

# PROFESSIONALS AND VOLUNTEERS IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROCESS

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

As the environment edges towards the centre of the political stage, policy makers are forced to engage with complex new policy objectives, such as achieving ‘sustainable development’. It is therefore unsurprising that, in developing policies to meet the new objectives, state agencies frequently call upon the assistance of environmental organisations (Jordan and Maloney, 1997; Lowe and Goyder, 1982; Rawcliffe, 1998). Policy makers appear to accept that not only can environmental organisations assist with policy development but that their incorporation into the policy making process may help ensure broad support for particular policies. Rawcliffe (1998 p. 6) believes that “this new acceptance by governments and industry is a reflection of the authority of environmental organisations in providing independent expertise, information and observation” at the local, national and international levels of policy making. It also stems, he argues, from the recognition by decision-makers that “environmental groups both represent and help form public opinion on environmental issues and their views should therefore be taken into account” (Ibid.). As a consequence, the environmental policy arena seems to consist of a number of ‘partnership’ arrangements between government and ‘green’ groups. These ‘partnerships’ clearly give environmentalists a ‘voice’ in a range of policy processes, even some that were once impervious to their demands.

It might be supposed that government/NGO partnerships serve to ‘democratise’ policy making. And yet, there are continuing concerns about the levels of *public* participation enshrined within the new policy making arrangements. In part, this concern is linked to a recognition that policy processes in the UK remain relatively ‘closed’, despite the inclusion of new groups within policy communities and networks (Smith, 1993). It also derives from a suspicion that environmental groups themselves may be structured in ways that militate against genuine public involvement. This latter concern has recently been voiced as part of a debate on the

increasing *professionalisation* of the main environmental groups (see Jordan and Maloney, 1997; Rawcliffe, 1998). Professionalisation is thought to stem both from the development of close working relationships between the groups and state agencies and from an exponential growth in the groups' memberships. Large membership increases (such as those that took place across most leading environmental organisations during the late 1980s) tend to place a number of pressures on the organisational capacities of the groups, leading them to adopt ways of working derived from more mainstream (e.g. business) organisations. In the wake of these developments, the largest environmental groups become what Jordan and Maloney (1997) term "protest businesses", oriented to both the pursuit of particular (environmental) goals and the management of their own (often considerable) resources.

The presumed rise of the protest business introduces a number of important issues when considering the better incorporation of the public into processes of policy formulation and implementation. In particular, it raises the question of whether environmental groups genuinely act as conduits for concerns held widely throughout society or whether they comprise yet another special or vested interest, one that is oriented to the achievement of a narrow set of organisationally defined goals. For their part, Jordan and Maloney (1997 p. 188) appear to believe it is the latter role that prevails when they say that, as they have turned into "protest businesses", so many environmental groups have become "bureaucratised and hierarchically controlled." The consequence is that the full-time, professional elites determine the policy agenda while the volunteers do mundane non-political work, such as raising funds. In this context, the direct involvement of 'the public' in policy making is limited; policy professionals, working in close co-operation with state agencies, mediate public aspirations towards the environment. Jordan and Maloney (1997 p. 190) thus conclude "there is little participatory democracy in protest business type organisations".

We take this (rather pessimistic) conclusion as our starting point in thinking about the relationship between professionalised campaigning and the utilisation of non-professional activists. In the wake of the ‘protest business’ debate, we seek to investigate the ways in which policy professionals and volunteers working within non-governmental organisations contribute to national, regional and local policies and how the contributions of both groups are ‘balanced’ against each other. We document - within the context of one case study - the main forms of public and professional involvement and their impact upon both the structures and outcomes of environmental policy. In general, we ask whether notions of representative or participatory democracy inform the work of officers and activists and consider whether environmental activists (professional and voluntary) do genuinely ‘speak for’ those they claim to represent.

The case study focuses upon the Council for the Protection of Rural England [CPRE], a politically influential environmental group which relies, to a considerable extent, upon a geographically dispersed local membership. The CPRE is a national charity with a network of county branches that are charities in their own right. The organisation “exists to promote the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of rural England by encouraging the sustainable use of land and other natural resources in town and country” (CPRE 2001, p.15). Unlike the leading environmental organisations such as Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace, CPRE works within one national context (England) and focuses on environmental problems within a defined geographical space (the English countryside). However, while the organisation has a restricted spatial focus, it displays a concern for a broad range of environmental and amenity issues within this spatial zone. It also claims to believe “in local communities having an effective say in the decisions that affect their environment and quality of life” (Ibid. p.15). Thus, by considering this case study in some detail we can assess how the participatory ideal is given practical expression. Because countryside issues are often seen as central to English culture, we would expect that CPRE is able to channel rural concerns into policy. Moreover, the CPRE is involved in policy formation at

local, regional and national levels, so we can assess this channelling across the three policy tiers.

In attempting to understand whether CPRE genuinely functions to represent ‘communities in the countryside’ we take up an issue that, in our view, has been under-researched in the policy studies literature (Cowell and Jehlicka, 1995), namely the *spatial distribution* of group membership and participation activities. In order to investigate how this environmental pressure group reflects the geographical spread of its members we compare the activities of CPRE in three contrasting localities – Devon, Hertfordshire and Northumberland. These three counties have been chosen because they represent very different contexts of participation and can be expected to highlight the impact of spatial variability on both the environmental organisation and environmental policy. By considering the activities of CPRE in the three areas we hope to assess the impacts of local and regional variation upon both central-local relations and the work of the organisation as a whole<sup>1</sup>.

In analysing differences between the case study locations we therefore emphasise the importance of local context, notably differing environmental circumstances, contrasting social formations and the degree of development pressure. We propose that CPRE’s local character is very much shaped by these contextual factors. We contrast the combinations of local presence and national profile that determine perceptions of the CPRE in particular local areas. We then go on to assess how the emergence of a newly enhanced regional tier is affecting relations between national headquarters and local branches. Finally, we summarise the interactions between the three

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<sup>1</sup> During the research we conducted 48 semi-structured, face to face interviews with key respondents. These consisted of, on average around 12 interviews in each case study county with CPRE activists, regional policy officers, Government Office, county and district council planners and officers, and other amenity society personnel. At the central level we conducted interviews with CPRE staff (both existing and past), and senior civil servants in MAFF and DETR (as the two ministries with most significance for CPRE). We also conducted three focus groups with CPRE members in the three study areas with around 4-6 participants in each group. This face-to-face material was supplemented by around twenty telephone interviews with key respondents in both CPRE and related organisations. The research was carried out throughout the year 2000.



tiers of the organisation – national, regional, local – drawing upon the research material gathered both on the central activities of CPRE and from the three research areas.

## Chapter 2

### THE CPRE: HISTORY, DEVELOPMENT AND STRUCTURE

The CPRE was founded in 1926 at a preliminary meeting held at the Royal Institute of Architects in London. Neville Chamberlain (who was then Minister of Health with responsibility for planning) proposed the establishment of a new organisation to act as a ‘co-ordinating body’ for all those interested in actively protecting the landscape (see Allison, 1975). Taking recent writing by the pioneer planner Patrick Abercrombie, who was also present at the meeting, as his cue, Chamberlain identified a number of threats to rural well being and suggested that concerted action to preserve the English countryside was required. The new organisation was named the Council for the *Preservation* of Rural England.

The nature of this first meeting illustrates the character of the organisation in its early years. As Lowe et al. (1986 p.12) put it, CPRE “was predominantly a metropolitan-centred movement comprising a small but influential group of intellectuals, members of the artistic and literary establishments and the landed aristocracy”. It reflected this elite’s concern for the countryside as a repository of ‘Englishness’ (Matless, 1995). However, despite this metropolitan bias, a number of local preservation societies began to affiliate themselves to the new organisation and the local roots of CPRE began to take hold. Thus, right from the start CPRE combined central co-ordination with local autonomy.

Allison (1975 p. 117) argues that during the inter-war period the organisation remained largely a “propaganda” group; it campaigned “against tasteless ribbon development and act[ed] as a ‘ginger group’ for the ideas of preservationism”. It was formed at a time of unprecedented urban growth and its leaders therefore “saw themselves fighting against an avalanche of bricks, concrete and asphalt” (Lowe and Goyder 1983 p.12). Central to the organisation was a belief that this fight would be better conducted if new legislation, notably oriented towards a strengthening of the planning system and the introduction of national parks, were

introduced. A great deal of organisational effort was put into lobbying for these measures. With the introduction of such legislation in the immediate post war period, CPRE began to use its local structure to monitor implementation. This marked the first major shift in the nature of the organisation's activities.

As a result of this post-war legislation, the number of local preservation groups increased rapidly (Lowe, 1977; Lowe and Goyder, 1983) and by the mid-1970s, the CPRE consisted of a federation of county groups (40 in all, structured in line with the planning system). The local groups elected members to a General Committee, which in turn elected an Executive Committee to oversee the working of the national office. At this time the national office, which was staffed by only a small complement of full-time officers, was relatively weak; most power lay with the county groups, many of which employed their own full-time staff (Buller and Lowe, 1982; Lowe and Goyder, 1983).

Allison (1975) describes the membership at this time as "upper middle class", with a high proportion of county chairpersons and secretaries belonging to the House of Lords and the judiciary. In his view, this social profile allowed the organisation to work closely with decision-makers at all levels of government. CPRE therefore placed great emphasis on "influencing policy in incremental steps, on seeking pragmatic alliances... and generally working within institutional frameworks" (Rawcliffe 1998 p. 21). Lowe and Goyder (1983 p.65) consider that by the early 1980s this 'insider' strategy was well established. They quote a CPRE staff member as saying:

*Our contacts are incipiently sympathetic. Even in those organisations with which we disagree there are usually individuals or units which are receptive to our point of view. These are people that we cultivate. We try to encourage their attempts to modify their organisation's stance. By applying pressure or giving a favourable reaction, their initiatives can be fostered. They are useful leverage for us in their organisation*

*and we may be useful leverage for them in trying to introduce policy changes.*

CPRE's 'insider' status was not only measured by its ability to speak the language of policy makers; post war legislation also incorporated many of the aspirations held by the organisation. This was most apparent in the planning arena, which was, and remains, CPRE's main area of concern (Lowe, 1977). According to Lowe and Goyder (1983) "in most English rural counties the values represented by the CPRE... are strongly represented in local government policy".

While CPRE had ensured itself a central role in the rural planning arena at both national and local levels, broad contextual changes were taking place during this period that shifted the balance of power within the organisation. Firstly, from the early 1960s onwards, the population of rural areas began to grow after a long period of overall decline. The new rural residents were mostly 'counterurbanisers' who were moving out of towns and cities to the countryside to be close to 'green and pleasant' environments (see, for instance, Boyle and Halfacree, 1998; Champion, 1994; Murdoch, 1998). In the main, these households were moving to rural areas for two main reasons: to live within 'real' communities and to develop closer relationships with 'nature' (Bell, 1994). The counterurbanisers were thus natural supporters of CPRE, as the organisation appeared to promote a vision of the countryside quite in accordance with their own aspirations (see Buller and Lowe, 1982).

This groundswell of support in rural locations was further bolstered by a growth in environmental campaigning associated with the emergence of an 'environmental social movement' in the late 1960s (Doyle and McEachern, 1998). The new social movement provided a context in which environmental concerns were granted an enhanced legitimacy, firstly amongst the general public and latterly amongst policy makers. At this time, CPRE's membership began to grow. And as it grew, so it changed: becoming 'middle',

rather than ‘upper-middle’, class; it comprised more adventitious, less established rural residents (Lowe and Goyder, 1983)<sup>2</sup>.

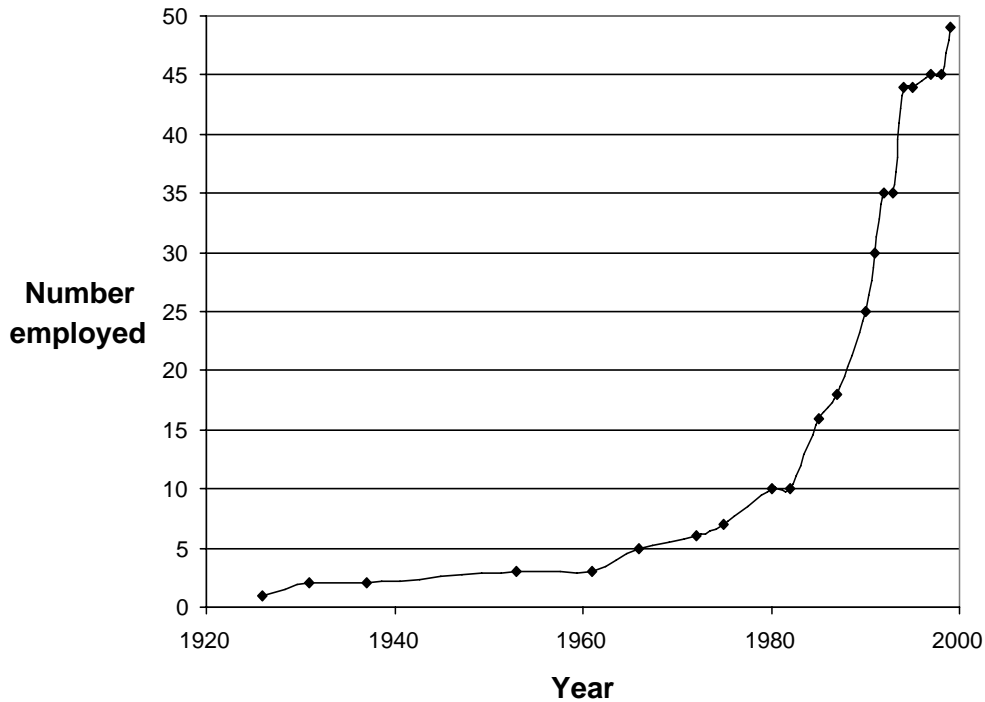
The confluence of these trends led to a shift in focus and in 1969 the name of the organisation was changed to the Council for the *Protection* of Rural England. This indicated the emergence of a broader set of concerns than simply *preservation*; it marked the beginning of a more holistic approach to the countryside as the organisation sought to align itself and its concerns with the burgeoning environmental movement. As a consequence, CPRE entered “a new campaigning phase underpinned by the development of a much broader environmental critique” (Rawcliffe 1998 p. 26). It began to talk the language of environmentalism by arguing for the “implementation of environmentally sustainable planning, transport and land use policies” (CPRE 2001 p. 6). Despite its long establishment, and its ‘insider’ credentials, CPRE began to develop broadly in line with other, usually newer, environmental groups.

In the course of repositioning itself as an *environmental*, rather than a *countryside*, group, CPRE professionalised its organisational structure. The number of full-time staff at the head office increased - from 10 in 1980 to 49 in 1999 (see Figure 1). This increase, which reflected the enhanced funding that followed the growth in members, enabled the establishment of policy teams, branch development officers, full-time fundraisers, and information support staff. A succession of professional campaigners with media experience was recruited to ‘front up’ the group and its major campaigns. In this context, the overall balance of power in the organisation swung towards the centre.

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<sup>2</sup> A recent survey of CPRE members showed them to be on average 62 years old, split evenly between males and females, predominantly in social class AB, and mostly living in southern England, the area that has experienced the most counterurbanisation (Scott, 1994 – see also section 3 below).

**Figure 1: CPRE's National Staff 1926-2000<sup>3</sup>**



CPRE's county groups thus became integrated (as branches) into a more centralised and unified national organisation, with membership functions centrally administered. While this move was not to the liking of all the branches<sup>4</sup>, it allowed headquarters to rationalise the overall structure and to disseminate standardised membership practices to the local affiliates. The intention of this reform was not to disable the CPRE's local capacity but to achieve national membership recruiting and to enhance the effectiveness of the county branches as part of a more unified organisation. For instance, Rawcliffe (1998 p. 91) quotes Fiona Reynolds, former Director of CPRE, as saying:

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<sup>3</sup> Source: Annual Reports.

<sup>4</sup> For instance, when centralisation took place in the mid- to late-1980s, the Somerset branch refused to accept the shift and had to be closed down. It was later re-opened with different activists in control. Other branches also refused to join the new structure – see the case of Northumberland below.

*[what] really distinguishes CPRE in things like the planning debate is the national-local strength. You cannot deliver something like planning policy just at national level. You have got to have branches scrutinising local plans and getting involved at local level. You cannot champion new environmental policy unless you have someone on the ground seeing it through.*

This statement indicates a recognition by its professional leadership that the effectiveness of CPRE continues to depend on synergy between local volunteers and national office. The introduction of an integrated structure can be interpreted as an attempt to make better use of the local volunteers in the context of the organisation as a whole. With greater integration, central office could begin to improve the functioning of the branches – e.g. by filling in gaps in the branch network and by encouraging fund-raising activities – more effectively than if the branches retained full autonomy<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> One central office staff member said to us that “the branches have still not realised their full potential”. There is an acute awareness at CPRE headquarters that the branches are valuable and useful in mounting national campaigns.





At the time of our study, a major new element had just been added into this mix, in the shape of the strengthened regional groups. With the election of a Labour Government committed to enhancing the regional tier of policy making, CPRE recognised that the organisation needed a stronger presence at this level. However, in the wake of the centralisation of functions that had taken place in the late 1980s, this new commitment further complicates the organisational structure. While it may ultimately serve to improve communications between branches and central office, the introduction of a strengthened regional tier has also engendered renewed tensions between the branches and the centre (e.g. over the question of which tier ultimately ‘owns’ the new bodies). In the rest of this section we outline the present structure of CPRE before going on to consider relations between the tiers in the context of our three case study counties.

## **2.1 National Office**

According to CPRE (2001 p.5), national office’s role is “to develop and agree the overall campaigning strategy, to engage in public policy formulation and campaigning nationally, to allocate shared resources effectively, to provide central services and to ensure sound management”. These various tasks can be broken down into two primary sets of functions: firstly, lobbying government (at almost all levels, but mainly at the centre e.g. Westminster and Whitehall) and, secondly, supporting the involvement of volunteers in policy processes at the regional and local tiers. In order to carry out these functions the office is organised into a series of ‘teams’ concerned with policy, branch development, fund raising and administration (see Figure 2). The various teams work to Assistant Directors who in turn work to the Director. This organisational structure was put in place following the expansion of membership in the mid- to late- 1980s when the need to have a much more efficient relationship between headquarters and branches became paramount. While we heard one or two complaints that some flexibility may have been lost as a result of this formalisation, most national staff members agree that the gain has been a more

specialised use of personnel and a more precise channeling of resources<sup>6</sup>.

In terms of the first set of functions, the effectiveness of central office can be gauged from the widely held view that, in relation to its size and resource base, the CPRE is generally acknowledged to wield considerable influence over national environmental policy (see, for instance, comments in Rawcliffe, 1998). As one senior civil servant commented, “for its size and turnover, [the CPRE] pulls considerable weight. It achieves a remarkable amount with little resources”<sup>7</sup>. National office has both a high public profile - it is recognised to be a skilled user of the media (especially the broadsheet press and BBC Radio 4) - and good ‘insider’ relationships with government. In general, the communication links between the CPRE and civil servants, political advisors and ministers are thought to be good (although CPRE is constantly striving to improve these). As a senior civil servant noted of her relationship with one of the CPRE’s Senior Policy Officers, “I’d pick up the phone and speak to him direct, and he’d do the same to me. There’s no problem of communication between us”.

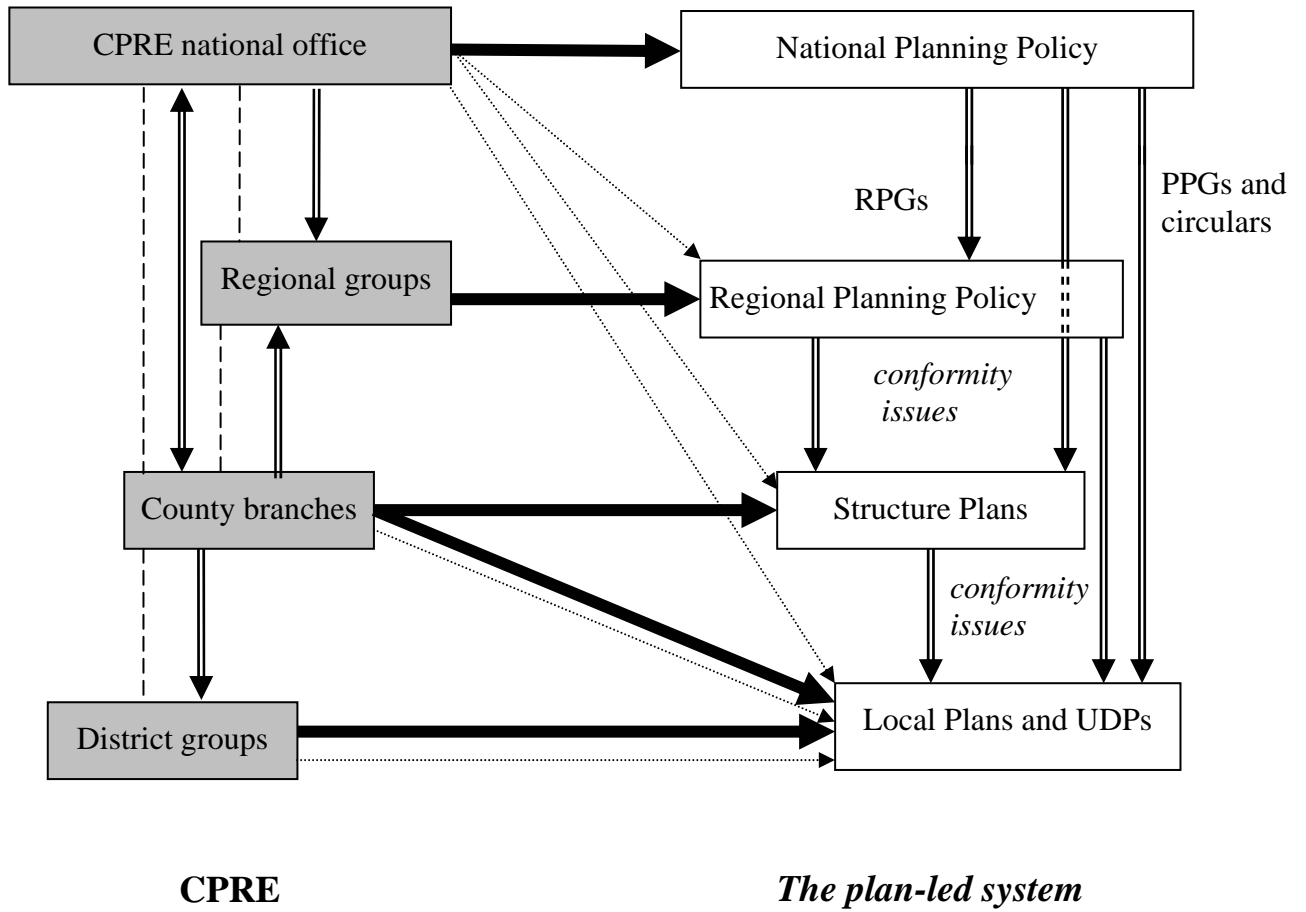
The CPRE is regarded positively by government as a professional campaigning organisation that can make a useful and well-argued contribution to policy debates (see, for instance, material presented in Lawson Lucas Mendelson, 1998). One civil servant described the CPRE as “the most professional of countryside groups,” and noted that its interventions are “better judged and more timely” than those of most other lobby groups. She described the CPRE’s national policy team in positive terms: “They make a useful contribution. At the very least, their inputs are well articulated and accessible for government officials”. Another noted that the

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<sup>6</sup> At the time of writing CPRE was contemplating a further re-organisation of central office. According to CPRE (2001 p.10), a new structure should be put in place ‘to improve the central services provided to the field organisation’. It is proposed that national office be streamlined into five teams: policy, fundraising, finance and administration, communications and human resources.

<sup>7</sup> Where no citation is shown, the quotes are taken from our interviews and focus groups.

**Figure 3: CPRE and the ‘top down’ flow of planning policy**



**Key**

- ==== Formalised relation
- Extensive feedback
- Systematic engagement
- ..... Intermittent engagement

CPRE's response to consultation is usually "well researched" and "even if we don't agree with it, we still find it coherent and relevant." This respect for the quality of CPRE's arguments has allowed it to work effectively with government. As a member of a Government Office for the Regions noted: "Nationally CPRE are very strong: they have got the ear of ministers; are a group, that if they say something, tends to be listened to - fairly thorough, fairly clever".

CPRE's effectiveness as an 'insider' group depends, in part, on its sensitivity to shifts in political discourse and its ability to mobilise government rhetoric and policy principles to its long-term advantage. This demands particular adroitness following a change of government. As CPRE's own 'Reputation Audit' showed, some incoming ministers and their advisors of the first Blair administration had a rather 'negative' image of the organisation and its goals at first (Lawson Lucas Mendelson, 1998)<sup>8</sup>. Great effort is therefore needed to continually align CPRE objectives with current government thinking. As one of the Regional Policy Officers noted, CPRE must "attune themselves to the language of the government of the day and work closely with government."

In the main, however, CPRE's influence is restricted to those parts of government that are most attuned to its goals<sup>9</sup>. It is recognised as having a particular influence on planning throughout the policy hierarchy (see Figure 3). One official within the Planning Directorate of the Department of the Environment, Transport and

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<sup>8</sup> The Reputation Audit – which consisted of interviews with civil servants, political advisors and officers in other pressure groups about the nature of CPRE - was undertaken as part of a Strategic Review set up in 1999. The objective of the Review was "to map the direction of CPRE for the next five years" (CPRE 2001 p.4). It consisted of an in-depth analysis of the organisation extending from national office level down to the branches.

<sup>9</sup> This causes some concern at CPRE headquarters. For instance, with the election of Tony Blair's Labour Government the organisation recognised that power was retained mostly at No 10 and in the Treasury and there was concern that the organisation is not so influential in these parts of the Government machine. As one staff member said: "we are closer to government now even than under Gummer [who, when Secretary of State for the Environment, was acknowledged to be a supporter of CPRE's aims] but we are actually further from power".

the Regions (DETR), recognised that the CPRE “is a very effective lobby organisation... We take note of what they have to say because we recognise the strength of their arguments”.

Though less high profile than its planning campaigns, CPRE has also played an influential role in debating the UK responses to agricultural policy. Its pattern of involvement is not as comprehensive as in the planning field. However, it is actively engaged in the formulation and implementation of agri-environmental policy. One senior official in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) commented:

*In this field, its supporters should feel that they are getting good value for money... [because] the CPRE has made a pretty good input into determining the structure of implementation for the Rural Development Plan<sup>10</sup>.*

Another official described the CPRE as “a welcome ally” when the Ministry calls on the Treasury for more resources for agri-environment programmes. In other fields of agricultural policy, such as animal health or the operation of commodity supports, the CPRE is not so involved. This does not necessarily prevent it from influencing the strategic direction of agricultural policy. As one senior official explained: “A factor that gives them more influence than many other groups is their wider political standing – Cabinet Ministers will see them.” Another factor is the quality of their input: “it tends to be coherent, consistent and strategic.”

Respect for the CPRE within certain branches of government stems largely from shared commitments between headquarters staff and civil servants. This is most evident in the planning field: as an official from the DETR explained:

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<sup>10</sup> The Rural Development Plan implements the Rural Development Regulation of the Common Agricultural Policy. It provides the framework for agri-environmental support measures.

*We are talking to people who are actually agreeing with us that there is a planning system which has to be there and which has a role to operate... They have a commitment to the planning system, we have a commitment to the planning system. And you have got two professional bodies sharing the same thinking...and language.*

A shared commitment to the policy process must, however, be distinguished from shared political goals. The CPRE is seen as “allies in terms of a shared belief in the importance of the system, not allies in terms of a shared commitment to policy objectives”, as one official within the Planning Directorate of DETR put it. Civil servants recognise that, while the CPRE pushes for a specific set of objectives, it is their responsibility to *balance* competing goals and aspirations.

Many of the above comments indicate that CPRE national office is extremely effective at working on the ‘inside track’ with Government. And the effectiveness with which this role is played enhances the status of the organisation as a whole. Many of the civil servants, planning officers and policy participants that we spoke to in the regions and counties expressed admiration for the quality of the representations coming from CPRE headquarters.

The second of central office’s roles – supporting the branch network – is primarily conducted by: identifying campaign priorities; analysing branch needs; provision of training; visits by central staff for discussions on key issues; development of volunteer recruitment strategies; and dissemination of policy and organisational information (on the latter see Table 1). The main goal of this work is to tie the branches into the organisation as a whole and to ensure commonality in procedures and goals.

In this role the professionals assist the volunteers to be effective. Much of what is involved is coordination and provision of information but there is also an effort at ‘professionalisation’ of the branches. For instance, to ensure that national policy principles

**Table 1: CPRE publications**

<b>Publication</b>	
Reports and campaigners' guides	These publications relate to a range of topics from EC environmental law to minerals policy.
CPRE Voice	This is a glossy membership magazine with limited technical detail produced on a quarterly basis.
Rural Matters	Monthly technical magazine on rural policy produced by national office and distributed to active members. This magazine summarises official policy papers and developments in national and regional planning policies, and the CPRE's response to them, as well as making requests for views from branch and district groups.
Planning Update	Quarterly technical magazine on planning policy produced by national office and distributed to active members. This magazine summarises official policy papers and developments in national and regional planning policies, and the CPRE's response to policy issues, as well as making requests for views from branch and district groups.
Branch circulars	These are produced on an ad hoc basis in response to policy developments and call on local groups to engage in voluntary action whilst providing them with advice on how to be most effective.

are applied at the local level, the CPRE's national office supports branch and district volunteers in their planning and development control work through the provision of campaign information (e.g. the PPG 3 campaign<sup>11</sup>). Such information alerts volunteers to the 'CPRE line' and indicates how they should work in accordance with this 'line'. National office provides training seminars and sessions at which national policy staff, sometimes in conjunction with invited speakers from the DETR and other government agencies, explain national policy principles and campaign strategies to volunteers and regional officers. Such activities inculcate a common 'professional' approach<sup>12</sup>.

Although the flow of policy information is primarily from the national office to the branches, national office relies on intelligence back from the branches as to where policy is failing, to inform its lobbying activities. National office staff are also sensitive to the views of branch volunteers, since they have to

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<sup>11</sup> PPG 3 (Housing) was published in 1999 and outlined the Government's new 'plan, monitor and manage' approach to housing development (see DETR, 2000). It provided policies on brownfield development, urban renaissance, and 'sequential development' e.g. that greenfield land should only be used for housing once no brownfield sites were available. CPRE strongly supports this approach - one staff member said to us that PPG 3 is "our policy" - and has developed a national campaign to ensure that it is effectively implemented through the planning hierarchy. This campaign charges the branches with ensuring that local plan reviews embrace PPG 3 and its objectives (notably minimising land take for housing), the regional groups with campaigning for key PPG 3 objectives at the regional planning guidance level, and national office with publicising any failings in the policy. All three tiers of the organisation are to work together to aid the implementation of PPG 3 policy.

<sup>12</sup> One central office staff member said of the recent PPG 3 campaign that it would also facilitate "lots of organisational development, trying to get the branches to think more proactively".



know how far they can develop their policy proposals while keeping the membership on-board. There are four main ways in which branch views feed into head office deliberations: meetings of the General Council, which are attended by representatives of all the branches<sup>13</sup>; the Chairman's Meeting, which brings together all branch chairpersons as well as central staff; membership surveys (usually as part of strategic reviews), which ensure that national campaign priorities accord with the aspirations of the 50,000 members; and informal visits by central staff to the branches (which are undertaken on a regular basis).

## **2.2 County branches, district groups, members and supporters**

While national headquarters has grown in size and stature, and now exercises increased control within the organisation as a whole, CPRE still relies heavily upon an active membership. This membership is required in order to: underpin CPRE's claim to be a legitimate and representative group, able to speak on behalf of the countryside; raise income; shape and monitor the local implementation of policy; mount nation-wide and local campaigns; and reflect the views of local communities in rural England. As an internal report noted, it is "the blend of local action with national backing that succeeds in creating real respect for the organisation" (Scott, 1994 p.8)<sup>14</sup>.

The membership itself is divided into two main groupings: 'members' and 'supporters'. The 'members' pay subscriptions and receive *CPRE Voice* three times a year. Their names are notified to

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<sup>13</sup> The General Council meets twice a year at the Methodist Hall in Westminster. Every other meeting considers the Director's Report, the audited accounts and policy concerns that are presented by national office. There is a question and answer session at the end. One leading activist said the meetings are useful and provide "a good day, when we feel like we have learnt something and been able to put our views forward".

<sup>14</sup> Without its local branches CPRE would be seen as a 'think tank' rather than a 'pressure group'. In fact, we heard one or two comments to the effect that national office's representations are frequently of the quality of those coming from 'think tanks'. This perception leads to a slight blurring of CPRE's image with policy makers. It may also raise expectations that the branches will also produce the same high standard of representation (see, for instance, comments in the Reputation Audit).

the local branch and they will be invited to local events. The number of members has risen fairly steadily over recent years from just over 15,000 in 1987 to just under 36,000 in 2001<sup>15</sup>. ‘Supporters’ are less active participants and usually just pay a standing order (for which they receive *Our Countryside* twice a year). The ‘supporters’ category has been the object of recent recruitment campaigns (in order to raise income) and the numbers have risen sharply – from just over 6000 in 1999 to 15,283 in 2001.

The members are organised within CPRE’s 43 county branches<sup>16</sup>, which are independent charities, each with their own distinctive histories and identities. While there is no one model, a CPRE branch normally consists of: an executive committee of trustees; a pool of active volunteers to be involved in ‘delivering’ CPRE’s policy agenda; and a membership base, which averages out at around 1000 members per branch (although there is great variation between branches – see below). Many of the branches have also set up district groups for the monitoring and review of district planning policies. The coverage of the 200 district groups is, however, variable owing to the incomplete geographical spread of CPRE members.

Membership income is split between national headquarters and the branches (60% goes to the centre/40% to the branches<sup>17</sup>). Legacies and investments are generally much less significant than the membership income, although bequeathed property provides some branches with valued branch offices. Branch income allows for the employment of planning advisors, branch development officers and

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<sup>15</sup> Although it should be noted that this figure has begun to ‘tail off’ so that a small decrease in members has taken place over the last couple of years – down from 37669 in 1998 (the high point) to 35712 in 2001.

<sup>16</sup> Three more branches were added to the earlier structure in the wake of local government re-organisation

<sup>17</sup> CPRE (2001) argues that a more equal “partnership” between headquarters and branch is required so suggests that the membership income should be split equally between centre and branch. It suggests that this division of monies will allow the branches to focus on recruiting ‘members’ locally while national headquarters concentrates on acquiring ‘supporters’.

secretarial staff<sup>18</sup>. Thus, the structure of local branches invariably consists of a core of active officers and members and a much larger number of inactive members. This can lead, as we shall see below, to the emergence of branch CPRE ‘elites’ who can sometimes guard their local status quite closely<sup>19</sup>.

The branches are charged with taking forward CPRE’s agenda in their local areas. According to a recent Strategic Review document (CPRE 2001 pp. 16-17) the branches should: campaign on local transport initiatives, engage in development plan reviews, comment on planning applications, and champion landscape character and rural tranquillity. As this list shows, much of the local policy work is oriented towards planning, notably efforts to influence local plan policies and development proposals. In part, this is because planning provides a ready policy focus (one that corresponds to the core concerns of activists) and also a structured arena of participation (especially in the context of a ‘plan-led’ system in which public participation is encouraged – see Rydin, 1999). As CPRE (2001 p.3) points out: “Each year our county branches and local district groups screen over 100,000 planning applications, involving us in more planning and transport decisions than any other organisation”. In effect, volunteers monitor the implementation of national planning policy at the local level and, in so doing, act as ‘countryside watchdogs’.

The expertise and competence of the volunteers is variable. While some demonstrate an in-depth knowledge of both CPRE and government policy, others display little regard for the strategic thinking coming out of national office, and therefore sometimes contradict the national policy line. Despite efforts by CPRE central office to ‘professionalise’ the local activists, there is a recurrent concern amongst policy makers and others that the majority of

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<sup>18</sup> In a recent strategic review of its activities, CPRE has concluded that the branches are struggling to cope with the amount of work expected of them and has therefore introduced a Branch Support Fund which will distribute £155,000 annually to branches allowing them to strengthen their local structures.

<sup>19</sup> This ‘elite’, it was mentioned to us, can sometimes have an ambivalent attitude to the local members: it sees the members as necessary but can be dismissive of their ‘inactivity’.

ordinary members are only concerned with local issues, and then from a largely reactionary perspective. One county planner told us that some of the CPRE's volunteers have a dogmatic approach to stopping development and "no matter what you want to talk about, will say 'and don't you build an incinerator here'". He called volunteer responses to proposals for housing development "inflexible" and described their attitude as "keep fighting, keep questioning, keep pouring cold water on the idea". Even one of the CPRE's own policy officers was willing to concede that "the people recruited at branch and district group are essentially NIMBYs who become educated about using the planning system to modify their local environment". As national office has noted:

*It is an unfortunate fact of life that support is more easily obtained for resisting locally undesirable proposals (the more so the nearer they are to the people directly affected) than for promoting good initiatives (CPRE, 1992 p. 73).*

This leads on to a common stereotype of the CPRE as anti-development, a view that is confirmed by the Reputation Audit: "There is a very strong feeling, particularly from those who are concerned with development, that CPRE sees its role as to stop things happening" (Lawson Lucas Mendelsohn, 1999 p. 4). An official from a Government Office for the Regions made this point in rather graphic terms when he said that the volunteers sometimes give the impression of being

*an organised rabble where they purely use CPRE notepaper to do NIMBY comments. And sometimes the comments that come up can be pure, pure NIMBYism and they have got their underwear in disarray because of something that is being proposed*

In our discussions, a number of policy makers pointed to a significant difference between the strong professionalism and strategic thinking of national office and the apparent NIMBYism of the local members. One civil servant described a "stark contrast"

between the national office and the CPRE “out in the sticks”. She noted that the policy officers at the CPRE’s national office are “pretty professional”, and “a bunch of smart operators” but she professed herself “not impressed by grassroots CPRE members”. A county planner, who complained of the negative outlook of local CPRE members, reflected approvingly on the “useful and positive” approach of the London staff. He contrasted the “big thinkers at the national level in CPRE who are exposed to the reality of certain things in policy making” with “people at the local level whose motivation is ‘we don’t want development here’”. With the London staff, he commented “we can have an adult conversation”.

### **2.3 Regional Groups**

While CPRE has traditionally relied upon a local branch structure co-ordinated by a central headquarters, it has recently strengthened its regional groups significantly. This innovation has largely followed from the enhancement of this tier within government. In the early 1990s John Major’s Government introduced integrated Government Offices for the regions, a move that implied a renewed emphasis on regional policy. CPRE quickly recognised that “regional policy issues are of growing importance... in the pursuit of our objectives of safeguarding and enhancing the English countryside” (CPRE 1994a). In particular, Regional Planning Guidance [RPG] was identified as an area where emerging policies were gaining importance, especially when linked to strategies of sustainable development (CPRE, 1995). However, CPRE (1994b) identified a number of weaknesses in the regional institutions, notably the limited opportunities for public participation, a lack of regional distinctiveness, poor co-ordination between regional policy initiatives, and a neglect of environmental issues. There was, therefore, some caution in strengthening this organisational tier (see CPRE, 1991).

Further serious discussion about regionalisation was, however, prompted by the Labour Party and its publication, in the mid-1990s, of a number of documents – notably *A choice for England* – which indicated that, on reaching power, it would introduce

regional development agencies and regional chambers. As the likelihood of a Labour victory grew so the need to develop a response to these proposals increased. CPRE appeared to broadly support Labour's approach, although some reservations about the possible impact of new regional institutions on local government structures were voiced, along with concerns about the potential 'remoteness' of the regional bodies.

CPRE's own regional committees were originally just quarterly meetings of the chairs of the county branches and were basically fora in which the branch representatives exchanged experiences. In 1996, in anticipation of the growing importance of the regional tier under New Labour, the CPRE's regional groups were restructured as sub-committees of the national office and re-aligned in accordance with the boundaries of the eight Government Office regions. The loose co-ordinating function of the old regional committees was superseded by a remit to oversee CPRE's emerging regional role. Instead of a rotating chair between the county branches, each realigned regional group was to have its own chairperson.

The increased policy responsibilities at this level meant that the potential effectiveness of the volunteers in working together as regional groupings - rather than as simple aggregations of county viewpoints - varied considerably. Previously, they had depended largely on national office, for instance in co-ordinating preparations for RPG reviews. While this role had allowed central office to highlight regional planning controversies in ways that had alerted the branches to the importance of this new governmental arena (as was arguably the case over the 'Crow Report' in the south east<sup>20</sup>), the time and effort central staff were putting into regional policy work reinforced the need to strengthen

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<sup>20</sup> Stephen Crow was the Government appointed Inspector into Regional Planning Guidance for the South East in 1999. As part of the Government's new regional plan review arrangements, an Examination in Public [EiP] into the guidance is now to be held. The Inspector is charged with overseeing the EiP and writing a revised set of recommendations to be considered by Government when publishing final regional guidance (see DETR, 1999). In the case of the south east, the Inspector's report overturned the regional planning body's [SERPLAN] approach in many significant respects, notably in terms of housing development

the regional groups (especially if these groups were ever to be accorded any real autonomy).

In 1999, after considerable discussion, CPRE started a new programme to enhance its input into regional decision making through the recruitment of part-time (but professional) Regional Policy Officers. This process was managed by national office in consultation with regional group volunteers. An arrangement was established whereby each Regional Policy Officer was formally employed by national CPRE (and receives regular briefing material from national staff and attends training events at national office), while being line managed on a day-to-day basis by a nominated member of the respective regional group<sup>21</sup>.

Following the selection of Regional Policy Officers, national office undertook a recruitment campaign to enhance volunteer input. REACH, an agency that specialises in the recruitment of retired professionals for voluntary work, was employed to engage additional regional volunteers<sup>22</sup>. This ‘cold’ recruitment of volunteers represented a significant departure for the CPRE as traditionally members had been solicited primarily through personal contacts or in response to a local planning issue<sup>23</sup>. However, it appeared necessary to ‘professionalise’ this process in a context where, as one regional volunteer put it, “the regional level does not raise the emotive sense as the county level or the issues round the corner”. Instead, the regionalisation process has

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totals (SERPLAN claimed it could only provide land for around 900,000 homes during the plan period – the Inspector reinstated Government housing projections that stipulated over one million homes should be accommodated). The Inspector’s report came to be known as the ‘Crow Report’ and was strongly criticised by CPRE.

<sup>21</sup> The Regional Policy Officer appointments were initially made on a two-days per week basis, except in East Anglia (where the appointment was for 11 hours per week) and the North West (where the Regional Group funded an additional two days per week from the outset). The working time of these policy officers has recently been extended to a minimum of three days per week (with the extra funds coming from the national level).

<sup>22</sup> In total, 50 enquiries were received and 35 were interviewed, with CPRE finally retaining about 15 people.

<sup>23</sup> The use of this recruitment agency might be interpreted as a ‘professionalisation’ of the volunteering process.

aroused some suspicion, if not hostility. One central office worker with particular responsibility for organisational issues said of attitudes to the regions in the CPRE branches: “Everywhere I go people say this is an EU plot to destroy England”. Moreover, according to one regional policy officer, some branches have come to regard the regionalisation process as “national office encroaching on their territory”. The recruitment of regional volunteers with neither branch affiliation nor experience of CPRE campaigns actually fuelled the suspicions of some established volunteers, as a paper prepared by one CPRE policy officer recognised: “There can be some suspicion that they may misrepresent the organisation if they are not properly ‘controlled’” (CPRE, 2000 p. 3).

Yet, while the recruitment of regional staff from outside CPRE has often brought in people with different backgrounds to those of established branch members, the recruits are mainly professionals who have some experience of policy development and committee work, and hence can quickly learn ‘the rules of the game’. Most have postgraduate degrees or senior management experience, and have worked in the public sector, mainly local government and health authorities, before taking early retirement. As a consequence, CPRE has begun to make a significant contribution to regional policy processes, particularly in relation to reviews of regional planning, consultations on regional sustainable development frameworks, regional economic strategies, regional transport strategies and the Rural Development Regulation. The organisation has been active on regional planning forums, some regional assemblies, and consultative groups established by quasi-governmental bodies, such as the Countryside Agency and the Environment Agency. Regional groups have sought to develop relations with, and influence, a number of bodies concerned with policy making at the regional level. These include the Regional Development Agencies, MAFF, and regional chambers<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> It is worth noting that CPRE is not the only pressure group currently placing more emphasis on the regional tier. For instance, Friends of the Earth (FOE), which also comprises a network of locally based groups, co-ordinated by a national office, has nine regional groups for England corresponding to the Government Office structure. The groups are co-ordinated by



## 2.4 Summary

CPRE brings together a diffuse array of actors and provides a structured context so that they can bring their influence to bear on environmental policy. The professionalisation of the group has not diminished its reliance on volunteers and supporters. The relationship between professionals and volunteers within CPRE operates across its organisational tiers. While the balance of that relationship has changed through the centralisation of many functions in the late 1980s, and the more recent emergence of the regional groups, the effective articulation between these organisational tiers is vital to the overall effectiveness of the group. If all the various relationships are working well then we might expect CPRE to draw national, regional and local together within expanded arenas of participation.

Thus, CPRE might be seen as an organisation committed to the norms of ‘participatory democracy’; that is, a belief that the processes of environmental decision making are enhanced by the inclusion of activists and members at the various tiers of government. The goal of CPRE from this perspective would be to continuously expand the scope of participation in policy to ensure that many voices are heard. However, it might also be argued that the growing power of CPRE headquarters and the ‘professionalisation’ of participation within the organisation have served to allow a policy elite to dominate participation. In this sense, CPRE might be seen as a form of ‘representative democracy’ wherein ‘professional’ policy actors ‘represent’ the ordinary members and a broader public constituency beyond,

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Regional Campaign Co-ordinators, who are employed full time by the national office. The RSPB has also built up a regional structure. One national policy officer estimated that the RSPB’s biggest regional offices have about 50 members of staff and, although the majority will be engaged in practical conservation work, it does mean that “all the policy work is driven by the professional staff”. Lastly, the Wildlife Trusts are beginning to develop a regional structure, although this is still at an experimental phase. The Trusts have a formal structure of regional groups in five regions. This structure does not map onto the Government Office regions, which means that the Wildlife Trust’s input into regional policy processes often depends on informal sub regional partnerships.

within the environmental policy process. The goal of the organisation from this perspective would be to expand a broadly based, but largely quiescent, membership in support of an active policy elite.

In order to investigate whether the current working of CPRE ensures genuine participation in policy processes and how far the organisation serves to represent a broad constituency we now turn to examine three case study counties chosen to represent very different contexts of local participation. In these three cases we investigate the following: relations between the centre and the local branch; the impact of local socio-economic circumstances on CPRE activity; and the impact of the regional tier on central-local relations. In general, we seek to outline the range of local and contextual circumstances that affect local levels of participation and indicate how these circumstances determine the shape and direction of the organisation as a whole.

### Chapter 3

#### THE COUNTY CASE STUDIES

In selecting the case-study counties we have utilised a set of contrasting socio-political land development contexts formulated during an earlier ESRC research programme (the ‘Countryside Change’ Programme - see Marsden et al., 1993; Murdoch and Marsden, 1994; Lowe et al., 1998). These contexts refer to different ‘types’ of countryside where contrasting pressures around land development can be found. They are: (i) the *preserved countryside* where high numbers of middle-class activists use the planning system to press for strong control of development in ways that reflect the aspirations of most rural residents; (ii) the *contested countryside* where growing numbers of middle-class activists confront a well-entrenched set of developmental actors (who are still well represented in local political structures) thereby giving rise to increased conflict around land uses; and (iii) the *paternalistic countryside* where large landowners continue to dominate the land development process ensuring that middle-class in-migration is limited and middle-class political concerns are marginalised<sup>25</sup>.

Our three county case studies - Hertfordshire, Devon, and Northumberland - have been chosen in line with these contexts. *Hertfordshire*, which has long been subject to counterurbanisation, and where a well-established ‘anti-development’ constituency exists, is a classic case of the ‘preserved countryside’ and might be thought of as part of the traditional heartland of the CPRE. *Devon*, where local agricultural and development interests increasingly find themselves confronted by a growing middle-class presence, represents the ‘contested countryside’ (cf. Lowe et al., 1998). *Northumberland* is the prime example, in the English context at

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<sup>25</sup> There was a fourth type in the original formulation – the ‘clientelistic countryside’. This referred to areas – such as mid-Wales, or the Highlands and Islands – where the state is still heavily involved in supporting economic and social institutions. We have not included that here as this type was not so relevant to the English countryside (see Marsden et al., 1993).

least, of the 'paternalistic countryside', for much of the county still tends to be dominated (in economic and social terms) by large landed estates.

These differing types of countrysides refer to differing socio-natural circumstances in the countryside: they reflect the fact that environmental features are differentially distributed and exist in a variety of relationships with socio-economic actors. Thus, in Hertfordshire we find a kind of 'suburbanised' countryside in which the landscape and environmental features, while highly regarded by those social groups seeking an 'escape' from the dynamic economic context, are, in themselves, not of great intrinsic value. In Devon we find a rich array of environmental assets, many of which are tightly bound into a long standing rural socio-economic structure (e.g. small, pastoral farms). The differing social groups residing in the area value these assets in different ways: for in-migrants the assets are invariably subject to an environmental logic which prioritises protection, while for long-standing locals their value often resides in the extent to which they aid development. In Northumberland, 'nature' is even more extensively present and is subject to a variety of national and international designations. However, the contrasting views that shape its perception and usage in Devon are not so evident here: the environment is subject to a more single-minded developmental rationale.

The three areas thus differ greatly in terms of the social pressures surrounding development. Table 2 indicates the number of planning decisions taken in the areas. It shows that the number is high in Hertfordshire and Devon but low in Northumberland. Conversely, approval rates are much higher in Northumberland, suggesting less opposition to development than in Devon and Hertfordshire, with the latter showing the lowest approval rates. As the 'ideal types' imply, pressure for development is associated with counterurbanisation i.e. the attractiveness of the countryside to developers and in-migrants alike. In turn, counterurbanisation tends to generate a growing middle-class presence in rural areas

**Table 2: Planning decisions (for year ending 31 March 2000) in the three counties<sup>26</sup>**

	<b>Total decisions</b>	<b>Number approved</b>	<b>Per cent approved</b>
<b>Devon<sup>27</sup></b>	14,474	12,775	88
East Devon	2,098	1,888	90
Exeter	928	807	87
North Devon	1,599	1,423	89
South Hams	1,758	1,529	87
Teignbridge	1,102	1,014	92
Mid Devon	1,315	1,157	88
Torridge	1,234	1,037	84
West Devon	720	662	92
Plymouth UA	1,490	1,311	88
Torbay UA	1,490	1,281	86
Dartmoor National Park	740	666	90
<b>Hertfordshire</b>	12,131	10,490	86
Broxbourne	767	629	82
Dacorum	1,607	1,446	90
East Hertfordshire	1,693	1,439	85
Hertsmere	1,076	861	80
North Hertfordshire	1,464	1,347	92
St Albans	2,344	1,946	83
Stevenage	446	437	98
Three Rivers	1,084	911	84
Watford	670	583	87
Welwyn Hatfield	980	892	91
<b>Northumberland</b>	2,600	2,441	94
Alnwick	246	234	95
Berwick upon Tweed	384	357	93
Blyth Valley	379	349	92
Castle Morpeth	507	487	96
Tynedale	766	712	93
Wansbeck	273	257	94
Northumberland National Park	45	45	100

<sup>26</sup> Planning and Land Use Statistics, DETR (2001) Planning decisions, percentage granted and percentage decided within 8 weeks. [WWW] < <http://www.detr.gov.uk/planning/pd/0198/index.htm>, 31/1/01

<sup>27</sup> Figures for Devon include Plymouth and Torbay unitary authorities.

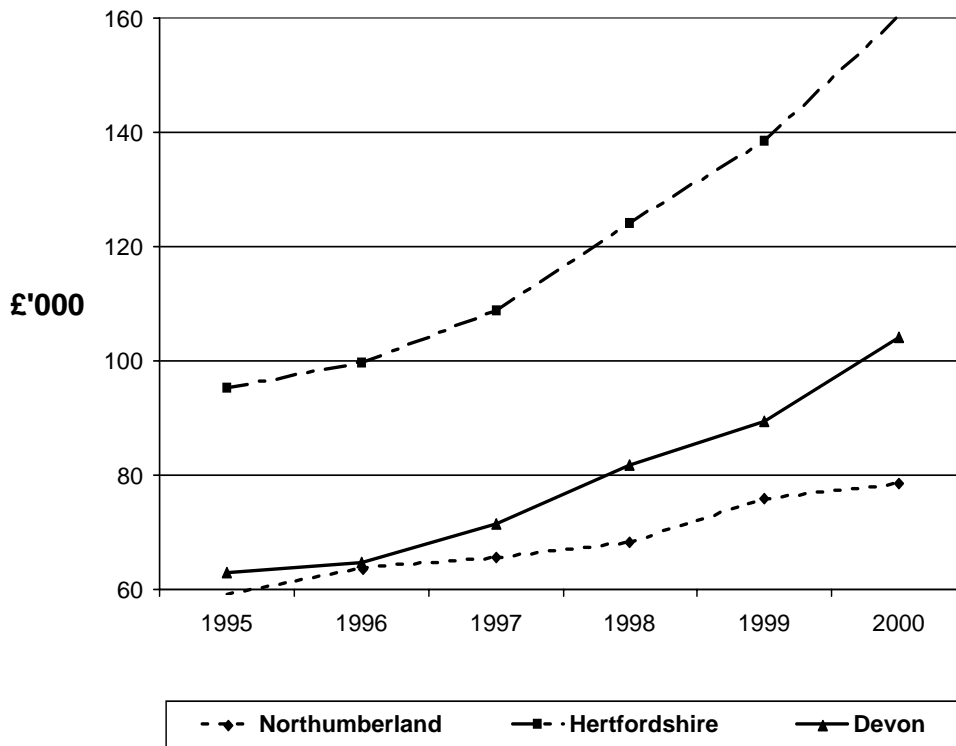
(Murdoch, 1998). The house price figures provided in Figure 4 below are a crude indicator of levels of in-migration (e.g. prices are highest where pressure for housing is highest). The figures show that prices are high (and rising) in Hertfordshire, lagging somewhat but rising relatively quickly in Devon, and are considerably lower in Northumberland. When coupled with the development control figures, this data indicates that the three areas represent quite different contexts for the CPRE, notably in terms of planning and development activity, as well as the different social and political contexts outlined above.

The three areas also have quite different political compositions. For instance, at the time of writing (March 2001), the County Council in Hertfordshire has a Conservative majority (40 members in total), with Labour in second place (28 members), while in Devon the Liberal Democrats are the majority party (29 members), with the Conservatives in second place (15 members). In Northumberland the situation differs again: Labour is the majority party (41 members) with Conservatives in second place (15 members). While these bald figures do not give the full flavour of local politics in the counties, they do indicate that the three CPRE branches confront contrasting political circumstances. We can speculate that in Hertfordshire the Conservative majority is likely to share some amount of sympathy with CPRE views, even if their legal obligations as a local authority force them, at times, to administer policies that are not to CPRE's liking. In Devon, the Liberal Democrat majority reflects a strong degree of 'localism' in the county's political structure<sup>28</sup>, a perspective that must be accommodated in some way by the CPRE branch. Lastly, in Northumberland the Labour Party has key strongholds in the former mining and industrial areas of south east Northumberland but the Conservative Party holds sway in much of the rural county beyond the urban centres. This political structure fits well with the

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<sup>28</sup> This 'localism' is illustrated by the fact that in the district councils there are 106 independent councillors compared to 110 Conservatives, 106 Liberal Democrat and 29 Labour.

**Figure 4: Breakdown of average property prices by county for all properties sold, 1995-2000 (July – Sept)<sup>29</sup>**



<sup>29</sup> Figures relate to all properties sold in each quarter from July to September, from HM Land Registry Property Price (2001) Unitary Authority / London Boroughs [WWW] < [http://www.landreg.gov.uk/ppr/interactive/ppr\\_ualbs.asp](http://www.landreg.gov.uk/ppr/interactive/ppr_ualbs.asp) (31/1/01)

‘paternalistic’ politics of the county (Labour controls the urban and industrial areas - the Conservative ‘squirearchy’ the countryside). If CPRE is to consolidate itself in the region it must find some way of inserting itself into this political structure.

We have thus chosen three areas where the local contexts of participation will vary considerably. In particular, we have chosen the areas to investigate more closely the relationship between CPRE activity and counterurbanisation. “In the countryside,” a senior civil servant remarked during interview, “it does seem that they [the CPRE] represent the middle class incomer”. The accuracy of this characterisation was confirmed by a recent CPRE survey which showed that the social composition of the membership is “predominantly” drawn from social classes AB, with incomes “significantly ahead” of the national average (Scott, 1994). Given this finding, it seems reasonable to take as our starting point the hypothesis that the CPRE’s influence on rural and environmental politics is closely tied to its ability to mobilise new middle-class residents in the countryside. The three study areas will allow us to investigate this proposition in some detail.

Secondly, and following on from this initial hypothesis, we can propose that the CPRE is strong where this middle-class constituency is strongly present. Again evidence for this can be drawn from the membership survey which noted that CPRE’s members tend to live in suburban or rural areas in the South of England (48.1% were based in the South East, 17.3% in the South West and 8% in East Anglia; 2.1% of the CPRE’s members were resident in the North East - Scott, 1994). Thus, in parts of the countryside where politics is highly localised and structured around farming and economic development - for example, in parts of Devon and across Northumberland – we can expect support for CPRE may be limited by the lack of any visible and articulate middle-class constituency.

In short, the comparative analysis of the three areas will permit examination of the geography of CPRE activity (and, consequently, the aims, objectives and policy positions it upholds)



and whether this geography corresponds to that of the middle class in the countryside. We speculate that counterurbanising residents move into rural areas in order to be close to rural nature and once there act to protect the natural features residing in their local environments. However, counterurbanisers have to balance various aspects of their socio-economic situations, notably access to labour markets. Thus, their residential preferences may be constrained by such factors as travel-to-work times, employment location, stage of life, etc. In other words, the type of 'rural nature' they embrace may be defined by a set of socio-economic, rather than environmental, considerations. If CPRE represents this constituency then such considerations will also be apparent within the organisation<sup>30</sup>. In what follows, therefore, we assess whether CPRE represents the 'counterurbanised countryside' or a broader range of rural locations.

### **3.1 Hertfordshire**

#### ***Introduction***

The degree of urban development in Hertfordshire distinguishes it from our other case studies. This was recognised by an official from Hertfordshire County Council:

*In a place like Hertfordshire, there is no such thing as 'rural' in the way that there is in Devon or Northumberland. This is a very busy county and you can't go anywhere without the impact of the urban environment.*

The location of Hertfordshire within London's Outer Metropolitan Area is the most important factor explaining the development trajectory of the county. This location has fuelled the growth in its

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<sup>30</sup> The problem we are pointing to here is that pressure for protection and preservation (at least, in the shape of CPRE) will be strongest in those areas where 'rural nature' is perhaps already compromised (for instance, by processes of 'suburbanisation'), while the pressure is weakest in those areas that have a range of environmental assets in need of protection.

economy and resident population, raising housing and employment as key planning issues, whilst ensuring that the protection of the environment and the Green Belt have been continuing concerns for local amenity groups (Hart and Doak, 1994; Hebbert, 1990; Garbutt, 1989). There is an acute awareness of the importance of protecting the identity of the county, particularly its pattern of free-standing towns and open countryside. However, Hertfordshire is not merely a recipient of counterurbanisation pressures, commuting trends and financial investment from London. South Hertfordshire, in particular, exhibits an economic dynamism of its own, and this too has driven the growth in the workforce, encouraging immigration and placing its own demands on infrastructure and environment. In short, the pressures on the countryside in Hertfordshire are acute.

Although much of the county remains semi-rural, and has a “largely green appearance” (Hart and Doak 1994 p. 215), Hertfordshire’s population and economy are mostly urban-oriented.<sup>31</sup> About 90% of the population live in towns of over 5,000, and 60% in the ten largest towns, each of which has a population of over 30,000 (HCC, 1998). There has been significant urbanisation in Hertfordshire in the post-war period, with the urban area increasing by 82.4 square miles, from 16% to 29% of the county (HCC, 1998), and the population density at 625 persons per sq. km (ONS, 1999) is much higher than the average for England (378 per sq. km). This trend looks set to continue in the wake of the County Structure Plan (adopted in 1998) which proposes the accommodation of 65,000 new dwellings within the county between 1991 and 2011. It also advocates the release of Green Belt land - which covers some 60% of the non-urbanised area of the county - for town expansions at Hemel Hempstead, Stevenage,

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<sup>31</sup> Some 64% of land use in the County was classified as ‘agricultural’ in 1993 (HCC, 1998), but agriculture is not a significant economic sector. Overall, the proportion of the workforce involved in agriculture is low (0.99%), compared with the national average of 1.77% (ONS, 1992). Primary agriculture contributes 0.5% to Hertfordshire’s GDP, a much lower percentage than the English average of 1.8% and the average for the East of England, which is 2.1% (MAFF, 2000).

Langley, and south of St. Ippolyts. These policies indicate that development activity remains intense (see also Table 3).

The pressure for housing development stems from a steadily rising population, caused largely by increasing lifespan longevity, net immigration, mainly from London (Champion et al., 1998), and a decline in the size of households (HCC, 1998). The population is predicted to rise by 82,000 between mid-1996 and 2016, and the number of households by 72,000 over the same period, or 3,600 households per annum.<sup>32</sup> The Hertfordshire branch of the CPRE has recognised the significance of these projections: “The threats to the [Hertfordshire] countryside are now more serious than ever before. Rising household projections for the South East assault us on both sides” (CPRE - The Hertfordshire Society Yearbook 1999, p.1).

The objective of maintaining high and stable levels of economic growth and employment has been incorporated into both Regional Planning Guidance (GOEE, 2000) and the Regional Economic Strategy (EEDA, 1999) for the East of England. Over the period 1996 to 2011, employment is forecast to grow by 63,000 in the county (HCC, 1998). This is a cause of some concern, since the resident workforce is projected to increase by merely 19,200 in the same period. The implications are thus an ever-greater imbalance between jobs and workers, with all the implications this holds for commuting patterns and house building.

### *The CPRE in Hertfordshire*

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<sup>32</sup> The Regional Planning Guidance for the South East (DETR, 2000) proposes an annual rate of housing development slightly lower than this projection of household numbers, at 3,280 housing units in Hertfordshire over the period of the guidance (1996 – 2016). This broadly equates with the level of provision suggested in the Structure Plan (1998) which proposed 3,250 housing units per year (providing 65,000 additional dwellings during the plan period to 2011). This level of provision equates to about 90% of projected household growth over the period, suggesting that there will be continued pressure on housing in the county. One potential impact of this discrepancy could be, as is predicted in the County’s response to the Regional Planning Guidance (HCC, 2000), that single person households are more likely to share accommodation in the future. Another possibility is increased homelessness in Hertfordshire and elsewhere in the region.

The Hertfordshire branch of the CPRE was founded in 1928. Initially it was administered from London until 1936 when it was reformed as the Hertfordshire Society, with its own constitution and affiliated status. It enjoyed this status until 1992, when it became a full branch of the CPRE. In 1997 it incorporated the name CPRE into its title, and became 'CPRE - The Hertfordshire Society', reflecting its increasingly close ties with the national organisation.

The branch is well supported, with around 1,400 individual members and one hundred affiliated groups. The groups include about half the local parish and district councils in the county, and local societies and amenity groups, such as the Welwyn Garden City Society and the Kings Langley Residents' Association (which have memberships of their own ranging from a handful to about a hundred). The Hertfordshire Society's own membership is largely urban based or is made up of recent urban residents: one member said: "we are dominated by townies".

The Hertfordshire Society has an executive committee of trustees, honorary officers, which include the Director, Chair, Vice-Chair, Treasurer and Planning Advisor, and four part-time staff members - the Executive Secretary, the Branch Development Officer, the Planning Officer and Office Assistant. There are three policy sub-committees (Planning Policy, Rural Affairs and Transport Policy), each of which involves between 8 and 12 members who meet on a quarterly basis. There is a fundraising group of 3 people which organises 2 or 3 events a year. The Society is run by the Honorary Director. She has an academic specialism in historical geography and a background in printing and social work, but is now retired. She puts in four days a week and provides much of the public image of the Society e.g. briefing the press, giving presentations and editing the branch magazine. As this activist admitted, the Society is "a very heavily centralised organisation".

Nevertheless, the Hertfordshire CPRE claims to have up to 100 active volunteers, which is relatively high compared with other branches. The number includes between 40 and 50 'Planning Correspondents' spread across the county who respond to planning

applications on an *ad hoc* basis and are co-ordinated by the Planning Officer. However, the Society's efforts to develop a district group structure have met with limited success. Although eight district groups were set up to monitor and express local concerns across the county, all except two (Broxbourne Area Committee and Dacorum District Committee) have collapsed for "lack of people and lack of leaders", as one activist put it.

There is a feeling that, at the local level, the Society is competing for active volunteers with the large number of local environmental and amenity groups active in the county. While this may make it difficult to establish a district structure, it means there is considerable symbiosis between the Society and the dense local amenity network. Many of the local groups are affiliated to the Society and there are a lot of informal links between them. The Society holds a council meeting every three months, to which all members are invited, as well as the affiliated groups<sup>33</sup>. Overlapping membership is an important factor in maintaining cohesion. As the Planning Manager remarked: "Individuals who are really keen and well motivated about a particular thing will try and get onto anything ... even if it means joining two or three groups" (he is also Vice Chairman of his local amenity group, the Wheathampstead Preservation Society). He went on to explain how the local network of activists could operate in a concerted way over a particular issue:

*One of the things we are working on at the moment is Luton Airport who've just produced a development brief to double their passenger throughput ... And we've got members of ours who are also members of local groups like the Harpenden Society, and so on around the airport, who are in turn also on things like the Luton Airport Consultative Committee ... So the*

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<sup>33</sup> At the Council meeting in June 2000, 8 affiliated amenity groups - the Ashwell Society, Hitchin Society, POUNC, Hertingfordbury Preservation Society, Welwyn Garden City Society, Friends of Batchwood, Wheathampstead Preservation Society and Harpenden Society - were represented along with 11 parish and district councils and the Hertfordshire Association of Local Councils.

*Airport people see them sometimes three times over wearing different hats: on the Consultative Committee, then one of the local amenity groups and then, perhaps somewhat invisibly, feeding things through us as well and helping us to put together our comments.*

Inevitably, there may be different perspectives between the groups but there is a lot of informal co-ordination. As the Director pointed out: “some of us are on other committees and naturally the policy is a result of consensus .... Where the majority view takes over but it isn’t CPRE’s view, then I try not to be identified with that if it goes into the press or anything”. On reflection she commented “there is a lot of overlap and it does occasionally cause a problem, but usually it just strengthens us”. On occasions the Society has itself given rise to other campaigning groups. For example, it called the public meeting at which the Campaign Against Stevenage Expansion (CASE) was launched and it is represented on the CASE committee (“we have a fairly big influence on the committee” commented the branch Director). In this way a lot of local support can be mobilised but the Society remains above the fray and retains a semblance of detachment and discretion<sup>34</sup>.

The Society offers advice and information to its affiliated groups. Through membership it can gain access to the flow of research and analysis from the London office on all the possible threats to the countryside. The Society itself is a source of planning expertise and, through contact with it, local activists can stay informed about developments in national planning policy as well as key planning issues and the state of plan making in the county. The Society carefully manages its relationships with the many local groups in a way that emphasises its own pre-eminence in the amenity politics of the county. Thus, in the more strategic approach and the style of action it adopts, the branch both gives a lead to the local amenity

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<sup>34</sup> Inevitably, as the Director pointed out, the Society has to put up with the occasional complaint from local activists to the effect that “the CPRE isn’t giving us the support it should”.

network but also emphasises its differences from it. Its leaders emphasise how it takes “the wider perspective”, mainly because its brief is for the county as a whole (in contrast, it is claimed, to the local groups’ single-minded focus on particular environmental threats and the defence of their specific localities). The following exchange between three of its leading members (in the context of a focus group) illustrates this point:

*Mark: We are not a one-issue group like some of these are. So we tend to get involved in absolutely everything in Hertfordshire.*

*Keith: But that helps the influence of course - by not being a single-issue group.*

*Ray: It gives us a wider view of everything. We are not just focused on a narrow thing. We can look at the county as a whole and the influence that one issue might have on another.*

Hence, the Society fully engages in the strategic planning processes for the county - the preparation and revision of the County Structure Plan, District Plans, the Transport Plan, Catchment Management Plans, etc. It gets actively involved in issues beyond the county’s boundaries that will, nevertheless, have a significant effect on the area, such as the expansion of Luton and Stanstead airports. It keeps an eye on the regional planning context and, through central office, stays actively informed of the broader policy framework. The Society also has, in the Director’s words, “this overall picture of the environment” that it strives to protect and entails, for example, attending to biodiversity through membership of the Hertfordshire Conservation Liaison Group, helping organise the Village of the Year competition and picking up and pursuing initiatives from national office, such as on quiet lanes or clear night skies.

Part of the Society’s strategic outlook is to be more accommodating of what it regards as necessary development. According to its statement of aims: “The CPRE - The Hertfordshire

Society does not oppose change but seeks to ensure that where development occurs it inflicts as little harm as possible” (CPRE - The Hertfordshire Society, 2000a p. 1). While the principal aim of the Society is the safeguarding of the natural environment of the county, it is “equally concerned, however, to enhance the well being of the county’s population by seeking to steer new development where this does least harm to the environment” (CPRE - The Hertfordshire Society, 2000b p. 1).

This ‘pragmatic’ stance gives the branch some authority, especially in its dealings with local government. It also helps it to avoid being dragged into every local planning dispute. For example, while the Welwyn Hatfield Environmental Network has vowed to fight the siting of an incinerator in the local area “tooth and nail”, the branch has deliberately kept out of the dispute. The Society also distinguishes itself, through its style of action, from the confrontational stance of some of the local groups. As one volunteer noted: “We are not a campaigning - in inverted commas - organisation. We don’t go out and tear up paving stones”. Instead it seeks “positive” engagement with policy issues. The approach adopted is the cultivation of close relations with governmental authorities so as to steer policy making from the inside. As the Director commented: “we do get invited onto committees.... and we do try to actually make them more effective and put our own ideas in as well.... And yet we are not a soft touch”.

In the past, the Society relied on the social standing of its leading figures to gain access to decision making. As one volunteer recalled:

*The influence then came through the good old-fashioned way. In the organisation were influential people and when you went to County Hall people said ‘my God, it’s Lord So-and-So here again’.*

This style of influence, with its reliance on the patronage of the county establishment and having “the right people in the right places”, remained effective until the 1980s. A branch volunteer



commented that when he attended the Hertfordshire Society's AGM in 1983 he felt like he was "going back in time to Edwardian England". The style has changed since then as the Society has grown, mobilised its professional middle-class membership and become more integrated into national CPRE and its campaigning approach. The Society now stresses the strength of its arguments and its "professionalism". In the words of the Chairman of the Society's Transport Committee:

*We have a tradition of arguing intellectually... When we write, we write good stuff. And we try to give alternatives. Where [the planners] are doing something right, we make sure we tell them that that is jolly good. Much of what we have been doing is challenging their boldness, in effect, and saying 'yeah you're on the right lines, but do more'*

In conducting this type of activity, the back-up - in terms of information, advice and analysis - from central office is invaluable.

Its 'Home Counties' location allows the Society to draw upon well-connected people who have retired from senior positions in, say, the civil service or the City. It can also find key officers with appropriate expertise: for example, the Planning Manager was a career civil servant with the Department of the Environment for 32 years and the Chair of the Society's Planning Policy Committee is a retired planning solicitor. It is a reflection of the confidence and resourcefulness of the Hertfordshire Society that it has contributed through national CPRE to wider policy debates, such as the consultation on the Rural White Paper (CPRE - The Hertfordshire Society, 1999). This clearly adds to its authority locally.

Given that the Society no longer depends on establishment figures, it has to recruit its own leaders from amongst its existing or potential members or supporters. As a leading activist comments:

*It is specific issues that often bring people to us.... Normally it is something quite close to home. It is not*

*often that they have got this overall picture of the environment that they want to save.... It is a little bit of their own personal environment”.*

From such contacts the Society recruits the grassroots planning correspondents that it needs to monitor planning applications and development proposals across the county. And as the activist notes: “Quite often they will progress into, say, doing the whole village or the whole parish, and sometimes even more”.

And yet, despite its location, the Society still finds difficulty in recruiting “people prepared to take responsibility and lead”, as one leading member put it. The existing activists are constantly on the look out for people who are not just committed but who are “knowledgeable” and “capable of taking a broader perspective”. As the member goes on to say: “we recruit [volunteers] in different ways but there are this 10 per cent who see the wider issues”. The Society has tried soliciting activists through the newsletter but gets very few replies; advertising has also not proved satisfactory. Personal contacts and approaches occasionally bring in the “right person”. In some cases, suitable individuals emerge from amongst grassroots volunteers. As the Planning Manager commented: “The majority start off on a local thing that concerns them ... but there are a select few who then develop and get more and more involved and take on a wider and wider role”. An officer of the Society sees the recruitment of “effective leaders” as the biggest challenge for the future:

*We are dependent upon the leadership which emerges. You know, you can appeal in the yearbook, the newsletter. You can talk to people. But in the end it is who, by chance, comes along really. Or who you might meet. And their qualities and their time determine what they will do, and their interests, you see.*

The final distinguishing aspect of the Society is its public presence. While it relies to a lesser extent on local elites, there is still a

considerable amount of informal influencing that goes on. The leading members of the Society make use of their extensive social networks and the opportunities that arise, say, at the golf club, a Rotary meeting or an official garden party to ‘bend the ear’ of a councillor or senior officer.

In addition, and along with other CPRE branches, the Society is increasingly seeking media attention to influence a wider public debate. In so doing, it is able, largely through the auspices of central office, to attract much broader and more favourable coverage than could any of the other local amenity or protest groups<sup>35</sup>. There is recognition that greater integration into the activities of central CPRE has significantly altered the pace and tempo of lobbying. The Chair of the Transport Committee commented:

*The CPRE call us a Transport Campaign Group. As far as they are concerned, the Transport Committees in local branches are Campaign Groups... A little bit of [the old-style influence] still goes on. But we are now part of a national body as well and we have picked up its power.*

He describes the Society’s new lobbying approach as “forceful” rather than “militant”. The most apparent effect has been that the press and decision-makers now pay the Society greater attention.

The work of the Society’s Transport Committee illustrates well the interpenetration between local and national campaigns and shows how the two tiers working together can assist in the development of a ‘professional’ approach. The Committee members have recently been drawn into consultation with the County Council over its Local Transport Plan; national office provided them with briefing on the background and the process and, from its overview

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<sup>35</sup> In 1998, the Society featured in three national and seven local newspapers, two national and four local radio interviews, and in four regional television programmes (CPRE – Hertfordshire Society, 1999).

of what was happening in other counties, examples of good practice elsewhere. The Chairman of the Transport Committee said:

*There's a great deal of support, help and motivation that we get from the national office. The sheer weight of the postbag for a start, not to mention the faxes and the emails. And there is help, genuine, useful advice.... The transport people from head office have come along to my little committee meetings.*

The Society has also promoted campaigns conducted by the national office, on the Slower Speeds Initiative, the Rural Roads Initiative and the Quiet Lanes Campaign. Not only does this mean drawing on briefings and information from the London office but it may also entail requests for local examples to be fed into the national campaign. The Society is asked to put up spokespeople willing to be interviewed by the press on these campaigns: as the Transport Chair remarked: "within no time I was in the local press. I was interviewed on local radio within weeks of taking this on ... the whole thing has become quite hectic". Asked to what extent these national campaigns reflected the specific concerns of the Society's members, the same respondent replied:

*Our concerns on transport are the general concerns on transport wherever you are.... There is nothing parochial about congestion or speeding or road accidents.... A national body can keep your issue in the public eye in general terms.... The vast majority of the population in our county are not environmentally aware. They are very consumer-oriented. So a national campaign can bring it to their attention and keep the pot boiling.*

### ***Policy processes in Hertfordshire***

At the county and district levels, the Hertfordshire Society has been active in a number of high profile planning debates and policy

fora in recent years. Housing and transport issues have been particular foci through the Society's contribution to the revision of local land use plans, the county council's transport plan and consultations on the development of airports in the region.

The Society is held in fairly high regard by the County Council. As one of the volunteers commented, "we get on extremely well with the officers of the County Council and some of the councillors. And I think we get privileged treatment". Key officers of the Society hold passes to get into County Hall and have the use of a room. The Society is represented on a number of longstanding committees such as the Hertfordshire Conservation Liaison Group. It is also regularly asked to join working parties: recent ones include a consultative group for the local transport plan and a committee preparing a landscape strategy for South Hertfordshire. Significantly, the Society is the only organisation on a number of liaison groups to be represented by a volunteer, with the rest of the members being public officials and professional officers.

The County Council clearly perceives the Society as a key organisation in winning over wider opinion. For example, the Society was asked by the Chair of the Council's Environment Committee to convene a public meeting where the Council could have a chance to explain its strategy on housing development. Likewise the Society was asked to chair one of the early forums on the local transport plan in County Hall. It is also an active member of two groupings sponsored by the County Council - the Rural Forum and the Town Renaissance Campaign Group<sup>36</sup> - which debate strategic options for balancing the demands on the environment with social and economic requirements. The Town Renaissance Campaign Group has held a series of events throughout the county over the past couple of years to publicise the need for the regeneration of brownfield sites and 'balanced' development.

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<sup>36</sup> This awareness raising programme is called the 'Town Renaissance Campaign' rather than the 'Urban Renaissance Campaign' in recognition of the predominance of towns within the settlement hierarchy in Hertfordshire.

A senior planner with the County Council pointed to the Society's close relations with local council officers by contrasting its outlook with that of other amenity and campaigning groups:

*Almost by definition they are more strategic because their remit is not so much to do things, it's to think about things and talk about things. And they sometimes will take a county-wide or even a regional view of things.*

Leading members of the Society have demonstrated a "very good knowledge of the big picture". They have made "some very useful" inputs into the Local Transport Plan and "a pretty positive contribution" to the work of the Rural Forum by "helping to synthesise options for policy making especially on economic and social matters".

However, in such a buoyant development context as Hertfordshire it is inevitable that the Society and the County Council will not always see eye to eye. While they may be able to 'talk the same language' on a number of policy issues, there is disagreement over the implications of meeting the strategic housing requirements in the county. For instance, following the sustainability appraisal, in which the Society played a full part, the County Council took the decision that, to accommodate the new housing projected by sub-regional growth targets, development would have to occur on part of the Green Belt, including an expansion of Stevenage west of the A1 motorway. When this proposal was incorporated into the draft version of the Structure Plan, the Hertfordshire Society came out in complete opposition.

Once a clear line of disagreement with the County Council was drawn, the Society's tactics changed and it began a public campaign against Structure Plan policy. A county planner, who now found himself a target of the campaign, likened the Society to "a chimera that changes from one kind of beast to another". He went on to explain:

*When push comes to shove, and as strategic planners, we have to settle upon an area which we, in our professional opinion, believe has to have a bit of sustainable development in it, we may then come across that bit of CPRE that tends to say 'not in my backyard'. It's almost then as if some of CPRE's more thoughtful membership melt away and keep quiet and the ranks are swelled by people who have not done all the previous thinking but simply want to object to the decision that has been made.*

This more robust approach to local campaigning inevitably comes to the fore around new housing proposals, such as the Stevenage expansion, where local CPRE can see a constant encroachment onto existing green spaces and is forced into a more defensive (i.e. less strategic) form of politics.

In general, however, most development monitoring takes place in a more mundane way than the Stevenage case. In undertaking such work, Hertfordshire CPRE feeds into the routine development control processes across the county in a characteristically well-organised manner. Its response to planning applications is co-ordinated by the Planning Manager who works about two and a half days a week for the Society. He examines the list of planning applications that are received every week from the ten districts and identifies those that seem significant or controversial and notifies the local planning correspondents (the Society has a network of 40-50 planning correspondents across the county). They are asked to follow up the particular applications in their area which entails looking at the local plan to see what the policy context is, visiting the site, and reporting back to the Planning Manager any reasons that might form the basis of an objection. The Planning Manager then decides whether to send off a letter of objection to the relevant planning authority.

This process ensures that the Society manages its input into local development processes in a co-ordinated fashion. It also appears to

command some respect from development-control officers. In the words of the Planning Manager:

*It is noticeable when I ring up council officers on the occasional planning case that if I just give them my name and they think that I am a member of the public they are not very helpful. If I say 'CPRE Hertfordshire', immediately the barriers go down and they are co-operative.*

Occasionally, the Society is approached by development control staff, soliciting its specific views on a planning application, and frequently the Society's objections are cited in the decisions reached by the planning authorities. One leading officer recounted a telling incident that revealed the standing of the Society amongst development control staff:

*When I first came, I wrote a letter because I did planning applications then. I didn't know too much about planning but I could look anything up.... So, I wrote this letter. And the planning officer phoned me immediately it hit his desk and said to me '... you really didn't mean to write this'. And I had made an error that was to our detriment and he said 'I think that, if you agree, you actually didn't mean to send it, it didn't reach me'*

### **Summary**

The Hertfordshire branch seems well organised and efficient in its activities. The buoyant development context ensures that it needs to carefully monitor new planning proposals and policies in order to protect existing green spaces. And through close relations with a dense network of groups, spread throughout the county, it plays its part in many other aspects of local environmental politics. In fact, it appears to act as a co-ordinator of other groups, especially in high profile planning campaigns, such as the Stevenage expansion. It also appears to be well-respected by local council officers and politicians, although on occasion strict battle lines can be drawn



and two opposing sides then come into view. At these times (again, Stevenage provides a case in point), CPRE finds it hard to keep on lobbying from the ‘inside’. In such cases, the ‘professionals’ “melt away”, as the planner put it, to be replaced by ‘NIMBYs’.

Hertfordshire CPRE seems, in general, to balance strategic and local considerations and this balancing ensures some respect from others involved in planning and environmental processes. In pursuing this ‘professional’ approach at the local level, central office support seems to be very much appreciated. There is a feeling in Hertfordshire that CPRE’s national campaigns are relevant to the locality and that local developments are relevant to the national campaigns. Little disjuncture between the national and the local is evident. In fact, central CPRE and Hertfordshire CPRE appear to very closely resemble one another. Moreover, the CPRE locally appears to speak for a broad swathe of opinion in the county and its apparent representativeness gives the organisation as a whole a great deal of legitimacy. In part, this is as a result of the local social context in which large numbers of middle-class counterurbanisers are seen as the natural bedrock of CPRE support – the local group is dominated, as one member admitted, by “townies”. The concerns of this social group largely accord with those of the organisation locally. And yet, despite this context, Hertfordshire CPRE has to strive to find and retain the skilled volunteers that are required. In part, this may be as a result of the strong growth and development pressures, which ensure that CPRE activists in Hertfordshire must remain constantly vigilant. It also results from the desire to find the right people, those “who can see the wider issues”. In this way, the Society maintains a small cohesive leadership and continues to ensure its pre-eminence in the amenity politics of the county.

## **3.2 Devon**

### ***Introduction***

Devon is a predominantly rural county, which has experienced significant economic and social changes in recent decades. Along with its westerly neighbour, Cornwall, it used to be thought of as a peripheral ‘problem’ area (the “far South West”) that was lagging behind in economic development. However, with the growth and outward spread of the South East and the London-Bristol (M4) corridor, so the more accessible southern and eastern zones of the county have found their economy coming more closely in line with that of Southern England. In this way, Devon, which is a large county geographically, has come to straddle the divide between the prosperous south of England and the poor western periphery which still includes Cornwall and the remoter parts of north and west Devon (in 1999 Cornwall received Objective 1 status, confirming it as one of the poorest regions in the EU, while most of Devon received Objective 2 status). Associated with these developments have been significant changes in the social and economic complexion of the county, including a marked decline in agricultural and ancillary employment, considerable expansion of the service sector, and a high rate of population growth through immigration to the county.

These changes have operated upon and through a social and geographical structure that remains predominantly rural. The county has the relatively low population density of 158 persons per square kilometre compared to an English average of 378. It also has a dispersed settlement pattern and there is no major urban/industrial conurbation. The establishment of Torbay and Plymouth as separate unitary authorities leaves only Exeter, the seat of county administration, as the sole urban centre within Devon. The majority of people live in the towns and villages scattered across the county. The rural character is also evident in the continued significance of agriculture: in the 1991 Census, three districts – Mid-Devon, Torridge and West Devon – had 10% or more of their workforce directly engaged in farming and horticulture. The distinctive pattern of farming in the county also contributes strongly to the identity of Devon, with pastoral livestock farming (i.e. dairy, beef and sheep) dominating the county. The farms are relatively small, and the county has the

largest number of any in England. The vast majority are owner occupied and they rely wholly or mostly on family labour.

This small-scale, pastoral farming contributes to the distinctiveness and diversity of the Devon landscape. Much of the land has low fertility and can only support extensive grazing but this in turn may help to maintain important habitats and wildlife. The county includes two National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Areas of Great Landscape Value. Most of the coastline is designated Heritage Coast. The Devon Biodiversity Action Plan describes “a cornucopia of species, niches and landforms” (DCC 1998a, p.1) and “an almost unrivalled range of ecosystems” (p.7). Thus, the pastoral image of the county, along with its coastal attractions and seaside, are at the heart of Devon’s touristic appeal. The county attracts by far the largest tourist expenditure from UK residents, with the total standing at about £1 billion a year, directly generating about 32,500 jobs (DCC 1999). Tourism is concentrated mainly along the north and south coasts, and is made up mainly of small-scale family businesses.

The popularity of the county as a holiday destination is matched by its attractiveness to people moving from elsewhere in the UK. Other rural areas and regions have experienced counterurbanisation, but Devon stands out in terms of the volume of the influx, the preponderance of inter-regional (rather than ‘within region’) migration, and the fact that this migration is largely related to employment change (Bolton and Chalkley, 1990). Thus population growth rates have been amongst the highest in the country, and are entirely due to net in-migration. The county’s population grew by 16.7% between 1971 and 1996, with most of the growth occurring in the rural districts. Growth exceeded 25 per cent in the districts of East Devon, South Hams and Teignbridge.

People usually move to Devon for a fresh start, whether it is to find work, to set up in business or to retire. These long-distance migrants and retirees come predominantly from the South East, London and the West Midlands, many of them attracted by the high quality of the environment (Bolton & Chalkley, 1990). This

has had particular implications for the age structure of the county which, in the words of Devon County Council, is “tending towards the more elderly” (1998 p. 71). More than a quarter of the county’s population was aged 60 or over in 1996, significantly higher than the UK average of 18%. In some districts, the dominance of older people is even more pronounced. For example, in 1991 four out of ten households in East Devon District were occupied solely by pensioners. The retired population is concentrated largely along the northern and southern coastal zones. The majority of incomers, though, are working-age people seeking to take up employment or business opportunities, although often with the eventuality of retirement in mind.

During the development boom of the 1980s, the migration flows that had previously impacted on the coastal and market towns also began to affect the smaller villages and hamlets of the deeper countryside. The completion of the M5 motorway and the north Devon link-road opened up many parts of rural Devon to longer-distance commuting (to Bristol and the M4 corridor, for example). Residential dispersal was also encouraged by the liberalisation of the planning system and facilitated by farmers, many of whom, with government encouragement, sought to realise some of their assets by releasing land for development or converting redundant farm buildings into expensive dwellings (Kneale et al., 1992). The social fabric of once agricultural villages and hamlets was transformed.

The scale of regional population growth and economic restructuring, and the associated social changes, led to environmental issues becoming increasingly prominent in local politics. The combination of an attractive countryside landscape, important environmental characteristics, and in-migration meant that local amenity groups flourished and the region became an important location for the growth of environmentalism nationally within the UK. The Green Party recorded its greatest electoral achievements in the south west, and at times in the late 1980s it seemed on the verge of a major breakthrough in the region, most notably in the 1989 European elections when it received over 20

per cent of the popular vote. National campaigns to halt the ploughing up of moorland in National Parks, to stop the drainage of lowland bogs, to combat river pollution from farm waste, and to clean up sewage contamination of bathing beaches first took off in this region, and were pursued by a local network of activists and sympathetic journalists (Lowe et al., 1998).

By and large, the carriers of the environmental consciousness have been 'incomers'. In bringing these new ideas into the region, they have often found themselves challenging established local interests - whether hoteliers seeking to boost visitor numbers, local developers, commercial interests and trades people looking to expand particular settlements, or farmers intent on intensifying their production and/or diversifying their holdings. At the core of such disputes are basic disagreements about the well being of the countryside and its inhabitants. For example, the influx of large numbers of newcomers in the 1980s helped catalyse a major shift in public attitudes to agriculture and the countryside. Many farmers had new neighbours – often retired migrants or well-to-do professional or business people – with quite different perceptions of the function of the countryside. For example, one in six Devon dairy farmers surveyed in the early 1990s had experienced direct pressure from neighbours and local people to change their farming practices (Lowe et al., 1998 p.155).

However, in challenging such a traditional local interest the environmentally conscious incomers also reconfirmed the pre-eminence of the 'rural' character of Devon: the pastoral countryside has to be central to any concern about protecting what is special or distinctive about the area. The Devon Biodiversity Action Plan, while recognising that some modern farming practices are not especially sympathetic, nevertheless concludes that:

*Farmers and land managers are central to the goal of maintaining a rich and varied natural environment in Devon. As stewards of most of the land surface in the County, it is they who ultimately control the future.*

Thus, while challenging traditional local interests and their political power, environmental groups have also had to reach an accommodation with them in order to maintain the distinctive rural and environmental character of the area.

In sum, 'rural nature' is at the base of the county's two main traditional industries - farming and tourism - but it is also a magnet for people and firms moving into the county. On the one hand, there is great pressure to protect and preserve Devon's rural heritage; on the other hand, there is a recognised need for rural development and farm diversification to boost local incomes, support rural services, and offset the impact of the farming crisis (made worse by the recent foot and mouth outbreak). This leads to intense debate and occasional conflicts about how to manage and regulate change in the county in a way that will satisfy the diverse socio-economic groupings that claim an interest in the countryside.

### *The CPRE in Devon*

Devon CPRE currently has just over 1000 members. It is run by the Chairman and an Executive Committee which includes the Vice Chair, representatives of the district groups and the honorary officers responsible for relations with the press and for recruitment. They are supported by two part-time paid positions, an Executive Secretary and an Assistant Secretary. The branch has a number of sub-committees including a Transport Group, a Minerals Group and a Branch Promotion Committee. There are also eight district groups covering North Devon, South Hams and Plymouth, West Devon, East Devon, Torridge, Teignbridge, Torbay and Mid-Devon. Finally, the branch has an Advisory Committee which brings together representatives from various organisations in the county, including affiliated local councils (East Devon, South Hams, North Devon and the County Council), the NFU, National Trust, Devon Wildlife Trust and the Small and Family Farmers Alliance.

These affiliations ensure that Devon CPRE takes a wide interest in planning, rural and environmental issues. It is also represented on a

number of consultative fora. These include two committees sponsored by the county council: the Devon Conservation Forum, which has a broad environmental concern, and the Environmental Driver Group, which is concerned with the implementation of Local Agenda 21. In addition, the branch is represented on the Devon FWAG, the Devon Hedge Group, Dartmoor National Park Consultation Group, various Environmental Agency committees and the South West Water Recreation and Conservation Forum.

The Devon branch was established in 1955, at a time when planning and development control functions were under the control of the County Council. It operated as a county-level committee bringing together representatives from various organisations in order to press for better planning. In short, it was a force for the *professionalisation* of planning in the county (the Council did not appoint its first Chief Planning Officer until 1958, and even then it was at Government insistence as a condition for approving the County's first Development Plan). In its early years Devon CPRE operated as a county-level 'ginger group' and gradually it gathered together a small group of supporters, mainly landowners and professional people. By 1971 it had a membership of 200, although the bulk of the work fell upon the Secretary. The then Secretary of the branch provided the following reflection:

*Planning was much simpler at that time, and it didn't seem too difficult for one person to tackle the whole county, although the distances involved were considerable and knowledge of planning law was rudimentary* (CPRE Devon, 2000 p. 5).

Support for the branch grew rapidly in the 1980s when many of the villages and small towns faced unprecedented levels of housing development. A number of new residents became involved at this time, often because of a single development proposal. As one member put it, "local people often don't have the facility to put forward a good case". Thus, incomers frequently found themselves spearheading anti-development campaigns.

The influx of new residents prepared to take a lead in local amenity politics led to the establishment of district groups (which now cover the whole county). One member described the formation of one district group in the following way:

*My involvement with CPRE started in the 1970s if I remember right when there was a planning application for a field opposite where we lived and there was a lot of local protest and one of the residents in the village suggested that I ought to get in touch with CPRE and see if they would help us. I did this. They did help us. And I thought it incumbent on me to join as a result. We then supported CPRE by attending the various functions which they ran and as a normal subscription paying member. Later on, and I can't remember the exact date, ten or eleven years ago, there was a planning application for a meat packing factory in a village a few miles away and we were so incensed by this that we wrote to a local paper and a resident in the village in question then got in touch with us and said that they were thinking of setting up an east Devon group of CPRE and would we like to join in. And so we did.*

The establishment of the district groups focused a great deal of CPRE attention on the activities of the district councils, in particular the councillors. The reorganisation of local government in the 1970s had seen the eclipse of non-partisan leadership of the county by prominent county figures to which the CPRE had related. The new district councils were organised on party lines and drew in local farmers and the business and trades people who ran the coastal and market towns. Most had strongly localistic orientations and a pragmatic approach towards local development for local needs. Facing them, the CPRE's new district groups drew in activists from the various local amenity societies, village action groups and residents associations that had sprung up in the 1980s to protest against the rash of local housing and industrial developments across the county. They looked to the CPRE to help



bring some order and restraint to what was seen as a development 'free-for-all' and to counter what they felt was a lax and compromised approach to development control by the district councils. As a consequence, the new district structure became an effective part of Devon CPRE, especially when the district groups were given the responsibility of tracking the local development plan review processes that followed the 1991 Planning and Compensation Act<sup>37</sup>. As district planning grew in importance so did the district groups within CPRE.

At the same time as the district structure was being put in place, efforts were being made to strengthen the county branch. The Chairman and Secretary decided to change the Executive Committee - which at the time consisted not just of branch members but representatives from all the affiliated groups - into an Advisory Committee. A new Executive was formed out of the district groups and county personnel. This committee structure seemed to work more effectively as executive decisions could be taken more easily by a smaller and more focused group, while the Advisory Committee could draw in a broad range of opinion on CPRE activity in the county. A Branch Promotion Committee was also established and it employed the volunteer recruitment firm REACH to bring in new and active members. As the Chairman reflected, the branch is "now much more systematic than in the past in recruiting volunteers. Before they had just drifted in but now you had to actively look for them". REACH succeeded in bringing a number of activists, two of whom agreed to act as Press Officer and Recruitment Officer respectively. These appointments held the potential to further strengthen the county tier.

### *Policy processes in Devon*

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<sup>37</sup> The 1991 Act stipulated that district planning authorities should draw up district wide plans. This was the first time such plans had been made part of the statutory system. The Act also stipulated that all development control decisions should be made in accordance with the plan (unless 'material considerations' indicated otherwise). This clause seemed to indicate that the district plan would have a new importance in determining patterns of local development. As a consequence, CPRE began to organise at this more local level of planning.

Housing provision is the most controversial issue confronting the Devon branch, and it has sought to influence local planning for housing at both the district and county levels and in the revision of regional planning guidance. Also of concern to volunteers are the proliferation of telecommunication masts, proposals for wind farms on the North Devon coast, and the extension of china clay workings in Dartmoor. The branch's Transport Group has co-ordinated responses to consultations on local transport plans and the transport policies set out in regional guidance. It has also taken part in national CPRE campaigns, including the Charter for Country Lanes and the Safer Lanes campaign, which have sought to publicise the need for reduced traffic speeds on rural roads. The branch's Minerals Group is regularly consulted by the County Council on minerals and waste issues. Alongside these more traditional CPRE concerns, the branch has also taken an active interest in farming and rural development policy. While they are not regarded as key participants in the arena of rural development, branch members are clearly concerned about the future of agriculture and its place in the county's landscape. However, the rural character of Devon means that CPRE's aspirations for the countryside must be set against those of other, perhaps more traditional, rural groups.

The branch's influence is most evident in the planning arena. It has been a persistent advocate of a plan-led approach and has sought to encourage a stronger professionalism amongst planning officials. The district structure allows it to monitor all planning applications and assess whether they infringe plan policies. As one activist commented "often enough it is a question of motivating the planners to do what they know they ought to do and get working a little bit harder at it than they would otherwise do". In campaigning on these issues the work of national office is seen as helpful, although there were occasional complaints that material from the centre has a "Home Counties bias", notably on the farming and rural development issues that are seen of such significance in Devon. In the main, the feeling was that central office staff "can be very helpful"; "when you get them here they do perform", as one local activist put it.

The planners interviewed generally praised CPRE for its consistency and its strategic approach. One regional planner based in Bristol singled out Devon CPRE as “a very strong county group”; it takes “a Devon-wide view”. He contrasted it with a neighbouring CPRE branch where the volunteers had a reputation for being more parochial and less consistent. He put the difference down to Devon being “a well organised place (with) a retired colonel there in every village”. In consequence, “with Devon CPRE you know where it stands, you know who they are”. Likewise, a county planner said that he was “impressed” by Devon CPRE’s “level of expertise on county planning matters”. The “strong relations” between the CPRE’s district groups meant that they spoke with a “common voice across the county”, in contrast to the parochial preoccupations of local amenity societies. The CPRE had been by far the most active group involved in the long drawn out process of preparing the county structure plan, which had begun in 1993 and was completed in 1999.

CPRE members themselves claim that they actively seek to work closely with planners and other local government officials. As one put it (in the context of the focus group): “We do try to be as constructive as possible, taking into account the parameters in which they [the planners] have to work”. However, the activists are critical of the quality of planning staff they deal with, particularly at the district level. One of the members of a district group commented: “The quality of local government has dropped abysmally”. Another leading volunteer described local planning officers as ranging from those that “you have to jack up and poke, and threaten with ombudsmen, through to the professional ones who are fine to deal with”. The same activist said:

*Basically speaking, the district planning officers are a fairly mixed bag and they range from some pretty good professional people... to some others who are really time servers and want an easy life. And it did get to a point with our local village... where we were so dissatisfied with the planning officer that we were*

*dealing with that we actually went as a deputation to the chief planner in [the district] and laid a formal complaint on the basis that this fellow was just taking the easy line and saying yes to developers as often as he could because it was the easy way to do it.*

It is perhaps unsurprising that one district planner said of the CPRE: “They are powerful and we prefer not to cross swords with them”.

The CPRE volunteers tend to have an even lower opinion of many local councillors. Indeed it is this which is seen to be at the root of the variable standards of planning within the district councils. As one volunteer commented: “a poor quality of elected member tends to select a poor quality of candidate [in terms of planning personnel]”. How, he reflected, could a council leader who was “a small time builder” be expected to appoint technical staff of high calibre.

In their struggles to get the District Councils to prepare and adopt local plans, and then to use the local plans to guide decisions on planning applications (in line with the plan-led system), the CPRE district groups see themselves as continually having to combat the inclinations and shortcomings of the local councils. There is a general feeling that most councillors have little understanding or knowledge of planning and that their response to planning issues is determined too much by partisan calculations, parochial instincts or improper personal considerations. This excerpt from the Devon focus group gives a flavour of local CPRE views on this issue:

*Mark: What I fear is the lack of technical ability, if you like, of planning committees, or the lack of understanding of planning committees. Well, I've actually seen somebody in a planning committee reading a plan held upside down and making comments on it. And I've also seen in planning committees schemes passed without anybody looking*

*at the plans at all and not understanding the scheme at all. Pretty horrifying really.*

*Paul: And a failure of correlation between the application and the local plan.*

*Peter: Not understanding the policies in the local plan.*

*Raymond: It is only in the last two or three years in fact when you have seen the planning applications go through and are listed for discussion at planning committee meetings any reference to the local plan policies.*

*Andrew: I think that an indication of this problem really quite recently the County Council decided to give short training courses to new members of its Planning and Development Committee. And I for one thought 'jolly good they are going to learn more about planning and the environment, architecture, anything that really matters in planning'. But no these training courses were merely training courses on the legalities of planning and how not to get themselves into a fix legally, but had nothing whatever to do with the environment or amenities or standards of design or whatever. And this I think is the real problem.*

Advice on the legalities of planning does seem necessary, however, as the CPRE in Devon has been known to report local councillors to the Ombudsman for improprieties in making planning decisions. One local planner commented that CPRE's past "whistleblowing" had certainly been "salutary". There was still a sense amongst the councillors that CPRE was "watching" them and this reinforced a feeling amongst the members that things should be done properly. There was no one else locally who would "blow the whistle" on the councillors, the planner observed.

While the CPRE activists feel it necessary on occasion to challenge the authority of local councillors, the latter in turn are often ready to deny the legitimacy of the CPRE. Councillors interviewed referred to it as "narrow and anti-development", as the mouthpiece of middle class incomers or of retired people who don't want to see

change. A farmer councillor referred dismissively to the “Council for the Ossification of Rural England”, adding pointedly that he himself was born and bred locally. However, not all councillors take this line. One district councillor commented:

*The CPRE can't be seen to be an 'anti' group, you know, they can't be seen to be against anything and everything in Devon. They can't be seen to be against all development or any movement whatsoever in the County. And I think that they achieve that role... from what I know of them, they have never said 'no, no, no' to everything*

Yet, even this councillor admitted that his colleagues tended to dismiss the CPRE because “they feel that the CPRE is not a broad church of people... you know they are representing the views of a certain section of the community... well, they are the middle classes trying to protect themselves.”

In general, there is a division running through the overarching political discourse in Devon: on the one side are local councillors - who are characterised as either ‘parochial’ (by, for instance, CPRE members) or as ‘sensitive to local needs’ (by other local interests); on the other side are CPRE activists - who are characterised as ‘interfering NIMBYs’ (by, for instance, some local councillors) or as ‘professional’ and ‘strategic’ participants (by, for instance, some planners). The planners appear to sit uncomfortably between the two sides: they (usually) recognise the validity of the professional arguments employed by CPRE but must also respond to the (local) sensitivities of the political members.

The nature of this divide between (‘local’) developmentalists and (‘incoming’) environmentalists, and the respective strengths of the two opposing ‘camps’, varies according to local context. Thus, in some districts CPRE is thought to reflect a growing segment of local opinion; in other areas, it is still seen as out of kilter with prevailing aspirations for development to meet local needs for employment and housing.

This local context, which is in turn linked to the social composition of particular areas in Devon - notably levels of counterurbanisation - determines, to a significant degree, the success of CPRE. Thus in east Devon the CPRE is well established and has developed effective working relations with planning officers and a number of councillors; it is now seen as a (professional and well-organised) part of the political structure. In parts of north, mid, and west Devon, however, the CPRE is weaker and finds itself confronted by well-established land and development interests. These and other localistic interests are well-represented on local district councils (as the number of independent councillors testifies) and can therefore act to contain CPRE's influence.

East Devon and Torridge Districts offer contrasting cases. In the latter, there is effectively a stand off between the district council and the CPRE. A senior planning officer characterised the local CPRE as standing "for a ban on anything", adding "I don't have any time for them because they go too far". He did not think their views had support amongst the councillors (most of whom are independents): "I don't detect any strong sympathy with the CPRE". The small Torridge District Group of the CPRE (it has 70 members) finds itself, according to its Chair, fighting against an official outlook which believes that the "enhancement of prosperity... begins with allocation of residential and employment land". Assessing the Group's political standing in the district, he commented:

*[we] have excellent relations with a few councillors. The Director of Planning, however, has stated that our aims are not reconcilable with the District Council's.... The capacity of councillors to pursue policies independently of the Council officers is very limited. Also some councillors seem to resent the influence we exert on their colleagues.*

In East Devon, in contrast, a senior planning officer described the CPRE as the "best organised and most well-informed group we

have to deal with”. He added, “they can be allies, depending on the issues”, and they were also helpful to the planners in “promoting public understanding of planning”. The CPRE has strong links with several councillors and in general council members respect its viewpoint. Even so, they reject any notion that CPRE stands for rural East Devon. In the words of a senior planning officer:

*Councillors don't want it to have special status over and above other groups. They often object if we give any prominence to CPRE's views. They say it is just a pressure group.*

### **Summary**

Support for the CPRE in Devon grew quickly during the 1980s. This growth, which was intimately related to counterurbanisation and the large numbers of people retiring to Devon for ‘quality of life’ reasons, allowed the local organisation to become both more comprehensive in its coverage and more effective, especially at the district level (where many of the most important planning and development control decisions are now taken). Prior to this period, the Devon branch has been run by what was, in effect, a small coterie<sup>38</sup>, and thus was unable to mount the extensive campaigns across the county which, by the mid-1980s, had become necessary. While a core group of key activists still tend to dominate participatory processes, the district structure ensures that this group is spread throughout the county.

In effect, CPRE in Devon has become a much more professional branch: it recruits “systematically” and seeks to provide well

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<sup>38</sup> Everyone in the area talks in admiring terms about the pioneering work of the Branch Secretary who at the time carried the load almost single-handedly.



thought-out and policy literate representations at district, county and regional levels. While its main area of expertise is planning, it is trying to broaden its range, notably into social housing, agriculture and rural development, to demonstrate its commitment to the overall well-being of the countryside and rural life<sup>39</sup>.

However, despite its undoubted expertise, Devon CPRE still finds it difficult to establish good working relationships with planners and councillors across the county. This difficulty is most pronounced at the district level where working practices and political cultures vary quite widely. Even in those districts where CPRE is strong we heard many complaints about “time-serving planners” and “parochial councillors”. In general, the localistic nature of Devon politics often makes it difficult for CPRE members to bring their increasingly professionalised and strategic perspectives to bear.

This difficulty is felt on both sides, so councillors complain about a lack of understanding of the local context and the needs of local people on the part of CPRE ‘incomers’, while CPRE members complain about vested interests and a lack of professionalism on the part of councillors. However, it is clear that the scale of immigration and counterurbanisation in the region (despite CPRE’s own efforts to constrain development) means that the situation is likely to move CPRE’s way. As the social structure of rural Devon changes, so CPRE’s concerns are likely to find their way to the top of local political agendas, even in those areas that, at present, remain impervious to its demands. The task then will be finding a way of integrating CPRE’s national concerns with the very particular needs of rural Devon.

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<sup>39</sup> As part of the research process we were asked by local CPRE members to organise a seminar in Devon which brought together representatives of Devon CPRE and farming organisations. The seminar was addressed by national office’s Rural Policy team and conducted a wide-ranging discussion of farming in Devon and the CPRE perspective in agriculture. All present agreed that it was the first such event organised in the county and that there was plenty of scope for more such events.

### **3.3 Northumberland**

#### *Introduction*

The popular image of the North East of England is of its industrial cities. In contrast, the popular image of the English countryside is one of thatched cottages, picturesque villages, parkland, small fields and rolling downs. In many respects, then, a county such as Northumberland, with its extensive rural landscapes and disused industrial areas, sits uneasily within the English rural context for it raises quite distinct issues that are related not just a more rugged landscape and a harsher climate but also very particular social and economic concerns.

The Northumberland countryside is very varied, extending from upland moors and forests to agricultural lowlands and coastal dunes. It is in the main attractive, with a diversity of wildlife habitats and places with strong historical associations. The need to conserve much of this environment is recognised in a National Park, two extensive Areas of Outstanding Beauty, a Heritage Coast as well as numerous Sites of Special Scientific Interest, scheduled Ancient Monuments, Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas. Some of these features are of international significance: Hadrian's Wall is a World Heritage Monument; the Lindisfarne area is recognised as a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention; the whole coast qualifies for designation as a Special Protection Area under the European Bird Directive; and the North Pennines is an International Biosphere Reserve. There are also degraded landscapes, associated mainly with industrial and mining decline, where environmental renewal is required to improve the quality of life and to attract new inward investment.

Although environmentally rich, the county is sparsely populated, with only 61 persons per square kilometre in 1996 (compared, for example, with 158 in Devon, and 625 in Hertfordshire). The density falls as low as 26 in the district of Tynedale, 27 in Berwick upon Tweed and 29 in Alnwick District. Population change in the

county between 1981 and 1996 was 2.7 per cent, compared with a national growth of 4.8 per cent (or some 9.7 per cent in Devon). Thus, compared with elsewhere in England (notably our other two study areas), the pressures on the countryside are not acute.

The social structure of rural Northumberland is also different from that of southern England. There are few commuters and retired immigrants; it consists largely of a set of working communities on whose viability the maintenance of the fabric of the countryside depends. Some of these communities are quite distinct, such as the uplands with their tenant farms and isolated settlements, and the rural coalfield with its former pit villages. Another distinctive feature is the landed estates, which cover around a half of the county's territory and dominate the social structure and landscape. The largest, belonging to the Duke of Northumberland, comprises over 100,000 acres (as well as the mineral rights to a further 300,000 acres). There are about a dozen other estates in the county with holdings in excess of 10,000 acres. There are also about a hundred landowners with more than 1,000 acres. In addition, the county includes a number of large institutional landowners - such as the Ministry of Defence (MoD), the Forestry Commission, the regional water company, and the National Trust.

Northumberland is not commonly perceived as a county in which *urban* development represents a major threat to the countryside. Indeed, the relatively depressed state of the local and regional economy means that the county actively seeks to attract firms, skilled labour and visitors. The nature of the economy of industrial Tyneside has been to produce a large working class and a small middle class<sup>40</sup>. Compared to the other metropolitan areas of England, the area has not been a significant 'net exporter' of middle class migrants into rural areas<sup>41</sup>. The commuter hinterland

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<sup>40</sup> In the North East as a whole, the proportion of the working population in professional, managerial and technical occupations is just 23.5 per cent, compared with an average for England of 30.6 per cent (Regional Trends, 1998: 48).

<sup>41</sup> Analysis of the 1991 Census Special Migration Statistics by Champion et al (1998) found a rate of net migration from Greater London of 7.7 per thousand in the preceding year, while

of the Tyneside conurbation is small and constrained - largely to the west (up the Tyne Valley) towards the market town of Hexham (where the transpennine A69 ends as a dual carriageway), and to the north (to the county town of Morpeth where the A1 is likewise reduced to a single carriageway). Beyond this zone, Northumberland remains a county where the middle class has established only a limited presence.

### ***The CPRE in Northumberland***

Given the social and economic structure of Northumberland, it is perhaps not surprising that the CPRE has struggled to organise in the region. For many years it relied on the Northumberland and Newcastle Society (NNS), a traditional county-cum-civic society which dates back to 1924. However, following a failed attempt to incorporate the NNS into CPRE's national structure, the Northumberland branch of the CPRE was established in 1993. It started with 180 members and had built up to just 360 by the end of 2000 (one-third the membership of CPRE Devon and a quarter that of CPRE Hertfordshire). The membership is largely suburban or outer-suburban based. Seventy per cent live in the Tyneside conurbation or in the Tynedale and Castle Morpeth Districts, which include Newcastle's commuter catchment area (CPRE Northumberland 1994). The branch has a small sprinkling of members across the rest of the county and does not appear to have recruited many residents from industrial south-east Northumberland. One annual review commented:

*We have few members in the Wansbeck and Blyth areas. This does appear surprising, due to such sensitive issues as open-cast mining and new housing developments which are of great concern to people living in these areas (CPRE Northumberland Branch, 1994 p.13)*

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net migration from Tyne and Wear was just 1.5 per thousand - the lowest rate of all metropolitan areas.

Its local weakness is reflected in the branch's inability to establish a stable leadership or pool of volunteers. In the first four years of its existence it had four successive branch secretaries and, at the time of our interviews, it was lacking a Chairman, a Secretary and a branch office. Local and national advertising of the Chairman's position had failed to attract any appropriate applicants. The small number of active volunteers has also ensured that the coverage of the county by district groups is patchy. There are four local groups: North Northumberland (set up in 1994), Tynedale (1995), Blyth (1995), and North Tyneside (1996), but they have operated spasmodically, only flaring into action in reaction to particular planning threats. For example, the North Tyneside Group emerged out of the campaign against the controversial Great Park development proposal to be located in the Newcastle Green Belt. The district groups remain largely dependent on the efforts of a few individuals. Parts of the county have no coverage, including the districts of Morpeth and Wansbeck<sup>42</sup>.

The overall effect is that the CPRE has a fairly low public profile in Northumberland. The former chairman of the county CPRE, who retired in 1998, remarked that he did not see the CPRE quoted in his local paper. The person employed by national CPRE as the Branch Development Officer for Northumberland and Durham spoke bluntly about "public ignorance of the CPRE in Northumberland... people don't understand about the CPRE and how it could help them."

The CPRE's small membership undermines any claim to be a significant rural voice in the county. There are a number of other organisations that are more strongly established and that are able to compete better for members, volunteers and influence. The most significant are the Northumberland Wildlife Trust, the Northumberland Community Council, and the NNS. With about 10,000 members, including 500 active volunteers, the Wildlife Trust is a prominent nature conservation organisation. The

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<sup>42</sup> Berwick and Alnwick districts are also without their own separate groups (they are covered by the North Northumberland Group).

Community Council organises the rural voluntary sector, and with about 30 staff is engaged in partnerships supporting rural services and village-level community development across the county. But it is the NNS, with 1,350 members, that most strongly coincides with the CPRE's interests<sup>43</sup>. Competition between the two is at times fairly acrimonious, largely because it was the NNS's refusal to be absorbed into the CPRE's branch structure that led national CPRE to set up the separate Northumberland county branch (this decision was bitterly resented by leading members of the NNS<sup>44</sup>).

These three organisations are all well established in the county, and unlike the CPRE, are generally seen to be indigenous county bodies. They are connected into the social and organisational hierarchies of rural Northumberland (which in other counties would be the CPRE's prerogative), such as aristocratic patronage and the support of key figures in the county's social and political establishment. They also affiliate and assemble the sorts of local organisations that elsewhere might give their backing to the county CPRE: for example, the Community Council with parish councils; the Wildlife Trust with local conservation groups; and the NNS with amenity societies in market towns. And they offer ample opportunities for the rural middle class and others to be active in voluntary work and local leadership. As the Director of the Northumberland Community Council remarked, its work is often supported by local retired professionals who are "as much concerned to see new childcare initiatives happen or computer training than mobilising a protest against housing development".

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<sup>43</sup> The Chairman of the NNS described the Society as reflecting "concern with the environmental impact of development, trying to identify the character, quality and significance of the existing environment... At the same time, recognising that development is critical to the economy and to the social life." In the past, the NNS has campaigned on: the protection of historic buildings and beautiful landscapes, sand and gravel extraction, open cast mining, the protection of green belt, the design of visually prominent electrification equipment on the railways, and nuclear waste disposal in the Cheviot Hills. However, one Government official in the county said to us that the NNS has not been "terribly prominent in objecting to planning applications in recent years".

<sup>44</sup> The first chairman of the county CPRE was warned privately by a committee member of the Society "in trying to get more members, you are competing with the Northumberland and Newcastle Society and we don't want to lose members to you".

In this unpromising context, the development of the CPRE has very much depended on the initiative and continued support of the national organisation and its paid staff. For a period, national headquarters had an officer stationed in Newcastle to assist in developing regional policy, notably input into regional planning guidance. She covered the whole of the north of England but the post was deliberately located in Newcastle to help give the CPRE a stronger presence in an area where it was seen to be weak. A Branch Development Officer, whose specific role was to assist in establishing branches for Northumberland and Durham, supported the post.

The former chairman of Northumberland CPRE, an ex-planner, explained in interview how the national office representative had “head-hunted” him to be Chairman of the new branch and had convened and orchestrated the public meeting at County Hall in 1993 which had launched the Northumberland branch. The regional staff played a similar part in initiating the district groups in the two counties. The Branch Development Officer explained her function as “helping the volunteers to fulfil the role that they are supposed to fill” and at the same time “building up the branches”. In the absence of both a Chairman and a Secretary for the Northumberland branch, she was temporarily acting in both capacities while actively seeking replacements (including through local and national advertising) but had been unable to find suitable candidates. Likewise, much of the involvement of the CPRE in county planning and local planning issues depends on the support of the Regional Policy Officer.

### ***Policy processes in Northumberland***

The strong central support that the Northumberland branch has received from national office has allowed it to make a response to local planning that, as one county planner observed, is “disproportionate” to its membership base. There has been a fairly systematic involvement in reviews of county and district plans, with housing and green belt issues being particular foci of

attention. Engagement with local planning issues though has been sporadic, and involvement in environmental issues beyond planning and housing has been limited.

Amongst the professional planners, the CPRE is valued because of the informed and consistent perspective it brings to bear. In the words of one county planner, “they make an input, a recognised input, and it is taken into account”. CPRE staff and volunteers are seen to have a grasp of the policy context and planning process that no other local groups have: “they are authoritative on planning issues” was one comment. Much of this reflects the strong reputation of national CPRE, with the local staff and volunteers seen to be likewise well briefed and well informed.

In particular, what the professional planners seem to appreciate from the CPRE, compared with other interest groups, is consistency of response. But it has been the Regional Policy Officer who has given the CPRE this capacity in the North East *not* the local branch. For instance, in rolling out PPG 3 to planners across the county, the Northumberland Planning Forum invited the CPRE Regional Policy Officer to give a presentation, alongside a representative from the Government Office. The planners were keen to hear the CPRE’s perspective because “it is acknowledged that the CPRE has strong views on housing development and where it should go”. Scanning the summary of PPG 3 distributed by the Regional Officer at the meeting, the county planner who organised the event commented, “you have got to have a good grasp and understanding of national policy to write that, a very good grasp.”

The influence of CPRE in the planning process, therefore, depends on an appreciation by professional planners that it is well informed, has a distinct and coherent point of view, and has a well briefed and readily available representative in the region. In fact, the weakness of the CPRE’s local base helps to give it clarity at the regional level: there is not the need to reconcile the outlook of a lot of active members or branches or district groups. As one county



planner noted, discussing the strengths of the CPRE, “they are not so parochial ... they have more of a regional perspective”.

A corollary of this professional recognition is that CPRE’s involvement in local planning issues has been “erratic” according to one planning official, who noted that they “don’t tend to get terribly involved” in contesting planning applications. This, he felt, was because they had taken the decision to “concentrate their limited resources at the regional level on regional strategic matters rather than on individual applications”. As a result “they are certainly very, very selective in terms of dealing with particular cases”: they “pick and choose” the issues that will “raise their profile in the county”.

He noted that of the recent “big cases”, CPRE took “a keen interest” in the Great North Park proposal for housing development in the Green Belt. It was involved “from day one” because “it was seen nationally as being a very prominent scheme and an indication of where the Government was going”. As the Branch Development Officer explained, the CPRE’s national office and the Northumberland branch agreed that this was “an opportunity to mount a big CPRE campaign up here”. The Great North Park issue was seen as illustrating the challenges to green belt policy and the urban renaissance theme. It was characterised by the Branch Development Officer as “a test case for John Prescott’s commitment to urban renewal and land take... It encapsulated a load of things. From an issues point of view, it was an easy campaign”. Another, associated reason for running a strong campaign stemmed from organisational considerations: it provided an opportunity to establish an urban group based in Newcastle (this is now the CPRE North Tyneside group). This campaign drew heavily on the support of national office and the Regional Policy Officer as well as a band of local volunteers, mobilised by the local threat.

However, the CPRE’s involvement in the Great North Park case was exceptional. It has been much less active in what is perhaps the most significant planning issue to have arisen recently in

Northumberland: the MoD's proposal to develop a series of new gun spurs and to widen and develop roads and buildings in order to accommodate new training requirements within the Northumberland National Park. In this case, CPRE did not take the lead, but lent its support to the campaign of opposition by the Council for National Parks.

A senior official in the Government Office for the North East pointed to a number of controversial cases which he considered to be equally as important, from a policy point of view, as the Great North Park proposal, but where the CPRE had not played a role. One example was 'Virtual Reality Valley', a development mooted for open countryside north of Newcastle comprising light industry, retailing and leisure facilities. It was particularly "embarrassing" where the Government Office had called in a planning application such as this, anticipating that "[the CPRE] would have been in there shouting and arguing their corner and appearing at the public enquiry - but they weren't." A lack of opposition, the Government Office official explained, can make for "a very one-sided public enquiry," with the Inspector having the task of trying to challenge the development proposal and its supporters "without anybody on the other side helping him". As well as this rather selective involvement in major planning cases, regional and county planners identified certain fields where they were surprised that the CPRE was not particularly active, including major road developments and minerals planning (a very important issue in Northumberland, given the scale of open-cast mining).

The CPRE's reputation in Northumberland does not therefore seem to extend significantly beyond the professional (especially planning) community. The Director of Northumberland Community Council, for example, commented that CPRE did not "figure in county politics". The Head of Economic Development at the County Council said he did not encounter CPRE, although he was aware that they existed within the county. A prominent councillor, and leading member of the Liberal Democrats, could not recall having to deal with CPRE in any of the positions he had occupied in the county, including membership of the Planning

Committee, Chair of the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, trustee of the Wildlife Trust, and Chair of the county NFU.

### *Summary*

In many respects, Northumberland is an unpropitious context for CPRE: the county is still dominated (in land use terms at least) by large estates and this land holding structure has ensured the continuation of quite traditional political structures. When allied to low levels of counterurbanisation, the result is a middle-class presence much lower than in either Hertfordshire or Devon. Thus, local development interests are confronted by less environmental concern. Moreover, what concern does exist is channelled through the NNS, an organisation that is seen as the legitimate voice of rural preservationism in the region. The fact that CPRE has been forced to work in competition with this group weakens its legitimacy still further. In short, following the break with the NNS, the CPRE has not been able to establish itself as part of the local political structure.

The weakness of the local branch means that CPRE comes to be associated with the national and regional offices. While this heightens its standing with policy professionals - who tend to agree that the representations coming out of these offices are of high quality (and do not see them contradicted by more parochial branch outputs) - it reinforces the perception that CPRE is an organisation rooted 'elsewhere'. This perception is, in turn, reinforced by the selective identification of key issues by the national and regional offices: these issues are thought to be of interest because they represent *national* campaigns and concerns rather than issues of pressing importance to people in the North East. In fact a number of key issues in the region appear to have been neglected by CPRE, reflecting its limited capacity 'on the ground'.

## Chapter 4

### **EXPLAINING LOCAL VARIABILITY: THE CPRE AND THE 'DIFFERENTIATED COUNTRYSIDE'**

In seeking to explain the geographical variability in CPRE's activities displayed by the three counties we return to the initial framework - our conceptualisation of the 'differentiated countryside'. In describing how given social groups predominate in some areas and not in others, Marsden et al. (1993) provide a typology of rural areas that distinguishes between the 'preserved', the 'contested', and the 'paternalistic' countrysides. These 'ideal types' seek to account for the differentiated development outcomes in rural areas by highlighting the relationship between social and political structures. In the 'preserved' countryside, as a consequence of long-standing counterurbanisation, the middle class is well-entrenched in the local population, and is able to channel anti-development attitudes into local politics via the planning system (Murdoch and Marsden, 1994). In the 'contested' countryside, family farmers and development interests continue to predominate but are increasingly opposed by 'incomers'. Thus, politics is often conflictual, with the various groups competing for political power (Lowe et al., 1998). In the 'paternalistic countryside' large landowners and large farmers dominate a more settled political scene. These groups decisively shape the development process and confront few challenges from incoming middle-class fractions (Newby et al., 1978).

When set in the context of counterurbanisation and a growing middle-class presence in the countryside, the three area types can be placed on a continuum extending from high counterurbanisation in the 'preserved' countryside to much lower levels of middle-class in-migration in the paternalistic countryside. Counterurbanisation also interacts with the socio-economic and political structures of the three areas in differing ways. Firstly, in the 'preserved' countryside the new rural middle-class might be expected to dominate social and political institutions. Local environmental policies might therefore be expected to conform to the aspirations

of the local middle-class formation. In particular, policy will reflect their perception of rural areas as places of residence and leisure rather than as places of work, employment and development. The term 'preserved' expresses the nature of this orientation but also indicates that the rural must be fought for in a context of development pressure (this pressure, of course, stems from counterurbanisation itself, as developers attempt to realise the considerable financial gains that stem from providing economic facilities in areas of high demand). Secondly, in the 'contested' countryside the impact of counterurbanisation will be uneven, with middle-class groups unable to consolidate their influence within a stable and dominant political formation. Alternative views of the countryside (i.e. a 'living', 'working', 'developed' countryside) will be asserted and may often come into conflict with those held by the new middle-class residents. Thirdly, in the 'paternalistic' countryside the counterurbanisers will remain a peripheral force and their sentiments will often be out of keeping with those of dominant groups (especially over the need for development). The continuum thus extends from a situation where policy operates to protect the countryside as an *environmental* space (i.e. a space that is valued according to an environmental rationale) to one where policy works to enable development of a *rural* space (i.e. a space that is valued according to a developmental rationale).

The three area types will be superimposed onto particular environmental conditions. In the first – the 'preserved' countryside – the rural environment will tend to be 'suburbanised' so that its value derives from its function as an 'escape route' within an economically buoyant regional context. In the contested countryside, more intrinsically valuable landscape features will be evident but these will be more strongly integrated into rural economy and society and therefore subject to differentiated value judgements by separate socio-economic groups. In the 'paternalistic' countryside, a multitude of intrinsically valuable environmental features are encompassed within a developmental rationale that sees little contradiction between the economic uses of the land and the ultimate safeguarding of environmental assets.

Our general hypothesis has been that CPRE is strongest where counterurbanisation is most pronounced and where the dominance of the counterurbanising middle class is most advanced. In other words, CPRE supports the ambition for a preserved, protected countryside, one where economic and developmental considerations are set firmly within a context of rural protectionism. It is to be expected, then, that CPRE will be strong and effective in Hertfordshire, that it will be engaged in an intense and difficult struggle with more embedded local interests in Devon, and that its influence will be much diminished in Northumberland. While at a general level our results clearly conform to this rather superficial characterisation, in what follows we examine the hypothesis in more detail and indicate its significance for the conduct of environmental politics in rural areas

#### **4.1 Local social structures and CPRE support**

In Hertfordshire the middle-class is well entrenched. We can therefore expect that perceptions of the countryside will be determined largely by the notion that this is an environment that should lie outside the main areas of economic activity in order for it to be maintained for residence and recreation. However, residence and recreation bring their own economic pressures; thus, the overriding political concern is that the countryside must be protected. For this reason the CPRE's core values have become incorporated into the dominant political culture of Hertfordshire and the organisation enjoys strong public support in the county.

Such support ensures that CPRE has an 'inside track' in local policy processes. Although the relationships between the CPRE and planners and councillors have sometimes been conflictual (notably over the accommodation of new housing), there is a perception amongst policy makers that CPRE has local legitimacy. According to one county planner:

*there is a natural inclination for people from rural areas and well-heeled market town areas to join forces with CPRE and say 'no more development'... there is a more natural affiliation between those*

*voters and what CPRE is generally held to stand for, which is opposing change.*

According to a local ecologist, “the NIMBY syndrome is quite evident in Hertfordshire,” with members of CPRE “tend[ing] to be a bit self protectionist.” Such feelings appear to provide the basis of CPRE’s support in the county. The intense development pressures in Hertfordshire have meant, “people are wanting to say ‘enough is enough’” as one officer of the CPRE branch put it.

In Northumberland the level of support for CPRE is also explained by the dominant social structure. Here the feeling prevails that CPRE is marginal, that is represents a view of the countryside that only makes sense in the ‘south’ (e.g. in the ‘preserved’ countryside areas). A development professional in the region who had previously worked in the Cotswolds said:

*where CPRE is stronger, it is a community of commuters... And there is a correlation between commuters and NIMBYs: ‘back to my darling village where nothing must change and we get very upset when cows actually crap down the road. It puts marks on our Porches’.*

In contrast he said, “Northumberland is not a county of commuters... and we have got a lot more countryside here”. In his view, the dominant perspective in Northumberland was of a ‘developmental’ countryside, a countryside in which economic and social, rather than environmental, considerations prevailed.

In part, this perception prevails because development pressure is much less intense. A leading figure in the NNS explained this point in the following terms:

*There isn’t much of a new middle class in Northumberland. Okay, there is up in Tyndale and up towards Alnwick, but my part of rural Northumberland is essentially the big estates with the landowner and the tenant... because there is a high level of tenancy,*

*whether farmer, cottager or householder, there would be a certain risk in sticking one's neck above the parapet and saying 'this kind of development isn't welcome'. But also there is very little development going on.*

The prevailing view in Northumberland is that development is something to be welcomed not feared. Thus, the CPRE view is seen as inappropriate. One Northumberland County Councillor remarked:

*I would have thought that CPRE would be picking up on people, and this is probably a huge negative caricature, who have moved into an area because they love it. And because they love it, they therefore wish to be more involved than an indigenous person, whose response would more likely be 'what? do I live in a beautiful area? Nobody ever mentioned that to me before' (County Councillor).*

In this county CPRE is viewed as 'importing' protectionist views from the south of England into the north (in part, because its local branches are weak and its national image strong). These views are thought to sit uneasily in the prevailing political culture, which prioritises jobs and development. For instance, a policy officer for the Government Office for the North East claimed that:

*The vast majority of people [in the North East] actually want development X. There may be opposition from CPRE. But, by and large, CPRE are on their own, whereas if you are in the South East they are probably much more reflecting the general view and in tune with public opinion down there. Up here, you often get the situation where the local authorities, all the economic bodies, the regional development agency and everybody else are saying 'we want X'.*



A council official in North Tyneside responding to CPRE criticisms of greenfield land given over to business parks commented:

*The CPRE would have us go back to thatched cottages. We can't all have two acres and a cow. Jobs are a critical factor in the North East. The emphasis is on employment and that's not unreasonable (The Journal 20/9/99).*

In Devon the cleavage between CPRE and local development interests is also characterised as a matter of 'outsiders' or 'incomers' imposing their views on 'locals'. For example, one district councillor described the CPRE branch in Devon as primarily comprising "middle-class incomers" who are "more conservation minded" and "want to keep it [the countryside of the county] as it is." However, the situation here is more complex than in Northumberland: although there is some resilience in the established political structures, so that traditional interests retain significant political power (notably in north, mid and west Devon), there is an increasing preponderance of middle-class activists in the county. This makes it harder to portray the CPRE as an 'external' force as it appears to represent a growing segment of the population.

In Devon counterurbanisers move into the area and tend to hold views of that space that are conditioned by the uses they are making of the area. These uses may be economic, but are much more likely to be social and environmental. Thus, they will view the countryside as a social and environmental good, one that should be maintained. Such a view is frequently at odds with that held by 'locals'. For the latter, the countryside will tend to be a familiar, taken-for-granted reality, one that more easily accommodates most aspects of their lives (living *and* working) in ways that do not threaten its fundamental integrity (e.g. they do not perceive sharp environmental limits that must be observed). Yet, these characterisations do not capture the dynamic nature of the interactions between the groups. For instance, one activist in

Devon, reflecting on his first involvement in amenity politics, said that the campaign to oppose a large commercial development on the edge of the village in which he had recently retired “had a great effect in uniting the village bringing together newcomers and established residents”. He claimed a local farmer who farmed within the village had thanked him afterwards for all of his efforts. Moreover, local CPRE activists display a great deal of concern for ‘local’ issues such as farming, rural development, social housing and so on, as though they too want to reach over the divide between ‘incomers’ and ‘locals’.

The complicated nature of the situation in Devon indicates that we must be careful in how we interpret claims to ‘localness’, ‘representativeness’ and so on. The protagonists in political disputes around environment and development frequently attribute qualities to their opponents for good political reasons. Thus, councillors in Devon claim that CPRE is out of touch with local aspirations in order to justify taking partial decisions. CPRE members in Devon characterise the councillors and planners as “parochial” in order to justify their own continuing role in the policy process. Regional development officers in Northumberland characterise CPRE as a “southern” body which seeks to impose external views because it potentially complicates their implementation of development policies. All these claims are part of the ‘hurly burly’ of local politics.

For CPRE it is clearly important that it has an effective means of countering these attacks by having a clear and irrefutable presence in those local areas where it seeks to influence policy implementation. Moreover, it is important that this local presence does not just mimic the national line, nor that it simply reflects local aspirations. It must skilfully combine the two perspectives. Thus, local activists must be attuned to the characteristics of both the local social formations and the needs of the environment. They must be knowledgeable enough to tailor national initiatives to local circumstances. Moreover, they should have the ability to channel local views back up to the national level so policy making at that tier is conducted in the light of local requirements.

In Hertfordshire CPRE seems well enough embedded in the local social and political context to achieve this balance: it is impossible to argue that CPRE is an ‘external voice’. The same is becoming true in parts of Devon as middle-class incomers assert ‘protectionist’ aspirations. However, in other areas of the Devon countryside, CPRE is weakly represented and so cannot easily challenge prevailing views of the ‘local interest’. In these circumstances, CPRE must rely more heavily on ‘professional’ interpretations of policy as a counter to ‘parochial’ decision making. A similar situation prevails in Northumberland, but here it is almost impossible for the CPRE to claim local legitimacy. It is too easily characterised as an organisation that speaks mainly for the middle classes in the Home Counties. CPRE will only be able to counter this claim once it has consolidated itself as a local organisation, reflecting local views. ‘Local views’ cannot be exported from London.

This latter point was made explicit in the North East when it was argued that although policy officers from CPRE’s national office had intervened in local developments in the region, they will only do this if the issue is viewed as being of ‘national’ importance. For instance, a civil servant in Government Office for the North East claimed that CPRE national office saw the Great North Park case as “quite a prominent, important national case”; however, the *national* significance of the case is again tied to the South East as the official went on to say, this was

*a remote South East battle... to do with the principle of whether this is a government which is going to protect Hertfordshire or not. And the battle was actually fought locally in the North East!*

Thus, despite a few high profile local interventions, there remains a feeling that “the CPRE’s national office is very much more focused on the South and the South East”, as an official in DETR put it. Its weak presence means that it cannot easily gauge the significance of development and policy for the area itself.

Almost the contrary situation exists in Hertfordshire. Here branch volunteers welcomed the national campaigns run by the national office, which are seen to reflect local priorities. One volunteer emphasised that such campaigns have been of “enormous” help to the branch. She emphasised that the national office has provided “a great deal of support, help and motivation” on local planning issues. Another volunteer from Hertfordshire remarked on the favourable coincidence of a national campaign with the branch’s campaigning on a local green belt issue,

*At the same time as the west of Stevenage [issue] came up, the national office started to run a campaign on green belts and that was enormously beneficial to us... [and CPRE in] Newcastle and Hampshire. There was all sorts of places with green belt problems all at the same time... So, national office started up a campaign and we benefited enormously from that because we in turn had green belt troubles.*

There is a strong feeling in the Hertfordshire branch that the national office’s approach to rural policy and planning reflects the concerns of the members. Indeed, volunteers in Hertfordshire can see little distinction between national and local policy positions. One volunteer in Hampshire said: “when things happen in the South East, they happen elsewhere.” He explained:

*the South East is a particularly important, or perhaps the most important area, where many of these policies are tested. It is where many of the policies bite.*

#### **4.2 Thinking strategically at the local level**

Despite these differential perceptions of CPRE in the local areas, respondents in all the areas agreed that CPRE acts as a ‘responsible’ participant in policy processes. This was most notable in relation to planning. For instance, in Devon there was a widely held view that CPRE seeks to ‘professionalise’ planning in

the county. This professionalisation stems from the knitting together of national, county and district views on planning and it is put into practice mainly through the districts, notably through pressure on local planners and councillors to abide by the plan-led system. These local components of the Devon branch allow the organisation to closely follow policy implementation on the ground, but in ways that are sensitive to local circumstances. However, the effectiveness of this set up (in at least some areas of Devon) brings CPRE into conflict with councillors who, it is claimed, often act in rather 'unprofessional' or 'parochial' fashion (that is, they undervalue the local environment, or, in some instances, do not follow 'correct' procedures). Thus, CPRE members complain about the need to better train councillors in planning procedures and of the need to 'raise the calibre' of local politicians. They also bemoan the attitude of planners who too often follow 'political' rather 'professional' courses of action. At times, it seems as if CPRE members know more about official procedures and policy development than those paid to administer these things. Moreover, local CPRE members seek to tailor these policy procedures to local circumstances.

In Northumberland it is also accepted that CPRE provides thoughtful and insightful input into policy processes (despite the complaint that the organisation is made up of 'NIMBYs'), but the quality of the representations is deemed to come from the involvement of regional or headquarters staff, not the local participants. So, while CPRE is seen as having good access to central government thinking on particular policies and the way these should be implemented, it is deemed to be much less knowledgeable about local views, aspirations and needs. Its expertise is seen to lie in the formal policies and procedures rather than the local context of implementation. As a consequence, it cannot easily match policy to local economic, social and environmental circumstances.

In Hertfordshire, CPRE is also seen as a county-wide body, able to take a strategic view. Planners and other policy makers welcomed this aspect of its input and had clearly gone some way to giving it

local ‘insider’ status. The network of planning correspondents around the county enables it to closely monitor policy implementation. Likewise, its integration into an extensive network of amenity and environmental groups gives it broad coverage of issues beyond planning. However, at times the strategic and responsible character is thought to break down, notably when the ‘insider’ approach fails to yield the requisite policy. Then a more confrontational or oppositional campaigning approach is required (it is at this point that charges of ‘NIMBYism’ come into play). Hertfordshire CPRE thus follows a ‘twin-track’ approach by simultaneously utilising its ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ status. In this way it seeks to channel development into urban locations and to hold on to existing green space.

In all cases, then, CPRE is seen as an effective participant. While questions remain about its local legitimacy, the narrowness of aims, the local representativeness of the volunteers, and the structure of the participatory mechanisms, overall the organisation is seen to bring important considerations into the policy process. The most significant issue is the quality of its representations: in all three areas it was agreed, even by unsympathetic respondents, that CPRE invariably presents a well-argued case. Clearly, this quality stems from the interlocking of the national and local tiers. Where this interlocking is working well (which seems to be the case for Hertfordshire and parts of Devon), national concerns are closely allied to local considerations; where the interlocking is not fully achieved (Northumberland and other parts of Devon) national considerations are seen to prevail over those seen as local and particular.

### **4.3 Summary**

We have argued here that, in order to understand the geographical dispersion of the membership and the differential impact of CPRE on local policy processes, the organisation must be placed in particular economic, social, political and environmental contexts. We have proposed that political and social structures must be linked so that the impact of population change (i.e.

counterurbanisation) on rural areas can be assessed politically and that the effectiveness of CPRE is, in part, determined by the environmental quality of those areas it seeks to protect. Our three case study counties have enabled us to make these linkages and to assess the consequences for CPRE ‘on the ground’.

Within the Hertfordshire context, the legitimacy of the CPRE is clear and almost irrefutable (it simply cannot be characterised as an organisation made up of ‘incomers’ who are exporting ‘alien’ preservationist ideas into the area – counterurbanisation has gone too far for this to be a viable strategy). In this county, it is difficult to identify an indigenous population whose overriding concern is rural *development*; in fact, development is often something imposed by outside developers on unwilling locals. This means that the voice of the CPRE is almost taken for granted as the de facto voice of local residents and is expressed in a whole host of local policy arenas. Moreover, the professional (crudely put, ‘middle class’) character of the rural population ensures that volunteers come to the policy process equipped with skills needed to ensure effective representations are made. Hertfordshire seems to be a well-organised, well-supported branch that sits easily and well within the local political context. We can assume that it is effective in protecting local environmental assets in the face of acute development pressure. This development pressure will not go away however; the need for strong defences will remain.

In Northumberland almost the opposite situation prevails; because CPRE is so weakly developed at the branch level (a weakness that we suggest reflects the social composition of rural areas in the region as well as the troubled attempt to tie an existing and indigenous society – the NNS – into the CPRE structure), its views are seen as ‘external impositions’; they come from the ‘south’ and are seen as emblematic of a policy/planning agenda that simply lacks relevance in the North East. While this charge of ‘external imposition’ may be a caricature foisted on CPRE by its opponents and competitors in the region, it is not one the organisation finds it easy to refute as its legitimacy in the region comes from the standing of national office (its proximity to Government and its

support for the Regional Policy Officers). The weakness of the branch thus permits a perception to take hold that CPRE represents either a “southern” or a “national” view (on occasion these two perceptions are conflated), and that this view cannot easily accommodate the very particular economic, social and environmental requirements of the area.

In Devon, the situation is more complex: CPRE is strong in parts of the county and there is recognition that many local residents share its concerns. Here CPRE is seen as linking an understanding of formal (national) policy to a local sensitivity. However, in other areas the organisation is weak and it therefore runs up against established development interests that are still well represented in the local political structure. Moreover, such spatial variability means that these local development and political interests can still associate CPRE with ‘incomers’ and ‘non-local’ ways of doing things. But because CPRE’s middle-class support is clearly growing in the county as a whole, these charges are easier to refute in Devon than in Northumberland. Devon appears to be moving in the direction of Hertfordshire.

In general, a comparison of the three areas shows that CPRE’s influence is unevenly distributed. As indicated earlier, the organisation tends to become stronger as counterurbanisation advances; however, counterurbanisation coalesces with pre-existing conditions in a variety of ways so that a number of different local social and political formations become evident. We have reduced this variety to three here in order to capture the key characteristics of the main participatory contexts facing CPRE at the local level. The key (though hardly unexpected) finding is that CPRE represents the most ‘middle class’ areas of rural England. This not to say that it acts solely in defence of this class’s rural interests: rather, it is to argue that CPRE articulates its concerns and aspirations in ways that largely correspond to those of this particular social formation. As we have indicated above, these concerns and aspirations can be seen as broadly ‘environmental’: that is, they arise from a perception that the countryside as a space to be set apart from the crude economic rationale that determines



the development of other (urban?) spaces. The environmental rationale specifies that development must be in keeping with the existing environmental fabric of the countryside (development must be environmentally ‘sustainable’). As a consequence, CPRE finds it harder to represent those other perspectives that stem from a rural or developmental rationale in which the environmental fabric is to be tailored to the needs and demands made by a range of social groups, extending from the large landowners to the small working class communities. In many respects, the geographical spread of CPRE’s support reflects its status as an *environmental* rather than a *rural* organisation.

Moreover, counterurbanisation is most advanced in those areas where a ‘suburbanisation’ of the environment has taken place. Given the connection between counterurbanisation and support for CPRE, we can propose that the organisation is forced to focus upon countryside areas that reflect *social* rather than *environmental* characteristics. While these areas might be under intense development pressure (pressure that is, itself, linked to counterurbanisation) and therefore in need of strong protection, there is still a sense in which CPRE’s ‘gaze’ is being directed to those rural areas with the least amount of ‘rural nature’ in them. In itself, this may not be a problem if the broader rural environment is receiving its own form of protection. However, it is arguable that CPRE’s local concerns are also evident in its national concerns so that the requirements of rural Hertfordshire more easily find a reflection in national policy than the requirements of rural Northumberland. Again, this point returns us to the need for a better balance between the national and the local. In the next section we consider whether a better balance might emerge from a strengthened regional tier.

## **Chapter 5**

### **CPRE AND THE ‘REGIONALISATION’ OF ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY**

We have described in the previous section how the CPRE varies according to the local and regional context. We also described how the uneven development of CPRE at local level is reflected in differential relations between centre and branch. However, this situation is in a state of flux, in part because central office is continually attempting to strengthen its relationship with the branches and in part because the branches are continually seeking to enhance their effectiveness so that they might better align national priorities with local circumstances. Another aspect of this changing situation is the strengthening of the regional tier. A number of central office staff mentioned that they see this innovation as providing a means of reconciling some of the tensions between centre and branches and overcoming some of the weaknesses that stem from variable geographical coverage. They have made comments such as the regions “allow people to talk across boundaries”; “they permit much easier communication in the organisation as a whole”. The development of the regional tier also offers an opportunity to offset some of the weaknesses evident at the local level. In this section we wish to assess the impact of the regional tier and use material drawn from our three case study counties in order to consider whether this organisational innovation will reduce or exacerbate the geographical variability of CPRE. Thus we firstly consider how the regional tier is emerging in the four regions covering the counties – South East/Eastern, the South West, and the North East - before going on to consider the implications.

#### **5.1 Hertfordshire CPRE and the South East and Eastern regions**

Regional involvements have been particularly complicated for Hertfordshire as a county: it used to be part of the South East but

government has recently reallocated it to the East of England. In reconstructing the CPRE's regional organisation on the same basis as the Government Office regions, therefore, the Hertfordshire Society has likewise been reallocated from the CPRE's South East Regional Group (SERG) to the East of England Regional Group (EERG). The formal switch in the coverage of the regional Government Offices took place in 1999 but the consequent change in the regional planning boundaries did not happen until 2001: thus Hertfordshire was included in the draft Regional Planning Guidance for both the South East and East Anglia. There has therefore been a transitional period which has called for involvement in both regions.

This degree of regional involvement has not been easy to maintain, however, as Hertfordshire, like many branches in the South East, has regarded the regional tier with some suspicion<sup>45</sup>. A branch officer outlined the difficulties:

*None of the volunteers in Hertfordshire are interested in the regional agenda and so they haven't gone on to the regional committee with any great enthusiasm. We have been able to find somebody, but they have taken it on in a routine way, just to represent us. We could do with somebody really interested in regional affairs. But I don't think that such a person will exist.*

Yet, while the Hertfordshire Society has expressed some scepticism towards the regionalisation of CPRE (see for instance CPRE - Hertfordshire Society 1999), it has played its part in the new regional structures: it pays its contribution for the regional

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<sup>45</sup> This suspicion has been expressed in many branches through a reluctance to get involved in the regional group. As the former Regional Policy Officer for the South East Regional Group noted, "the South East branches have been reluctant to get together. They just haven't engaged particularly with the South East Regional Group". Another said that volunteers have come into the group with branch affiliation and continue to "think purely in terms of branches. They don't have a developing understanding of regional structures and they are also very strongly affiliated with the branches".

officer post, provides the administrative support for the Regional Group, and finds volunteers to attend regional meetings.

The most active member of the Hertfordshire Society at the regional level chaired the South East Regional Group (SERG) for three years and is now one of the “inner core” who make up the East of England Regional Group (EERG). He too admitted that “getting volunteers involved in the regional group has been difficult.... The regional level does not raise the same emotive sense as the county level and issues around the corner”. There are about 18 volunteers involved in EERG, including the core group of 6 who have a high level of commitment in ensuring the CPRE’s regional representation. This inner core includes some of the county chairs. The Hertfordshire representative divided the regional volunteers into those who have “a county affiliation” and those who operate “independently”. While the former are motivated by their concern to promote the interests of their counties, the latter (which includes the three volunteers brought in through the national recruitment campaign) are “primarily concerned with thinking strategically to reconcile regional needs”.

The Hertfordshire representative described the nascent regional organisation of environmental interests in the East of England, in which EERG is active. There is an East of England Environmental Forum comprising public agencies (such as English Nature, the Countryside Agency and the Broads Authority) as well as voluntary organisations (such as the RSPB, the Wildlife Trusts, the National Trust and the CPRE). This Forum represents the collective voice of the ‘environmental sector’ to a number of regional bodies, including the Government Office, the Regional Development Agency, the Regional Assembly, the Sustainability Roundtable and the Regional Cultural Forum. Most of these organisations in turn send observers to the meetings of the Environmental Forum. The Forum also has one of the ‘non-political’ seats on the Regional Assembly, for which there is one formal holder and an alternate, or ‘deputy’, who can sit in on debates and substitute for the formal holder. The Chairman of EERG, who is chairman of the CPRE’s Cambridgeshire Branch,

has this deputy position and is, in effect, able to represent the CPRE on the Regional Assembly.

As the Hertfordshire representative commented, the CPRE's small band of regional volunteers had been "extremely busy" getting the EERG organised and getting involved in the new regional consultative structures. EERG had acquired a distinct momentum and existence of its own. Like the SERG, it constitutes "a very definite layer" between national CPRE office and the county branches. However, the regional groups are "overstretched". There is a need for more active supporters, whether from the county branches or from external recruitment. One of the obstacles to this is the lack of interest in the regional group shown by the branches<sup>46</sup>.

The situation may be changing, however, as the regional groups begin to embed themselves in the organisational structure. The publication of Stephen Crow's Panel Report into the Draft RPG for the South East galvanised branch members' interest in the regional tier of policy-making in this region. Prior to the 'Crow Report', county branches in the South East had little interest or involvement in SERG. Indeed, many branches had formulated their own responses to the draft regional guidance. Once the scale of development faced by the counties in the South East became apparent, the interest of CPRE's branches in the regional group increased. This allowed the group to formulate a collective response to the Crow report, one that drew together the concerns of the county branches in the region. As a Regional Policy Officer noted, "The Crow report helped us enormously because it was the one thing that did bring the branches together, there was a lot of enthusiasm for the big fight.... I do believe that we are further ahead than we were before Crow". In other words, branch

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<sup>46</sup> Other branches in the South East have made a much more committed response to the emerging regional agenda. Kent branch seems to be taking a much more active part in regional planning which may stem from its identification in the RPG panel report as an Area for Plan-led Expansion and the feeling that, as one volunteer from the Kent branch noted: "Any development [should be] based on environmental capacity and not on the desire of other authorities in the region to use Ashford as a dustbin for their housing needs".

suspensions about the significance of regional policy have declined as the growing importance of the regional level has become apparent and as SERG has proved its capacity for effective action. At first the branches had what a Senior CPRE Policy Officer, recognised as a ‘healthy scepticism’ of regional policy, but are “turning around to see the relevance now.”

## **5.2 Devon CPRE and the South West region**

In the South West, there are tensions within the regional group over the definition of regional strategies that reflect the differing concerns of the county branches in the region. Such difficulty reflects the geographical size and ‘disparate’ character of the region. The South West regional group encompasses a diverse set of counties. The South West ‘super region’ was created through the amalgamation of the previous South West region, which comprised Cornwall, Devon, Somerset and Avon branches, with their neighbours further east - Gloucestershire, Dorset and Wiltshire. This brought together counties with very different growth trajectories and social and environmental needs: the west of the region is characterised by marginality and structural decline, whilst the east of the region has experienced high levels of growth and associated pressure on local landscapes and environments. This explains why the realignment of the South West region in accordance with the boundaries of the Government Office was not well received by the county branches that were brought together. “Nobody liked it,” as one volunteer recalled. Each branch has feared that the concerns of volunteers in other counties within the region will come to dominate the priorities of the regional group.

Yet, despite these reservations, the CPRE has come to be seen by some Government Office staff as active and influential. It made the biggest submission on the draft regional planning guidance and it was the only non-governmental organisation that was invited to every session of the Examination in Public. A planning official from the Government Office noted that, “amongst voluntary groups, [the CPRE] has had the most continuous involvement in the planning system [at the regional level].” However, the same

officer went on to say that the CPRE played only a limited part in the Environmental Sub Group of the Regional Planning Guidance. Whilst the RSPB, Wildlife Trusts, Friends of the Earth and the CLA had been well-represented on this group, the CPRE rarely took up its seat. This gave biodiversity a very prominent position within the draft RPG: according to an official for the Government Office, “it overshadows landscape and other traditional countryside issues.”

Branch loyalties in the South West have similarly hindered the effective operation of the regional group. Although the South West region has claimed to get 40 branch volunteers involved in regional work, “there aren’t people within the [South West] region who are thinking regionally,” according to the Regional Policy Officer, who noted that:

*They are thinking in terms of their branch and their branch needs, but they are using the regional group to lobby for those branch needs.*

For example, she recalled that at one group meeting the group discussed a possible campaign for quieter country lanes. However, she noted that this is not a regional issue, “it’s not a decision that you can influence at a regional level.”

Reflecting the relative importance of farming in Devon compared with other counties in England, the Devon branch has participated in regional consultation on agriculture and rural development. The branch has fed in to the South West Regional Group’s response to consultation on the regional chapter for the England Rural Development Plan, which was co-ordinated by the Regional Policy Officer. Through her efforts, they produced a paper with a local perspective, stressing the small family farm basis within Devon.

The biggest issue, however, has been the review of RPG, which began back in 1998. This confronted the regional group with a considerable challenge as it needed to find a way of bringing the diverse branches together to consider the rather artificial regional

context. In order to manage the workload four working parties were established: transport, housing, agriculture and forestry, and minerals and waste. Each county was represented on each working group. However, as one participant said, in practice it proved difficult to get seven people meeting regularly for each of the working groups so most of the work fell on the person who was chairing each one.

The main policy concern was, of course, new housing. Given CPRE's planning expertise, this was where most of its input was concentrated. According to a participant, CPRE got a sympathetic hearing during the review process and when we talked to him (just before the Inspector's report appeared) he was hopeful some headway had been made on this issue. He felt that they had "won some of the arguments at the South West Regional Planning Conference", notably on 'urban renaissance', which would have the effect of diminishing the need for migration-linked housing – "this of course would have a substantial impact for Devon". However, this perception of the group's impact may have been slightly misplaced as the Inspector's report called for 407,000 new homes to be built in the region between 1996 and 2016, 37,000 more than recommended by the South West Planning Conference (Devon was scheduled to take 4,300, slightly more than the 4,050 recommended by the Conference). The Panel concluded "we have no reason to think that the levels of housing we are proposing in our recommendations pose an undue threat to the Region's environmental assets". National CPRE disagreed with this statement and claimed: "Predict and provide planning lives on in the South West, threatening the countryside, undermining urban renewal and damaging the quality of life in the region" (Press Release 3/8/00).

### **5.3 Northumberland CPRE and the North East region**

According to one government official in the North East, "[the CPRE] do play quite a strong role regionally and are fairly prominent at the regional level." In fact, the CPRE has a longer history of involvement at the regional level in the north of England



than elsewhere, in part because the North East's Regional Policy Officer was the first appointed by the organisation. At the time, the national office was toying with the implications of regionalism and it wished "to gain a greater insight into how policy messages developed by staff in London may have a different resonance in different areas depending on particular regional conditions" (CPRE 1995 para 22). This first Policy Officer's geographical responsibility was the CPRE's then Northern Region, which included the North East, the North West and Yorkshire and Humberside.

After her departure, the regional structure was reorganised with national CPRE having taken the decision to establish a systematic, England-wide network of regional groups and policy officers on the same geographical basis as that of regional government offices. The CPRE's old Northern Regional office, in central Newcastle, was closed and a part-time regional policy officer for the North East was appointed.

His first task was to establish a North East regional group. Previously, there had been very limited formal liaison between the county branches. As the Regional Policy Officer noted, "The branches couldn't spare any volunteers because they were still forming themselves. So, we had to recruit directly through advertising". In doing so, they tried to attract "a different type of volunteer": "we were deliberately looking for people who were strategic thinkers", not necessarily with planning or rural expertise, but capable of pursuing CPRE's stance through regional policy processes. It was also important to get people with the skills to operate effectively at this level. Out of 12 responses, they recruited 10 people. The Officer described them as "mostly professional people who had had experience of policy development and committee working and consultation, but in other areas". Each was allocated a specialism, such as transport or agriculture. Over the next nine months, which the Policy Officer described as an "intense baptism of fire", a few dropped out leaving a core of six people. They, along with three or four people from the branches, constitute the new North East Regional Group (NERG). The

NERG did not therefore face the problem experienced in other regions of integrating volunteers and defining a common agenda because all the volunteers who first became involved in the regional group in the North East came from outside the CPRE's branch structure.

The main role of the regional group was to get involved in the various consultative processes and fora. The main activities of the NERG through 1999 and 2000 were: consultation on regional planning guidance; membership of the steering group for a DTI study on regional renewable energy; membership of the Regional Transport Forum advising on the preparation of a regional transport strategy; and membership of the consultative group advising MAFF on the regional implementation of the England Rural Development Plan. The Regional Policy Officer suggested that it had been relatively straightforward for the regional group to gain access to these fora:

*The structures are being created and then they are looking for us to fit into them... . The people who are setting up the structures... need an easy consultation network and we are meeting that need.*

This has been true of the consultative arrangements being put in place around the regional Government Office where civil servants have had to respond to Central Government's imperatives to make regional government more open and responsive. Regional CPRE has found a relatively easy entrée because, as the Policy Officer explained:

*our National Office has influenced a lot of the policies coming down... And [regional officials] are turning to CPRE and similar organisations saying 'can you explain to us what national government is on about?'*

Access has not been so straightforward to those regional structures that reflect indigenous political forces. For example, CPRE had not been involved in any of the consultative groups set up by the

regional development agency in order to implement the Regional Economic Strategy. Likewise, it had not been included in any of the sector groups set up to channel representation into the Regional Assembly, such as the Environment Sector Group and the Rural Contact Group. The Regional Policy Officer suggested that other voluntary organisations have also found themselves outside these sorts of structures, which are dominated by councillors, business and union representatives, and quango officials.

The influence of the regional CPRE thus varies between policy fields. A senior Government Office official referred to it as “the pre-eminent voluntary organisation on planning and development matters” in the North East. However, he doubted whether it was as effective a voice in the broader environmental and sustainable development fields, despite being consulted. He put this down to the CPRE “not having as clear a policy line or position on broader environmental issues as they do on planning and development control”<sup>47</sup>.

Referring to the CPRE’s involvement in the drafting of the Regional Planning Guidance, a planning official in the Government Office described the CPRE’s approach as “positive” and “intelligent”. The Regional Policy Officer had been a prominent and significant participant in the public examination of the draft RPG, and his approach was praised as being “quiet ... efficient, he hammered away”.

The Panel Report on the draft RPG was very much in line with the approach that the CPRE had pursued. It proposed that the annual rate of housing provision put forward by the Association of North East Councils in the draft guidance should be reduced by 9,000 to an average annual provision of 110,000 dwellings, that new

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<sup>47</sup> In fields other than planning, CPRE is not considered to be especially influential. Government Office officials identified Transport 2000 as more significant on transport issues, Friends of the Earth on renewables, and English Nature, the Countryside Agency and RSPB on conservation. At the root of this was a judgement that CPRE’s position was ambivalent: that there was a tension between its support for landscape protection and for sustainable development but that the former would probably prevail were there a conflict.

housing be concentrated in the conurbations, and that proposals for a number of greenfield developments should be dropped (GONE 2000). A senior Government official commented “the general philosophy of that report reflects government policy. But it reflects very strongly the CPRE’s position. I think they will be very happy with that report”. There is more than a hint here that the Government Office officials need the CPRE, in this case as a counterweight to the boosterism of the North East local authorities, each trying to grab a slice of housing allocations in a region whose population is actually declining. As a senior Government official explained “there are times when we have a very difficult balancing act here” particularly when seeking to counter a pro-development consensus, adding “there are occasions ... where it would be extremely helpful to us to have had a voice from the CPRE”.

In this context, NERG appears to have successfully consolidated its position. In a region with relatively weak participatory traditions, it has been able to exploit the need to be seen to be consultative on the part of the expanding regional government office structure. The other factors that have contributed to the success of this group are: the small size of the region; the clearer sense of regional identity in the North East; the weakness of the county branches (which allows the region to stand apart from local activists); and the undoubted abilities of key participants (notably Regional Policy Officers). Furthermore, the support that the regional group in the North East has provided to the branches in the region has generally been welcomed (rather than treated with suspicion). This has meant that the regional group has become seen as “a voice of support” on local issues of regional importance.

#### **5.4 Summary**

According to one policy officer we interviewed, the development of the regional groups has been “a very patchy and mixed picture”. In a context where some branches have demonstrated little interest in participating in the regional groups, and have expressed doubt about their utility and cost, CPRE has been forced to reconstitute

the groups as mixtures of paid officers, new regional volunteers, and traditional branch activists. It will clearly take some time for this new structure to evolve in a comprehensive manner. Until then relations between the regional groups and policy actors will vary considerably. Nevertheless, CPRE appears to have begun to replicate its 'insider status' at the regional level. This is demonstrated by the Countryside Agency's part-funding of the regional groups, the contribution of DETR officials to the training of the Regional Policy Officers, and their co-presenting with Government Offices the implications of PPG 3 to planning forums. One CPRE Regional Policy Officer proposed that, in sharing a commitment to regional planning and promoting its interpretation of government policy at the regional level, the CPRE has acted as "almost a covert branch of government." He noted:

*The formal structures [of local and regional government] are trying to address what is being required of them by national government. And they are turning to CPRE saying, 'can you explain to us what national government is on about?'*

Thus, the regional groups seem to be beginning to work well with the national office and this combination clearly gives CPRE greater strategic capacity. However, the relationships between regions and branches vary. In terms of our case study counties, the integration of region and branch seems best achieved in Devon (despite the artificial nature of this region) where leading members display little antipathy towards the regional tier and seem prepared to play a role in it. A ready appreciation of the integrated nature of policy, particularly within planning, but also in rural development, from the national level to the region to the county and district is evident. In Northumberland, because the branch is so weak, the regional tier is seen to have a much stronger link to the national level. While this clearly enhances the effectiveness of its inputs into regional policy processes (partly because the branches are not clouding the picture), it undermines the regional legitimacy of the organisation. In effect, national CPRE is pulled out into a region where CPRE-type values are least established. In Hertfordshire, the volunteers

seem so embedded in the local context that the region appears much less significant, although this is beginning to change in the wake of the Crow Report. Nevertheless, a problem remains that a strong branch, which feels it gets all the support it needs from central office, may continue to underestimate the significance of the regional tier, despite that tier's impact on the local context.

In the longer run it seems likely that the regional tier will further enhance the 'professional' approach of the volunteers. Those involved in regional policy processes will necessarily adopt the strategic view, while those involved in policy making and implementation at the lower tiers will soon begin to appreciate the significance of these broader policies. In the planning field especially, it seems likely that the gradual introduction of stronger regional policy will raise the sights of the leading activists higher up the policy hierarchy. As regionalisation takes place in other sectors, for instance agriculture and rural development, the same process may occur. However, the introduction of this tier further complicates already complex policy fields and this is likely to make participation a more daunting exercise. While the 'professional' volunteers may be able to cope with this, those who wish to be involved on a more casual basis may be put off by the ever more intricate policy arrangements that bear upon their local concerns.

## Chapter 6

### CONCLUSION

We began this report by questioning the growing 'professionalisation' of the environmental movement. We took note of recent work which suggests that as environmental groups become more professionalised so they become more hierarchical and closed. In other words, the more successful they are in developing their structures and modes of operation the more they act against processes of genuine participation. They become ultimately vested interests in the policy process and tend to work to norms of 'representative' rather than 'participatory' democracy.

Taking this starting point, we have conducted an investigation into the workings of the CPRE in order to consider how it, as an effective group which frequently works on the inside of policy making, manages the process of participation. We have examined the balance between professionals and volunteers in the participatory process. We firstly noted that, in line with most environmental groups, CPRE has strengthened its central headquarters and has professionalised a whole range of its activities. This process of professionalisation has extended down through the regional tier and into the branches. At the branch level where we would expect public participation to be most pronounced there is invariably a local elite dominating the participatory process. In important respects, then, CPRE conforms to the protest business model outlined by Jordan and Maloney (1997): there is an inner policy making 'core' surrounded by a 'mass' of inactive members.

However, the reliance on the local branches means that the 'protest business' characterisation cannot be carried too far: in a multitude of local areas, volunteers are tracking policy as it comes down through the tiers of government and are having a significant impact on the implementation of policy. In this fashion, the notion that CPRE policy making is confined to the inner core is a little misplaced: the 'core' consists of an extensive network of local

activists spread (albeit unevenly) throughout the country. Moreover, CPRE's own central policies are drawn up in ways that are sensitive to the views of members (CPRE continually monitors how well its central concerns match the concerns of the membership). Thus, CPRE refines and reflects the views of members and acts to channel these into policy processes at national, regional and local levels of government.

Yet, CPRE cannot be said to represent 'rural England' as our geographical analysis has showed. We began with the working hypothesis that the CPRE would be strong and effective where counterurbanisation was most advanced and where a rich reservoir of middle-class volunteers was located. In many ways, the research bears out this assumption. The CPRE seems strongest in Hertfordshire and in those parts of Devon where the population has changed most rapidly. On the flip side, CPRE is weak in Northumberland where this social formation is also relatively absent. This finding shows that while CPRE may be influential in terms of national and regional policy formation in the planning/environment sphere, its influence at the local level is very uneven. Moreover, if CPRE's policies reflect the aspirations of local members then they in turn may be skewed by the uneven distribution of membership. This raises the possibility that CPRE speaks most easily for that constituency (evident in Hertfordshire) that sees the countryside as an *environmental* space to be protected from economic activity (so that it can be used primarily for residential and recreational uses) rather than the constituency (clearly present in Devon and Northumberland) that views the countryside as a *rural* space, one that more easily combines development and environment<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> Thus, while CPRE, reflecting the aspirations of counterurbanisers and environmentalists, might now be an effective environmental organisation, the problems it faces in speaking for a range of social groups situated in a varied geographical locations mean that it may no longer be in the mainstream of *rural* organisations. Its focus on the 'preserved' countryside mean that it may be inhibited in talking for those more 'developmental' countrysides that can still be found across England.



It also indicates that the CPRE most strongly represents those areas where the reservoir of rural environmental resources is most diminished (where the countryside is at its most suburbanised), rather than those areas where there is still a rich and vibrant environmental legacy derived from pastoral agriculture (Devon) or where there is an extensive more rugged landscape associated with the large estates and environmental designations (Northumberland). Thus, the breadth of CPRE's environmental vision for the countryside may be restricted by its focus upon the needs of the 'preserved' countryside.

We have speculated here that differentiation at the local level undermines the ability of CPRE at the national level to develop policies that fit well with the diverse range of rural environmental circumstances found 'on the ground'. This situation may be ameliorated by the introduction of stronger regional groups. The regional tier may allow CPRE to gain greater influence in areas where its branch structure is weak. Thus, the regional tier may serve to overcome the problem of geographical variability at the local level and may allow a broader range of local circumstances to find representation within the organisation. However, the regional tier may also serve to perpetuate the existing discrepancies. As we saw in Northumberland, the regional group can serve to give national CPRE (as a 'carrier' of national policy) a stronger voice in the region. But this voice may still not be able to 'speak for' a local social or environmental constituency. Thus, the regional groups may simply permit the easier implementation of national policies, reflecting national priorities, in those regions where CPRE is weak at the local level.

While the findings conform to the differentiated countryside/counterurbanisation hypothesis, the study has also thrown up some complicating factors and we briefly summarise these in conclusion.

1. Despite the strength of CPRE in Hertfordshire, this is not a NIMBYist organisation (the most widely quoted caricature of CPRE). We found many instances of CPRE volunteers trying

to get the ordinary members to raise their sights above the local level in order to think ‘strategically’. In fact, local planners and other policy makers found this the most refreshing aspect of CPRE’s participation; as a planner in Devon said, CPRE can be very helpful in “promoting public understanding of planning”. Only when the chips were down, when CPRE’s core values – which after all concern ‘protection’ – were threatened did something resembling NIMBYism rise to the surface. It is arguable, however, that by the time this occurred there was usually little option but to take a categorical stand against development. Yet, for most of the time, the local branch’s efforts are directed at sticking to a responsible and strategic line of thinking precisely to avoid any lapse into NIMBYism. NIMBYism was thus seen, in part, as the failure of strategy and something to be avoided.

2. This leads on to the second point, which is that local volunteers take great pride in the quality of their inputs into the policy process. The relationship with national office (and no doubt in the future with the regions) is seen as important in ensuring that any involvement is correctly judged and well presented. For many, the ‘professional’ ethos is what makes the CPRE an organisation they are proud to be involved in. In this instance, ‘professionalisation’ is something that enables *better* participation (rather than leading to a discouragement of particular aspirations). Clearly, this applies to very particular types of activists, those that wish to get more and more involved in policy. One leading member said:

*When I talk to people in the local village, they are agonised about the things that are happening in the village...[But] if you start to talk in the parish council about the County Structure Plan, everybody falls asleep. It is too remote. But people like us, you know, you start being motivated by the local issue and then you find that’s quite an interesting subject. I suppose one’s own academic or industrial experience, or whatever it is, makes you realise that this is quite an*

*interesting subject. So, you get into the more esoteric bits, which is to do with structure plans and then you get into regional plans, and you get into planning policy guidance. And then you get into European Spatial Strategy. It's all got interest in it for those who want to exercise their minds.*

3. Thirdly, while the CPRE provides an environment that encourages participation and gives participants the resources they need to work effectively in policy processes, the degree of professionalism required means that participation necessarily becomes self-selecting. It requires volunteers who are able to take the 'wider view' and see beyond their own particular local interests. Ironically, however, this aspect of participation opens CPRE up to the charge of NIMBYism! We have pointed extensively here to the link between CPRE action and the middle classes in the countryside (especially those members who are well-educated, have professional or managerial backgrounds, and are civic minded). The other side of this link is that CPRE is not seen to be well represented amongst other social groups. This makes the organisation vulnerable to the charge that it merely reflects middle-class property values in the countryside. While it has tried to counter this claim by developing policies on a whole range of issues that are of importance to differing rural dwellers, the narrow range of active members displays the weakness.
4. Despite this problem our final point is that CPRE works in the main to enhance participatory opportunities especially at regional and central levels of government. However, efforts to extend participation further (especially in the light of the preceding points) should pay more heed to geographical diversity. Different areas have different requirements. These geographical variations are hard to discern from the centre. Yet, arguably, as the CPRE has centralised so it has a greater need to understand its spatially uneven character. There is now a requirement to understand the differing combinations of the national and the local that can be seen around the country (we

have displayed only three of these and the most significant characteristics) in order to assess how they can be better integrated to the organisation's advantage. Clearly, with the introduction of an enhanced regional tier, there is a need to understand further the differing trajectories of regional development and the impact these will have on patterns of geographical differentiation.

To sum up, the CPRE provides a structured context for participation and feeds the preservationist concerns of rural residents into policy processes at national, regional, and local levels. However, CPRE does not just crudely 'reflect' these preservationist aspirations; national office sets them within a professional policy discourse and then seeks to ensure that this discourse flows through the organisation to the local level. Thus, local CPRE representations can be seen as mixtures of the local and the national: where CPRE is working well these two scales should blend together in a balanced way.

CPRE does, however, reflect the geographical spread of its membership. As we have seen, this membership is mainly concentrated in the south of England, and is mainly active in the 'suburbanised' countryside, where the protection of a residential or recreational space is the primary aim. The concerns of the organisation as a whole therefore tend to mirror the concerns of this regional social formation. Yet there are other CPREs: there is the CPRE of the 'contested' countryside, which seeks to assert preservationist values in a developmental context; there is the CPRE of the 'paternalistic' countryside, which attempts to gain a foothold in areas where deference to traditional elites remains entrenched. These latter two CPRE types work in a more 'rural' context, where the values of preservationism need to be sensitively asserted in the face of traditional views that rural areas are working (i.e. employment) areas. As we have shown, the assertion of preservationist values in such areas of the countryside is an aspect of CPRE activity that needs further development so that its national character more easily reflects the characteristics of these other countryside types. If CPRE can begin to more readily reflect these

other countrysides, it might then claim to be a truly national organisation, one that gives local communities in all parts of the countryside a voice in national, regional, and local policy processes.

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