



Campaign to Protect
Rural England

TOWARDS A 2026 VISION:

Have your say on the future of our countryside

Your countryside needs you

In England, we're privileged to have beautiful landscapes and fantastic open spaces.

But these are under threat.

Climate change, unhindered building on Green Belts, planning rules that don't protect green spaces or promote sustainable development. These are all gradually degrading the natural world that surrounds us.

The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) is passionate about the countryside. We want to protect it, enhance it, and promote its importance in an increasingly urbanised society.

Sparking a national debate

We're looking to the future and we want to set out some of the challenges facing our countryside. Our ambition is to provoke a national debate that will lead to a consensus on how we can all protect the green spaces that make England beautiful.

Lots of people have lots of different views about the kind of landscape they want to pass on to the next generation. We want to hear all of them. Your views will help shape CPRE's vision for the countryside in 2026, our centenary year.

We'll also feed your thoughts back to Government. But this isn't a vision that should be left to politicians. It should be debated by everyone, from farmers to business people, planners to village shop owners. And we believe we can all take action.

Let the debate begin...

We've outlined the five key areas we've identified as most important to those who care about the countryside. We've tried to explore how things might look in 2026.

You may think it is over optimistic, or not ambitious enough. It might be too precious, too simplistic, middle class or middle aged.

Well, let us know. We have to start somewhere, and we're looking forward to hearing your views. If, like us, you're passionate about the countryside, it's vital you make your voice heard.

To have your say, visit www.cpre.org.uk/debates

'A national debate on the future of the countryside is much needed. If we can reach an agreement about where we want to arrive, we will be in a better position to agree the steps we need to take to get there.'

Bill Bryson, CPRE President.

1. The future of food and farming

A challenge to the globalisation of farming

Our vision is that by 2026, farmers will be valued for the work they do in maintaining the countryside, woods, meadows and habitats for wildlife. Climate change, population growth and environmental taxes will be key drivers in making this happen.

Consumers will choose and prefer locally grown food having increased awareness of how and where it's produced and the benefits for farming and the countryside.

Guardians of the natural landscape

Farmers will earn part of their income for maintaining the countryside. They'll also generate an income from countryside visits as people take more holidays there. And they'll play their part in supplying our energy needs diversifying into bio-energy crops, growing rapeseed oil and fast growing trees for wood burning.

What's the future for food and farming? Tell us what you think at www.cpre.org.uk/debates

2. Life in our cities, towns and villages

Urban regeneration

Thanks to urban regeneration, three quarters of the new homes created by 2026 will be contained within urban areas on existing brownfield land with the remainder taking up some of our countryside.

The Green Belt will come under increasing pressure from new development but its principle of protecting the countryside from urban sprawl will remain intact.

Greener towns and cities

Our towns and cities will also become greener places to live and work with rooftop gardens, parks, nature reserves, woodlands and more green spaces. New housing will be close to places for work, schools, shops and other services minimising car travel and maximising public transport. Road tolls and more people working from home will also reduce traffic.

Thriving small towns and villages

Smaller towns and villages will grow as a result of the revival in locally produced food and the interest in the countryside for leisure. This will also help to create more local jobs. With less traffic, the countryside will be a quieter place for walkers, cyclists, and horse riders. The substantial growth in the rural population will allow small towns and villages to thrive after decades of decline.

Will Green Belts survive? Give us your view at www.cpre.org.uk/debates

3. Planning

A stronger planning system

By 2026, the current emphasis on economic development in planning will be replaced by an integrated, sustainable approach. A new Government-wide initiative will ensure that land use is considered when drawing up economic and social policy. New methodologies, such as measuring quality of life instead of Gross Domestic Product, will help to promote this.

Quality of life

A new focus of the planning system will be on increased use of the 'countryside next door', within a few minutes walk of where people live. Development will be completed sensitively, retaining countryside character while encouraging access and recreation.

Green Belt policy will remain unchanged because of its continued relevance. The system retains its flexibility, though, and some adjustments of particular Green Belts continue to be made in the interest of wider sustainability.

Engagement with civil society

Pre-application consultation will ensure people can continue to have their say on the planning decisions that shape the places where they want to live and work, while protecting the environment. Early engagement means that CPRE and other environmental groups welcome sensitive new development, which are to the benefit of people, business and the environment.

Can we measure quality of life and environmental limits? Let us know at www.cpre.org.uk/debates

4. Lifestyle and leisure

Visiting the countryside

By 2026, a combination of climate change and increased transport costs will mean that more people visit Green Belt land. There will be a substantial growth in rural holiday accommodation in villages and on farms where people come to walk, cycle, ride and fish. People will also become much more environmentally aware, thanks mainly to the obvious and mounting damage being done across the globe by climate change.

They are more health conscious too and the growth in obesity has ended. England's countryside has blossomed into its Natural Health Service.

Valuing the countryside

All these changes amount to a huge increase in engagement with the countryside, extending far beyond the middle classes and the well to do, embracing those on lower incomes and from ethnic minorities.

People feel a greater sense of ownership of the countryside, are willing to support its conservation as taxpayers and, for many, as volunteers. They see England's countryside as part of their citizenship, rather than one more item of consumption.

Could this vision be a reality? Give us your views at www.cpre.org.uk/debates

5. Climate change and the countryside

Using the land to mitigate and adapt to climate change

By 2026, reforms to agri-environment schemes and the Common Agricultural Policy mean landowners are paid to manage land to retain and absorb carbon dioxide.

Farmers have helped to reduce CO₂ emissions by moving away from crops that require large amounts of synthetic, oil derived fertilisers, towards low-input, sometimes organic, systems.

To adapt to the changing climate, new areas of coastal wetland will be common, due to rising sea levels. Increased rainfall will be absorbed through better land management and technologies such as porous concrete. Biodiverse reservoirs will store water to take us through droughts.

The countryside and energy

Rural renewables, including wind turbines and solar panels, will supply the countryside with energy. Wind turbines will be the size of tall trees rather than the height of skyscrapers. Biomass, in the form of wood fuel, will come from wildlife-rich, low input coppice woodlands, now a common sight across England.

Overall power needs will have decreased due to energy-efficient buildings and modes of transport.

There will also be an increase in small scale renewable schemes, with many villages supplying much of their own heat and electricity.

Fact or science fiction? Tell us what you think – or read the full report – at www.cpre.org.uk/debates