

CPRE – the campaign to protect England.

John Croxen

Following a career in local government as Planning solicitor for Devon County Council, dealing with structure plans and planning inquiries, the speaker returned to England after 5 years as Secretary General of the Hong Kong Law Society. He has been a trustee of the London branch of CPRE for 2 years and chairman for one year.

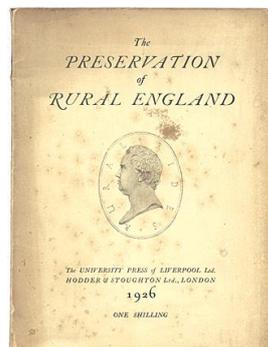
Originally formed as the Council for the preservation of rural England, CPRE was established in 1926 by a wide range of organisations concerned about the encroachment into the countryside of whole new towns in inappropriate places, such as Peacehaven in Sussex, the proliferation of advertisements alongside railways and roads and the development of roadside petrol stations with increasing use of motor vehicles. The organisations involved were:

- County Councils Association;
- National Federation of Women's Institutes;
- National Trust;
- Royal Automobile Company;
- Automobile Association;
- Garden Cities & Town Planning Association;
- Rural District Councils Association;
- Society for Checking Abuses of Public Advertising;
- Commons and Footpaths Preservation Society;
- Town Planning Institute;
- Royal Institute of British Architects; and
- Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings

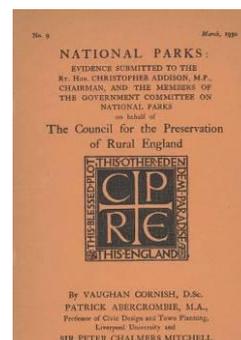
The leading light behind its establishment was Sir Patrick Abercrombie, whose major achievements include the founding on CPRE, the establishment of Green Belts and National Parks, the Town and Country Planning Act 1947 and the Greater London Plan of 1944. The original CPRE manifesto, written by Abercrombie in 1926, set the scene for the foundation of CPRE at the end of that year, with Abercrombie as its Honorary Secretary.

The new arguments presented by Abercrombie were:

- The preservation of an open belt of agricultural countryside around towns and cities – to prevent urban sprawl and provide food and recreation for the urban dwellers.
- The creation of National Parks to protect our finest landscapes for the benefit and enjoyment of the public.
- The extension of town planning rules to cover the countryside – to make sure that all new development in the countryside should be carefully planned and in harmony with its surroundings.



CPRE Manifesto (1926)

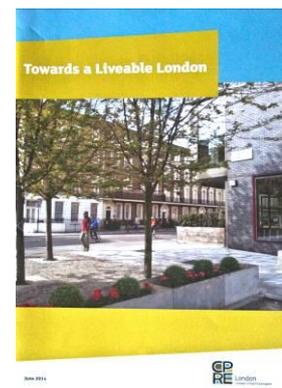
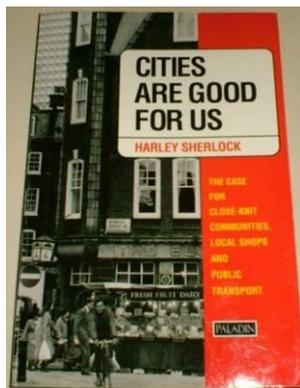


CPRE evidence on National Parks (1930)

In 1929, CPRE submitted evidence (published in 1930) to a Government Committee in support of National Parks. It took 22 years before the first National Parks (Snowdonia and the Lake District) were designated and the last, the South Downs in 2009, came just 80 years after being initially proposed.

The London Green Belt was the first to be designated and the concept has since been taken up by other cities such that Green Belts now cover 13% of the land area of Great Britain. The Green Belt was designed to prevent unrestricted sprawl of built-up areas, to prevent merging of towns and to safeguard the countryside from encroachment. To complement this approach, Harley Sherlock, Honorary President of CPRE for 10 years, suggested in his book *Cities are good for us* that:

“the close-knit city of the future could not only be the most stimulating place to live but also the means of preventing the surrounding countryside being swallowed up by an endless suburbia”



CPRE’s philosophy is that it is important to protect the countryside, which provides us with natural beauty, fresh air and peace and quiet, which is good for our physical and mental health. To do this we need to oppose inappropriate development but also to build our cities at such densities that can support local shops schools and jobs within walking or cycling distance and a good transport system, known as “Compact communities”. As long ago as 2001 the London Branch published a report entitled *Compact Sustainable Communities*. 5 years later it published the second edition and in June 2014 it published *Towards a Liveable London*. Its 5 key messages identify the need:

- to build more houses in London to meet projected population and household growth and a good proportion need to be affordable;
- to build to higher densities, particularly in the outer London boroughs;
- for better design, not only of houses, but of neighbourhoods and communities;
- for a diversity of housing supply with alternative housing models, e.g. self-build; more houses could be built by small and medium-sized builders; and
- to encourage more citizen involvement in the planning process with an emphasis on long-term management and place-keeping.

Nationally, CPRE has 60,000 members in county branches based on geographical counties. Its headquarters are in Southwark and it has 40-50 staff. CPRE London is probably the largest branch, with 2,000 members, 9 trustees, one paid staff (the Director) and another currently being recruited. The branch aims to protect London Green Belt, Metropolitan Open Land and campaign for a liveable London as well as to look after green spaces, especially within development in a city that has 1M commuters/day coming in to work.

In summary CPRE aims to:

- care for the countryside and green spaces;
- support good housing design in well-planned neighbourhoods;
- campaign for more affordable housing;

- help local groups to have a voice in planning;
- publish booklets on planning and campaigning;
- have websites: www.cpre.org.uk and www.cprelondon.org.uk;
- inform and support its 60,000 members and county branches.