



Campaign to Protect
Rural England
NORFOLK

NIGHT BLIGHT! IN NORFOLK

A PARISH AND TOWN COUNCIL SURVEY
INTO LIGHT POLLUTION

The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) 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.

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SUMMARY

In April 2003, Norfolk County Council adopted an Environmental Lighting Zones (ELZ) policy which set out guidelines for reducing light pollution from street lighting in rural and urban areas.

In November 2003, a survey was undertaken by CPRE Norfolk with the aim of assessing street lighting in rural areas in relation to the ELZ policy and of obtaining information about the range of lighting offenders in the countryside. A questionnaire was sent to every parish and town council in Norfolk and over one hundred responded. This report presents the results of this survey.

The results showed that many parish and town councils in Norfolk still choose to keep their villages unlit. In these villages, darkness was described as an intrinsic rural quality, contributing to the character of the countryside and the quality of rural life. In villages where street lighting was in evidence, this was typically from unshielded, low-pressure sodium lighting left on all night, rather than from lighting sources recommended in the ELZ policy.

Lighting offenders were widespread; with security lighting from residential and commercial properties being the most common source. Most parish and town councils that responded were concerned about light pollution in Norfolk and supported a campaign to protect Norfolk's dark skies.

CPRE Norfolk conclude that a co-ordinated and intelligent response is needed at all levels to prevent light pollution from increasing further and give a series of recommendations for further action.

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INTRODUCTION

Norfolk County Council's Environmental Lighting Zones Policy

In April 2003, following consultation with district and parish/town councils, Norfolk County Council adopted an Environmental Lighting Zones policy for reducing light pollution from street lighting installations.

The policy divided the land area of Norfolk into 3 lighting zones; rural dark landscapes; market town and existing well-lit villages; and urban areas and their suburbs. Most of the land area in the county was classified as a rural dark landscape. Recommendations for lighting in each of the areas were given.

The policy was adopted by Norfolk County Council and recommended to all Local Lighting Authorities across the county.

Campaigning About Light Pollution

CPRE Norfolk (the Norfolk Branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England) and the Norwich Astronomical Society have been campaigning about light pollution for many years.

Both organisations supported the adoption of the Environmental Zones Policy by Norfolk County Council and welcomed the classification of the land area into lighting zones. The policy guidelines for lighting rural dark landscapes were for full cut off lighting with a 'white' light source, a recommendation that both organisations supported.

Satellite Maps

In May 2003, CPRE launched the Night Blight! Campaign with striking images of light pollution taken from space. Data compiled from these satellite maps showed that in Norfolk, over a quarter of the land area has experienced significant increases in levels of light pollution between 1993 and 2000, and truly dark skies are now only visible in 12% of the county.

Lighting and Planning

CPRE Norfolk is contacted on a regular basis by individuals and parish councils concerned about excessive or obtrusive lighting in their local area. CPRE Norfolk support controls on all outdoor lighting and assess lighting specifications on planning applications throughout the county. Parish councils may also make recommendations for lighting in considering domestic and industrial planning applications in their area.

A Survey of Parish and Town Councils

In November 2003, CPRE Norfolk sent out a questionnaire on lighting and light pollution to all parish and town councils in Norfolk (540 councils). The aims of the survey were;

- to assess the level and types of street lighting in rural Norfolk;
- to remind parish councils of the recommendations in the County Council's Environmental Lighting Zones policy;
- to find out how parish and town councils are using the planning system to respond to lighting offenders in the countryside;
- to assess attitudes to lighting generally.

Over one hundred parish and town councils in Norfolk responded and this report presents the results of the survey.

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RESULTS

A specially designed questionnaire was sent out to every parish and town council in Norfolk (540) to assess street lighting in their parish, attitudes to lighting and concerns about light pollution in their area.

From the 102 responses that were received, the following results have been compiled.

A. STREET LIGHTING

1. Do you have street lighting in your parish/town?

Yes 40 No 62

The 40 parishes with street lights then answered the following five questions about their lights.

2. Are your street lights on all night or do they operate on a timing switch?

On all night 28 Timing switch 8 Unknown 4

3. What type of lamp is used?

Low Pressure Sodium 20 High Pressure Sodium 3

Tungsten 3 Mercury Halide 2

Mixture of above 5

Unknown 7

4. What type of fitment is used?

Shielded 12 Partly Shielded 2 Unshielded 18
Mixture of Above 2 Unknown 6

5. When are your street lights due to be replaced?

No fixed dates were given. Most parish and town councils said that either their street lights had been recently replaced or that they would simply replace them when the lights became worn out. One parish and town council were currently choosing new lights.

6. At replacement would you consider adopting the kind of lighting recommended for rural dark landscapes by Norfolk County Council (e.g. fully shielded low energy 'white' lights)?

Yes 32 Not responsible for replacement 2
No response given 6

The 62 parishes without street lights were then asked to comment about the darkness of their area.

7. If your village is unlit, what aspects of the dark landscape do you value?

Parish and town councils without street lighting highlighted the following areas that they valued: visibility of stars/night sky, encouragement to nocturnal wildlife (bats/owls), preservation of countryside character, enhancement to rural tranquillity and the improved feeling of safety.

B. OTHER LIGHTING

All parish and town councils were asked about lighting in the wider area and their consideration of lighting in responding to planning applications.

8. Are there any obtrusive lights in the local area that may contribute to light pollution or that can be seen at distances from your village?

Yes 68 No 34

Examples of obtrusive lighting:

Major road lighting; private residential security lighting; commercial and industrial security lighting; sky glow from nearby towns; floodlighting on golf ranges, football pitches and sports centres; lighting from local airbases; security lighting on prisons.

9. When considering planning applications, do you make recommendations to limit intrusive and excessive outdoor lighting?

Yes 32 No 64

No, but will do in future 6

10. Have your recommendations been taken up by the relevant planning authority?

Yes 17 No 6

Waiting to hear 2 No Comment 7

IN SUMMARY...

10. Do increasing levels of light pollution in Norfolk concern you?

Yes 90 No 3 No response 9

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FINDINGS

The results of this survey show that there are still a significant proportion of parishes and towns with no street lights. 61% of the responses we received were from parishes with no street lights. This shows that many villages and towns across the county are still unlit and that inhabitants value the rural dark landscape by choosing to keep their streets without lights.

These parish councils commented that they keep their streets unlit to enhance the rural character and tranquillity of their surroundings. It enables residents to see the wonder of the night sky, the stars and the moon. Some also were keen to encourage nocturnal wildlife such as bats and owls. This shows that in parishes without street lights across Norfolk, darkness is valued as an intrinsic rural quality contributing to the quality of life.

Where parishes are lit and within a rural dark landscape, Norfolk County Council's Environmental Lighting Zones policy recommends that fully shielded 'white' lights are used. Although most parishes with street lighting would consider adopting this kind of lighting, the survey showed that they currently do not light in this way. Parishes with street lighting are typically lit by unshielded, low-pressure sodium lights that are left on all night. Considerations of cost and safety were raised as factors that influenced decisions about lighting in rural areas.

Obtrusive and excessive lighting in local areas was widely reported across the county. 67% of parishes reported light that they feel contributes to light pollution. Apart from the encroaching glow of major roads and nearby towns, the major concern for parishes is

from security lighting on residential and business properties within the parish itself. Floodlighting is also a problem, being reported at golf driving ranges, sports centres and schools in different districts. The survey shows that the types of lighting offender are very varied, ranging from prisons and aircraft bases, to country clubs and farms.

Although lighting is not under planning control, our results show that nearly a third of parish councils make recommendations on lighting when considering planning applications. There were also many examples of district councils refusing a planning application where a parish council had raised objections on lighting. This shows that local authorities are listening to concerns over lighting and supporting parish councils when objections are raised. Several parishes, who had never made recommendations about lighting when considering planning applications, commented that they will now do so.

In summary, 89% of the parish and town councils were concerned about the increasing levels of light pollution in Norfolk and supported a campaign for the protection of dark skies.

Notes

An example of good planning authority control on lighting:

Brisley Parish Council recommended restrictions on lighting hours when considering an application for a riding stable. The district council restricted lighting hours of a floodlit arena in the stable grounds and residential properties were protected.

An example of a planning authority allowing obtrusive lighting:

Gimingham Parish Council questioned potential light spill and sky glow when considering an application for a golf driving range in Mundesley. There were further objections from residents in Mundesley but North Norfolk District Council approved the application. There are now “very large floodlights which are on most of the time”.

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CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Norfolk remains a largely rural county. The key factors which define its rural character deserve protection, including dark skies and dark landscapes. Satellite maps reveal that such areas are diminishing at an alarming rate.

The pioneering work of Norfolk County Council in defining and classifying areas of dark landscapes in Norfolk is to be applauded. CPRE Norfolk also recognise the enormous contribution made by those villages that continue to keep their streets unlit and support the right of people to choose to live without street lighting.

This positive choice of many parish and town councils to keep their streets unlit, confirms the importance of dark skies to rural communities in Norfolk and reinforces the case for tighter planning control to protect such areas from unwanted lighting.

Light Pollution in the Countryside

The proliferation of light polluters in the countryside, reported here by parish and town councils across Norfolk, is of real concern. Many parish and town councils already consider the implications of outdoor lighting on all planning proposals that come before them, but district councils also have an important role to play to protect the countryside from intrusive lighting. We urge all district councils to adopt planning guidance which covers lighting in the countryside, in line with the County Council's Environmental Lighting Zones policy.

Government Action

This survey gives further evidence of the widespread concern about light pollution and contributes to a body of evidence pressing central government for immediate action. It is essential that a co-ordinated and intelligent response is made in the coming years to ensure the dark skies of rural England are protected for future generations.

Lighting Choices

All forms of unshielded and poorly shielded light need to be replaced and the current trend towards shallow bowl lighting needs to be resisted. These forms of lighting are visible over great distances at night and adversely affect the character of the countryside. Full cut off lighting with a white light source is recommended for all outdoor lighting.

However, light pollution cannot be solved just by fitting full cut off shielded lights, important though this is. We need to use lights more intelligently and provide them only where necessary and to switch them on only when required. All lighting choices need to be made after the consideration of neighbouring properties, local communities, nearby roads, the character of the countryside and the darkness of the night sky.

In Conclusion...

CPRE Norfolk offers the following recommendations in an effort to limit and reduce levels of light pollution in Norfolk. We encourage other counties to take a similar approach.

Recommendations

- 1) The Environmental Lighting Zones policy of Norfolk County Council to be adopted by all parish councils, district councils and all County Council departments.
- 2) All unlit villages to continue to remain without street lighting.
- 3) Parishes with street lighting to continually review the relevance and usage of all lights.
- 4) Full cut off lighting with a white light source is to be used for all outdoor lighting. All light is to be directed and pointed below the horizontal and not to be visible beyond the area being lit.
- 5) The current presumption in favour of dusk to dawn lighting is to be questioned and movement sensors and time switches are to be used as alternatives.
- 6) All outdoor lighting, including security lighting and floodlighting, to be brought under planning control.
- 7) All district and town councils need Supplementary Planning Guidance to cover the issue of lighting in the countryside. All parish councils are to consider outdoor lighting on all planning applications that come before them.
- 8) Light pollution to be made a 'Statutory Nuisance' in line with noise pollution.
- 9) Central Government to implement effective planning controls to protect defined areas of dark landscape.
- 10) Every individual to think carefully about their use of outdoor lighting. We can all make a difference.

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QUOTES FROM PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS

“The parish council has always been keen to keep the village ‘rural’ – street lighting is felt to distract from this and give an urban feel” – Brisley Parish Council.

“I have lived in Gimingham all my life and yes, light pollution does concern me. You cannot stand anywhere in the dark, anymore. Towns folk come into villages and don’t like the dark, they are always on about having more street lights” - Gimingham Parish Council.

“Lighting is still required for safety issues. Key road junctions and signs should be lit. Pedestrian crossing signs on the A47 must be illuminated.”- Hockering Parish Council.

The financial problem of lighting properly: “lights were replaced at no cost to the council by AM Lighting. When the clerk enquired about more environmentally friendly lights he was quoted a cost of between £45 - £55 per lantern plus VAT. The council owns 35 lights and the annual parish council income is just £5000!”
- Unknown Parish Council.

“We would like to see the controls under Norfolk County Council’s Environmental Lighting Zones Policy extended further”
- Hempnall Parish Council.

“There needs to be a concerted effort, education and partnership between parish and town councils, district and county councils and the Highways” - Gateley, North Elmham and East Dereham Parish Councils.

CPRE Norfolk would like to thank all parish and town councils who responded to our survey questionnaire and/or have brought matters of light pollution to our attention. We would also like to thank the Norwich Astronomical Society for their involvement in the writing of this report.

For sample copies of the original questionnaire used in this study or for further copies of this report, please contact CPRE Norfolk.

