

CPRE's 2026 – A Vision for the Countryside

'Living the vision': some case studies

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Contents

Living the vision: case studies

Urban regeneration - revitalising Midlands towns	2
Urban regeneration - Mile End Park: 'keep <i>on</i> the grass'	3
Low carbon communities	4
Children: engaging with nature – the outdoor classroom	5
High quality housing? Gun Wharf triggers Plymouth renaissance	6
Linking town and country: greening the urban fringe	7
Civic activism	8
Climate change campaigner	9
Sustainable farming – it all started with just one goat	10

Case study shorts

Sustainable tourism	11
Litter education	11
Cheshire's local food	12
Back to nature: Wild Ennerdale	12

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'Living the vision': some case studies

Urban regeneration - revitalising Midlands towns

Young professionals are leaving new office buildings. Nurses and teachers are heading back to their city centre flats overlooking the canal. Many pop into local food shops to get something for their dinner. It's a home time scene on the streets of the West Midlands town of Walsall in 2026. This isn't a particularly grand vision for how a city centre might look a few years from now. For Gerald Kells, CPRE West Midlands' regional policy officer, it's a happy picture of future development in the area where he's lived for more than 30 years.

A former transport campaigner, Gerald's always had an interest in protecting the environment. Since joining CPRE in 2001, he's campaigned passionately to bring life back to West Midlands' towns. He says the Black Country is one of the areas of the West Midlands where urban regeneration is the biggest challenge – 12,500 people leave the region's cities each year.

The solution to the problem, says Gerald, is to make urban areas into places that people really want to live in. That means the right mix of housing, available for all; an investment in policing, schools as well as parks and green areas. 'There are seeds of change,' says Gerald. 'Birmingham has been through a renaissance and the region has many more great assets to build upon.'

This is something Gerald and local campaigners have helped local regional planners to understand. Their research and lobbying in 2004 influenced the area's Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), an agreement which sets out how the region will develop over the next 20 years. The strategy calls for concentrating development in urban areas to stop sprawl, and for building three quarters of new housing on brownfield sites.

But Gerald is concerned that the Government's plans to build three million more houses by 2020 will mean this kind of urban regeneration takes a back seat. 'Drastically increasing the numbers of housing built in the region, particularly in the Shire areas, will mean the Black Country and places like Stoke-on-Trent and parts of Birmingham will continue to decline. Building more houses all over the countryside is not the solution.'

This is what CPRE West Midlands campaigners will convey through lobbying, research and awareness raising. Without such action, Gerald fears that the streets of West Midlands' towns like Walsall will be run down, deserted for most of the day and characterless. 'Rural areas will become commuter dormitories for the cities,' predicts Gerald. 'That's not the kind of economic or environmental future we'd like to see.'

Latest at: <http://www.cprewm.org.uk/WhatWeStandFor%2023.04.09.doc>

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'Living the vision': some case studies

Urban regeneration - Mile End Park: 'keep on the grass'

Mile End Park is unusual. It was conceived during the Second World War by civic architect and founder of CPRE, Patrick Abercrombie, as part of his *County of London Plan* (1943). Abercrombie's foresighted idea was that a network of urban green spaces would 'allow the town dweller to get from doorstep to open country through an easy flow of open space from garden to park, from park to parkway, from parkway to green wedge and from green wedge to Green Belt'.

The massive demand for development space in post war London meant that Abercrombie's aspiration never stood a chance. While some of Mile End Park survived, it remained unloved and unused until its resurrection by Millennium Commission funding in the mid 1990s. Since re-opening in 2002, the Park has been hailed as 'London's quietest yet best Millennium project, far from the fleshpots of the West End', and provides an oasis of green space for the residents of Tower Hamlets, one of the most deprived of London's boroughs.

One of the biggest achievements of the Park has been in successfully forging links with the local community and engaging with young people, while challenging perceptions of urban parks as dangerous places. Park rangers organise nature

walks, pond-dipping parties for children and an authorised graffiti wall. 'I want to see a more generic role for park rangers – as play-leaders, litter collectors, ecologists, walk leaders and gardeners,' says Michael Rowan, Park Director. 'We're not using them in the old-fashioned way of security, they're more like ambassadors for the park. I dispute the golden Victorian age of parks. You had signs saying "Keep off the grass". We should have signs saying "Get on the grass".'

Ninety acres and one of the most unusual bridges in the country form an invaluable open space through the heart of London's East End. The Park now also provides safe and attractive pedestrian and cycle routes, significantly contributing to pollution reduction where neighbouring roads are heavily congested. A terrace garden and a tranquil stretch of the Regents Canal add to the relaxation. As long time resident Sheila Lewis commented, 'This Park used to be scrappy, bleak and dangerous. The change is amazing and we always come here with the children. They like it very much, specially the fountain. If I didn't keep an eye on them, they would get in for a dip!'

More at: http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgs/451-500/461_parks_and_open_spaces/mile_end_park.aspx

CPRE's 2026 – A Vision for the Countryside

'Living the vision': some case studies

Low carbon communities

Nestled in the Peak District, thousands of miles from the Rocky Mountain Institute, the inhabitants of the Bradford River Valley which includes the village of Youlgrave are leading their own drive towards a local, sustainable energy system. With the catchphrase, 'It's about our local community taking control of its own future', the Sustainable Youlgrave group's intention since its first meeting in February 2006, has been to reduce the community's reliance on fossil fuels by exploiting five types of renewable energy – wind, water, sun, biomass and methane – on a local scale.

At the same time, the dozen or so people involved in leading Sustainable Youlgrave, like CPRE campaigner John Youatt, aim to provide an income stream to fund 'other non-profit-making activities, such as energy conservation and environmental education'. They also aim to improve the sustainability of the local economy and to increase the efficiency of water services. Tying all of these sustainability objectives together requires a pretty sharp holistic plan. Youlgrave's includes the use of a range of small-scale renewables which the villagers hope to exploit to be less dependent on the National Grid and provide clean, green energy for nearly 600 homes.

At first glance the picturesque Peak District area of 1,600 people, 573 homes and 30 livestock farms covered by Sustainable Youlgrave might seem an

unlikely candidate for a small-scale renewable power revolution. But such innovation appears to be endemic here: by the beginning of the industrial revolution Youlgrave had already worked out a way of piping spring water from the limestone hills above Bakewell to the local communities.

This latest mission to embrace renewable power has already seen a big push on energy conservation projects for local homes, whilst John Youatt is delighted the National Park Authority is funding the group's feasibility study into using animal waste from nearby farms to provide power from biogas. 'It's very encouraging that the National Park Authority has confidence in our ambitious plans and is prepared to back community-led green ventures. Anaerobic digestion plants are common in rural Germany and elsewhere in Europe, but in Britain, they're relatively scarce. We hope to prove renewable energy technology is not just feasible but appropriate in a National Park setting.'

At the same time it is running feasibility studies in small scale wind power and hydro-electric power generation. The next move will be for Youlgrave to establish its very own Community Green Energy Company and a community charity, so that if any profits are generated (rather literally), a percentage would be held in trust for the community.

More at: <http://www.cpre.org.uk/library/results/climate-change-and-energy>

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'Living the vision': some case studies

Children: engaging with nature – the outdoor classroom

In the middle of what was once Europe's largest social housing estates lies an oasis of calm. Mushroom Wood, Creature Zone and Deer Park are on the northern edge of Leigh Park in Havant, Hampshire. But they're not part of a National Park, nor a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. They're part of an outdoor classroom, named and used by children at Warren Park Primary School, situated in the most deprived ward in the south east of England.

Born and raised on the Warren Park housing estate, 37-year-old Lorraine Byng's sons, Luke and Lewey, love their outdoor classroom lessons. 'When we go camping in the New Forest they create sculptures out of leaves like they do in their outdoor classroom class,' says Lorraine.

Each of the school's 410 children dons their Wellingtons and mackintoshes for two and a half hours every two weeks to do nature-focused activities. Lorraine, a teaching assistant at the school, co-leads the outdoor classroom lessons.

'My parents always used to take me out on day trips to the countryside. My husband and I think it's important to do the same

with our boys,' she says. 'Many of the children here don't have gardens and the countryside is difficult to get to for most parents. There's no direct way to get there, few signposts and the nearest countryside is a bus or car ride away.' Lorraine has seen the impact of the lessons, begun three years ago, on the pupil's behaviour towards the natural world.

'There was a day when they'd step on a snail to hear it crunch or squash a rain beetle to see if it would rain,' she says. 'Now kids stop the whole class if they see a snail or beetle in front of them. They'll move it to the side and carry on walking. They've really taken on board that nature is on their doorstep.'

The outdoor classroom is a state of the art sustainable classroom with a wind turbine and solar panels. Lorraine, her two boys and the other school children are very excited. She thinks every school should use their grounds to educate children about conservation. 'I get upset when they say they're going to build this here and put a road in there. We should be allowed to have a certain green perimeter,' she says. 'It's important future generations care about the countryside too.'

More at: <http://www.warrenpark.hants.sch.uk/outdoors.html>

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'Living the vision': some case studies

High quality housing? Gun Wharf triggers Plymouth renaissance

'Urban regeneration and quality brownfield housing developments are already reinvigorating our cities,' stresses CPRE's Steve Whitbread. 'By tapping into the potential of derelict space in cities, like disused car-parks and industrial areas, we can create desirable higher-density communities. The Georgians and Victorians managed it with their squares and terraces, and modern architects are starting to match their creativity and ingenuity for quality design within small spaces.'

Plymouth's Gun Wharf development is a prime exemplar of the community led regeneration that Steve is advocating. A once run down post war estate is transformed. Residents played a full role in the design process, requesting that the design should eliminate the back-alleys and street corners that had encouraged

crime and anti-social behaviour, while incorporating traffic calming features to stop cars speeding.

The development manages to integrate a variety of housing types with mixed occupancy and overall, the development has been hugely successful in redefining the nature of the built environment in the local community.

As resident Jackie Blight explains: 'Before the regeneration, the crime was high and drugs became an issue. We had problems with cars being set alight and nobody wanted to live here. Now we're always getting crowds of people taking photographs and saying "what a lovely place it is". It makes you proud to live here; it is lovely and I'm happy here.'

See many more case studies of Urban Regeneration in our report:

Family housing – the power of concentration <http://www.cpre.org.uk/library/3515>

And at: <http://www.cpre.org.uk/campaigns/housing-and-urban-policy/housing-sprawl>

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'Living the vision': some case studies

Linking town and country: greening the urban fringe

Politicians and the public are becoming more interested in the future use of our Green Belts. Most Green Belt land is graded as farmland. In practice, some of this farmland may actually be lying idle or used for grazing horses. A small proportion (roughly 10%) of the Green Belt is covered by woodland or parkland. But Green Belts could do even more. If we protect them, improve their quality and quantity, make it easier for people to visit them and help farmers and landowners to maintain them, Green Belts will bring greater health, social, recreational and quality of life rewards.

Community Forests and a number of country parks have been established to make the countryside in Green Belts more attractive and easier to enjoy. Since 1991 Red Rose Forest, on Manchester's urban fringe, has been creating new areas of woodland, helping to improve existing green spaces and encouraging thousands of people every year to visit their local park, woodland, nature reserve or community garden – discovering the countryside that is right on their doorstep. Nigel Blandford is one of the woodland operation managers, 'This area is known as Clifton Green, over there is Prestwich

Forest Park, and over there is Clifton Country Park, it's possible to walk from one to the other and all the time feel like you are out in the countryside. Yet we're only a few miles from Manchester city centre. People need to know that there are wonderful environmental assets like this right on their doorstep.'

In another part of the Forest, volunteers like Peter Guy helped transform a disused colliery, planting 60,000 trees and creating new footpaths. 'It's just lovely to have something like this on your doorstep. Walking out among these trees just makes you feel better it lifts your spirits. It's nice to look at, it's pleasant, and it's peaceful. Of course, we've got the Lakes and the Peak District reasonably nearby, but each of them are over an hour's drive away.'

The openness of Green Belt land needs to be cherished permanently. That way, Green Belts will protect our countryside and help regenerate our cities – and they will be able to do even more for us. With confidence and fresh commitment to their permanence, we can work to make Green Belts play an even greater role in improving our quality of life.

More at: <http://www.cpre.org.uk/campaigns/planning/green-belts/what-cpre-is-doing>

And at: <http://www.redroseforest.co.uk/web/>

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'Living the vision': some case studies

Civic activism

Just three years ago, semi-retired accountant David Gate was a campaigning novice with no previous experience of fighting council planning applications. His civic activism began when he discovered Lancashire County Council's plans to build a link road – from northern Heysham to the M6 – right through his tranquil community in Morecambe. 'The Council tried to bulldoze the road through our community,' he says. 'We realised the plans were wrong on many counts and would create an eyesore.'

David, who has called Morecambe his home for 31 years, was roused into action. He formed and chaired Transport Solutions for Lancaster and Morecambe (TSLM), a residents' group comprising 50 locals. The group opposes the plans and calls for less environmentally damaging public transport solutions instead. The proposed route will run through the heart of the local community bringing noise and air pollution to the doorsteps of 1,000 homes.

'It's important to keep this area for people to enjoy recreational activities such as walking or using canal boats,' says David. 'Council staff have been unable to back up claims that it will bring in substantial regeneration or even cut long-term traffic congestion. What is worse, the road is to be built on Green Belt land, which Government policy is meant to protect.' The fight was on.

The inexperienced campaigners found assistance on CPRE's website. 'CPRE's publications were a very useful guide and its support on staging protests gave us confidence,' says David. So, David and fellow campaigners staged a protest march along the proposed route. And supported by the majority of the local press, the campaign's arguments helped to overturn Lancaster City Council's support for the road. Most importantly, the group mobilised locals to write 2,200 letters to persuade the Government to hold a public inquiry.

These achievements were backed up by the campaign's website where photos, press releases, news and simplified arguments helped to garner further support, including £27,000 in public donations for inquiry legal costs. But, in the summer of 2007, the inquiry ruled for the Council. 'I was devastated by the news. But it's not the final answer. We're hoping to reverse the decision,' says David. The campaign's emphasis has switched to lobbying the Department of Transport to request that it funds more public transport rather than the road.

'The Government should have the courage of its convictions and resist inappropriate development,' says David. 'Campaigners should keep sending letters and fighting. You never know what effect you can have.'

More: <http://heyshamm6link.info/>

CPRE's 2026 – A Vision for the Countryside

'Living the vision': some case studies

Climate change campaigner

'I'm an optimist at heart,' admits Sean Furey. It is perhaps a prerequisite to be an optimist when you're an environmental campaigner. That's because climate change is, as the media tells us daily, the biggest challenge facing the world today. But Sean, who has worked at CPRE Kent for the last three years, says we're raising climate change issues as early as we can.

'The problem with society is that we tend to only face threats or problems that we can see as being real and immediate,' says Sean, who worked for the Environment Agency for seven years. 'We're getting to the stage where everyone is experiencing the effects of climate change in their daily lives. The response will come – we just have to hope it is fast enough.'

It was with this in mind that Sean set about organising a climate change conference for CPRE members and supporters. The idea was to promote discussion about the impact that climate

change is already having on Kent; to explore how the county can best adapt to inevitable changes. 'Sea level rise is the biggest climate change problem for us,' Sean told delegates. 'Either we lose lots of land or our coast lines will have to be defended to an incredibly high standard. That will dramatically affect their character and habitat.'

'The event was extremely successful in showing us the route our campaign should follow,' says Sean. He will now concentrate on organising smaller meetings, focusing on key topics to decide how campaigners will go about influencing decision makers. He also hopes to organise a similar conference for local sixth formers. 'It isn't about going into a dark room and writing a report. We can communicate effectively as an organisation as many voices, not as one,' says Sean. 'It is up to us as individuals to put pressure on the Government to take its responsibilities more seriously.'

More at: <http://www.cpre.org.uk/library/results/climate-change-and-energy>

CPRE's 2026 – A Vision for the Countryside

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Sustainable farming – it all started with just one goat

Paula Wolton moved to the countryside with her husband in her early 20s, went shopping for a table and came home with a goat. It wasn't long before Paula had her own 35-acre organic small holding, from where she made cheese and produced milk.

Now, 32 years later, Paula owns and runs a small organic beef and sheep farm near Hatherleigh, West Devon. She farms 120 acres and has a pedigree herd of Devon Red Ruby cattle and a flock of registered Whiteface Dartmoor sheep.

Paula has run Locks Park Farm, more or less on her own, for 18 years alongside bringing up her four sons: Olly, Will, Joe and Benjamin. A graduate in art, the former London jewellery designer who has presented for BBC1's *Countryfile*, knows she isn't a 'typical farmer'. That's partly why in June 2007 she started a blog, supported by CPRE, all about the day to day life of running a farm. 'I wanted to open urban people's eyes to what the countryside is like,' says Paula.

'The Government really needs to put food and farming into education right from primary school. Children will then learn about where food comes from and about the environment. 'Hopefully, they'll grow to understand the value of quality food and

be prepared to pay the extra needed for farmers to earn a living wage.' The farms around Paula's are all family-run. They were badly hit by foot and mouth outbreaks, and the majority find it hard to make money.

'The industry is dominated by big, commercially-run farms, which are highly targeted businesses,' she says. 'To go into small-scale farming nowadays you need passion and innovation.' Paula would like Locks Park to become totally eco-friendly, creating all its own energy. She'd love to convert some of her barns into classrooms where farmers could be taught business, IT and marketing skills. In return, local farmers and craftspeople would teach practical countryside, rural and farming skills.

It is crucial farmers find such ways of adapting to change in their industry, says Paula. She says in the future, farmers might plant fields of trees for carbon storage and drought resistant crops. But ultimately, Paula says, farming depends upon all of us as consumers. 'Should people care about farming?' she asks. 'Should they care whether we continue to produce food in this country? Whether we carry on both exporting and importing lamb? I think it would be a travesty if they didn't.'

To read Paula's blog, visit: <http://locksparkfarm.wordpress.com/author/wolton/>

CPRE's 2026 – A Vision for the Countryside

'Living the vision': some case studies

Case study shorts...

Sustainable tourism

Friends of the Lake District are taking action to encourage visitors to enjoy the beautiful landscapes to the full while minimising their impact on the environment. They are sponsoring an award scheme that encourages the tourism industry to minimise its impact on the environment, support the local economy by buying local products and reducing car use and promote energy and water efficiency.

Campaigner Judith Moore believes Cumbria could be at the forefront of sustainable tourism. 'We have a county

full of beautiful places to see and enjoy, coupled with great local food and drink and some of the best walking and cycling, rail and bus journeys anywhere in Britain.

'We are really pleased to be working with Cumbria Tourism to find the best businesses who are not only giving their customers a fantastic experience and service, but also want to ensure that the environment is safeguarded at the same time.'

Litter education

CPRE and The Wiltshire Wildlife Trust have produced a new creative education pack for schools revealing how litter can easily hurt or even kill wildlife, and putting into sharp focus the wider damage litter has on our environment. In Wiltshire, Derry Hill Primary School's Eco-Committee – formed by pupils aged 4 to 11 – launched the pack this year with a presentation on the environmental work carried out at their school.

Younger pupils decorated the main hall with litter and other waste materials, while older children acted out a version of the litter pack's storybook wearing costumes made entirely from waste materials gathered from the local Scrap store. Other

children played musical instruments made from waste materials to accompany a song they have written about living in a more sustainable way.

Dr Jake Reynolds, Senior Sustainable Development Advisor for the Department for Children, Schools and Families, welcomed the initiative, saying: 'Schools have the potential to develop positive, sustainable habits among children that can last a lifetime, and be valuable from the day that they become habit. A litter-free school (and of course litter-free routes to school) is a good indicator of a school's commitment to caring for the environment.'

CPRE's 2026 – A Vision for the Countryside

'Living the vision': some case studies

Case study shorts...

Cheshire's local food

CPRE's *Mapping Local Food Webs* project aims to increase understanding of the benefits and ultimately demand for locally produced food.

Cheshire CPRE believes local foods form an important part of the local economy, supporting jobs and rural services, keeping our villages and towns vibrant, and helping the farmers who look after the countryside we love. Buying food produced close to home from nearby shops, restaurants and other businesses also cuts down on polluting and fuel-

hungry food miles, and means we eat food at its freshest and most nutritious.

As part of their campaign to support local food, rural shops and services, the Cheshire group championed the 'Buy Local' food awards. Winners include farm shops, market traders, high street shops, vegetable box schemes, supermarkets, cafes and restaurants that are making significant efforts to provide genuinely local food, offering top quality produce, great local service, and benefiting the community and the environment.

Back to nature: Wild Ennerdale

A few years ago the Lake District National Park Authority gave its blessing to a process that had been quietly under way for some time, called the 'wilding' of Ennerdale. Organisations like CPRE seized on the opportunity to support a growing interest in 'wild' places. While Ennerdale has been changed by centuries of human influence, for many people it retains a sense of wildness that is highly valued, particularly when the pressures of modern day living creates a demand upon remote and unpopulated landscapes for a spiritual and physical pick-me-up.

The 'Wild Ennerdale' project is a partnership between the three main landowners in the valley (Forestry Commission, National Trust and United

Utilities). In the context of this project the term 'wild' describes a philosophical approach to managing the valley, and describes the sense of wildness which people experience in the valley and the degree to which natural processes influence the environment.

Jack Ellerby is a long time campaigner for Friends of the Lake District, 'The raising of the reservoir and blanket forestations were battles we fought and lost in Ennerdale in the last 75 years. We are delighted there is now consensus to restore the wild beauty of the valley and to nurture our souls!'