



# Light pollution blights the night



**U**NLESS you live in mid Wales or the Highlands, truly dark night skies are probably a thing of the past, says a new survey. The South-West has 20% of dark sky at night left, mainly over Exmoor and Dartmoor; Yorkshire and Humberside has only 11%, mainly on the Yorkshire Dales and Moors; the East is down to 5%, the East Midlands to 2% and the South-East, including London, to just 1%. The CPRE and the British Astronomical Association's Campaign for Dark Skies hopes it will highlight the need for businesses, councils and individuals to take more responsibility for light pollution. Frustrated survey participants described it as being 'out of control and a waste of public money', 'like having to inhale cigarette smoke' and 'socially unacceptable'. The CPRE's Emma Marrington comments: 'Light pollution is an unnecessary waste that detracts from the beauty of the night sky. The costs of not acting are clear: unnecessarily high energy bills for councils and, therefore, for local taxpayers, more carbon emissions, disrupted sleeping patterns, disturbance to wildlife, and a night sky bereft of the majesty of the

Milky Way.' John Matthews, a north Wiltshire farmer who is involved with CLA planning matters, adds: 'We get a great deal of light pollution on the skyline from Bath, Bristol and Swindon. Although we're assured rural crime is dwindling, it seems that the only financially viable answer for small businesses is security lights. People are aware of the problem, but the alternatives are beyond their means. In a similar way to the recent quiet days with no planes, if there was suddenly no light pollution, we'd really appreciate the night skies.'

Light pollution is affecting the property market, according to Philip Selway of The Buying Solution, a country-house buying agency. He reports: 'I was acting for a client in Worcestershire, who bought a beautiful Queen Anne house in a striking location. They stayed there for one night, and their first comment in the morning was that they wished they'd known about the "orange glow". As a result, we now include light pollution in our due-diligence reports (which already include noise, road, air and smell pollutions) and do a light survey for each property. The phenomenon of light pollution

is a real pity, and is becoming an important issue for our clients.'

Seven years ago, the Government promised to produce direction for local-council planners on creating policies to tackle the problem, but a draft for consultation has yet to be published. Campaign co-ordinator Bob Mizon says he hopes the survey will put pressure on the new Government: 'The only part of our environment with no protection in law is the night sky, unofficially but indisputably an area of outstanding natural beauty and a site of special scientific interest.' *Alice Cooke*

**The future is orange: artificially lit skies at Cliff Bay, Kent**

## The light that never goes out

- 83% of the 1,745 people surveyed say their view of the night sky is affected by light pollution
- 50% of those say their sleep is disrupted
- From 1993 to 2000, light pollution in England increased by 26% and light-saturated sky to 7%
- Councils spend a collective £532 million on street lighting each year, which can account for 5%–10% of a council's carbon emissions

## The main culprits

Roads  
Security lights  
Older street lighting

Sports grounds  
Supermarkets