

# SURREY VOICE

Magazine of the Surrey Campaign to Protect Rural England | Summer 2024



Defending local democracy  
Victory at the Supreme Court  
National Landscape set to grow  
Local Plans state-of-play



The countryside charity  
Surrey

Follow us on Twitter / X and Facebook  
Visit our website [www.cpresurrey.org.uk](http://www.cpresurrey.org.uk)  
Email: [info@cpresurrey.org.uk](mailto:info@cpresurrey.org.uk)



# FROM THE CPRE SURREY CHAIR

Welcome to the summer edition of *Surrey Voice*. A lot has changed since our last issue, not least since the General Election a few weeks ago.

Already the new government is pushing ahead with its changes to the planning system, and that includes making it easier to build on parts of the Green Belt. Over the coming weeks the government will be consulting on its revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), and CPRE will be providing input to this consultation once we have fully digested the proposed changes. Whilst we welcome the priority to build more genuinely affordable homes, and the prioritisation of brownfield development, we are worried that the wider definition of “grey belt” now being put forward could lead to a lot of Green Belt land being re-classified, especially in areas like Surrey.

In Surrey we have new constituencies and new MPs. We have some shared constituencies (Farnham & Bordon with Hampshire, and Windsor with Berkshire) and all but three of our MPs are new. There is plenty of work to be done in informing our new MPs of what we stand for at CPRE, and where we think the priorities of the new Government should lie. This is going to be a challenge for us as none of the Surrey MPs represent Labour, but one we should undertake all the same. CPRE’s National Office is lobbying the government hard for a National Land Use Strategy, that defines how we should split our land up for the many different uses we need. Agriculture, renewable energy (both solar panels and wind turbines), housing, transport, local and national infrastructure, industry... the list goes on. As a nation we should have a plan to use our precious limited resource of land and this must include space for countryside, for nature to thrive and for people to enjoy.

Here in Surrey, we have had some recent good news with the Supreme Court ruling against Surrey County Council over its



Surrey’s farmland is a great economic asset. (Photo: Andy Smith)

decision to allow oil drilling at Horse Hill near Horley without considering the long-term climate change effects of burning the oil extracted at this site. We are delighted to have as a contributor to this issue of *Surrey Voice*, and as a speaker at our forthcoming AGM at Denbies, none other than Sarah Finch who instigated that legal action on behalf of the Weald Action Group (supported by CPRE Surrey).

We are about to receive news of the latest round of consultations on the National Landscape boundary extensions. This has been delayed somewhat by the General Election, but we hope to have some news to share in the very near future. We are hoping to work with the Surrey Hills Society later in the year to help plant some hedgerows in the National Landscape. We need volunteers and donations to help us, so please get involved (see the article later in the magazine).

Finally, on the back page of this magazine there are details of our 2024 AGM which is being held at Denbies Wine Estate in Dorking on the morning of Friday 4 October. We hope you can join us then.

**John Goodridge, Surrey CPRE Chair**

Front Cover: Green Belt countryside near Leatherhead. (Photo: Andy Smith)

## SURREY VOICE

ISSN 2515-5105

Magazine of the Surrey Campaign to Protect Rural England

PO Box 865, Godalming, Surrey GU7 9LH

Tel: 01372 700205

Email: [info@cpresurrey.org.uk](mailto:info@cpresurrey.org.uk)

[www.cpresurrey.org.uk](http://www.cpresurrey.org.uk)

Twitter / X @CPRESurrey

EDITOR: Andy Smith FRHistS FCIJ

Designed by Jeremy Paxton  
(Tel: 01271 314455)

### CONTENTS

- 3 New President and Patron for CPRE
- 4 Defending local democracy
- 5 Postcards from the Future
- 6 Victory at the Supreme Court
- 7 District’s Climate Action Plan
- 8 National Landscape set to grow
- 9 Looking for Hedgerow Heroes

- 10 Council scheme ignores residents
- 11 Leaving a Legacy
- 12 Local Plans state-of-play
- 13 Council urged to block solar scheme
- 14 Surrey Nature Day
- 15 Book Review: *The Village News*
- 16 CPRE Surrey AGM

Surrey Campaign to Protect Rural England Limited, Registered Charity No. 1106245, Company Limited by Guarantee No. 04551761.

## NEWS...NEWS...NEWS...



### His Majesty King Charles III confirms Patronage of CPRE

The King has announced that he will succeed his late mother Queen Elizabeth II as Patron of CPRE. Welcoming the announcement from Buckingham Palace, the countryside charity’s Chief Executive, Roger Mortlock, said: “We are absolutely delighted and honoured that His Majesty King Charles III has been confirmed as the CPRE’s new Patron. In rapidly changing times, we are working as hard as ever across our networks of local groups to secure and promote positive progress for our countryside. With CPRE’s centenary approaching in 2026, His Majesty’s support will be hugely valued by trustees, staff, volunteers and our members.”

### New CPRE President is broadcaster Mary-Ann Ochota

CPRE has a new President – the anthropologist, author and broadcaster Mary-Ann Ochota. Mary-Ann’s passion for her subjects has engaged people all over the world with a deeper knowledge and love of landscapes, heritage and the natural world. She has presented factual programmes for the BBC, Channel 4 and *National Geographic*, including *Time Team*, *Mystic Britain* and *Ancient Impossible*.

Mary-Ann is a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, a member of Natural England’s Landscape Advisory Panel and a Patron of The Ridgeway National Trail. Her books on British archaeology include *Secret Britain: Unearthing Our Mysterious Past* and *Hidden Histories: A Spotter’s Guide to the British Landscape*, which was selected as a *New Statesman* Book of the



Year. She is a regular contributor to *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph*, *Countryfile* magazine, *Trail* and *Summit* and *The Great Outdoors*.

Mary-Ann Ochota made her first official appearance as CPRE President at the charity’s AGM, held at the Butchers’ Livery Hall in the City of London. She said afterwards: “What an honour to be elected President of CPRE, the countryside charity, at such a critical moment for our country and our planet. The countryside isn’t something ‘over there’ – green and pleasant, minding its own business. The majority of us live in urban and suburban areas but the countryside should still be our concern. Why? Because it’s the fabric that underpins everything important – energy, climate, housing, water, food, the economy and nature. The countryside needs to thrive for all our sakes.”

She added: “CPRE has unique authority and expertise in advocating for the countryside – for nature, for farming, for communities, for the people who visit and the people who live and work there. Their campaigns on things like the lack of rural affordable housing, planning, the Green Belt, hedgerows, and rooftop renewables have struck a chord with many of us. My day job is telling stories about our heritage, about science, about the landscape. I’ve seen that when people have a sense of ownership and belonging to a place or community, a sense of pride, it transforms everything. Wellbeing, physical and mental health, social cohesion. In this country we have such a depth of history and an astonishing range of habitats and landscapes. But many of those landscapes are under threat from climate change, catastrophic biodiversity loss, poor quality development, a lack of affordable and social housing and underinvestment in the right infrastructure. CPRE speaks to all these issues.”

### CPRE Surrey 100 Club

The Summer draw main prize for the 100 Club was for £263.25 and was won by Mr R M Whittaker. The runner up prize of £87.75 was won by Mrs A Simpson. Congratulations to both. There will be another draw in January next year. Half the subscriptions to the draw go back to the charity and half go to the prize pot, so please consider becoming a stakeholder. We would like to encourage you to buy as many stakes as possible (the price per stake remains at £12 per year). If we get 500 stakes, our target, then there will be one prize of £1,200 and one runner up prize of £300, drawn twice per year. If you want to join please e-mail me and we will keep you in touch with the size of the club, and of course the size of the prizes!

David Allen, Treasurer, [info@cpresurrey.org.uk](mailto:info@cpresurrey.org.uk)



# COMMENT:

## It is not “NIMBY” to want to protect our countryside

By Andy Smith

We applaud the new government for its commitment to providing the homes that the nation needs – but we hope Sir Keir Starmer will follow the example of his Labour predecessor Clement Attlee whose government (also elected with a huge majority) combined a national housebuilding programme with new measures to protect the countryside and the natural environment. There need be no contradiction between building what is needed and protecting what’s important.

Sadly, we still hear politicians merrily propagating the developer lobby’s myth that it is the planning system and “NIMBY” pressures that are to blame for the failure to build enough housing in this country. Local communities (and the MPs who stand up for them) are routinely dismissed as “blockers” for wanting to protect green spaces.

Politicians and pundits need to move beyond this name calling and start discussing housebuilding in a balanced and measured way. Otherwise, there is a danger that democracy will be forgotten in all this heat and smoke. When did people exercising their democratic rights become “NIMBY”? Surely it is entirely justifiable for local people, who know their areas best, to exercise their democratic right to have their say on what gets built in their locality and where it is built?

Local democracy has always been a crucial part of the land-use planning system in our nation, ever since “planning” was born with the Town and Country



The Green Belt is “the countryside next door” for millions of people. (Photo: Andy Smith)

Planning Act 1947. That bold and far-sighted piece of legislation was one of those new-fangled ideas introduced by Clement Attlee and the post-war Labour government. It ranks alongside another achievement of the Attlee government, the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 as key to protecting our countryside and stopping over-development.

Come on, Sir Keir, this is your chance to match Attlee’s ambition. CPRE research has shown that more than 1.2 million new homes could be built on previously developed (brownfield) land in England, so why are government ministers talking about needing to build on some of the Green Belt? Alongside the New Towns that Sir Keir has promised, and a reaffirmation of the commitment to ensuring that all

As of 4 July 2024, Surrey constituencies are represented by the following Members of Parliament:

**Dorking & Horley:**  
Chris Coghlan MP (Liberal Democrat)

**East Surrey:**  
Rt Hon Claire Coutinho MP (Conservative)

**Epsom & Ewell:**  
Helen Maguire MP (Liberal Democrat)

**Esher & Walton:**  
Monica Harding MP (Liberal Democrat)

**Farnham & Bordon:**  
Greg Stafford MP (Conservative)

**Godalming & Ash:**  
Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP (Conservative)

**Guildford:**  
Zoe Franklin MP (Liberal Democrat)

**Reigate:**  
Rebecca Paul MP (Conservative)

**Runnymede & Weybridge:**  
Dr Ben Spencer MP (Conservative)

**Spelthorne:**  
Lincoln Jopp MP (Conservative)

**Surrey Heath:**  
Al Pinkerton MP (Liberal Democrat)

**Woking:**  
Will Forster MP (Liberal Democrat)

In addition, part of the Borough of Runnymede falls within the Parliamentary constituency of Windsor in Berkshire which is represented by Conservative MP Jack Rankin.

CPRE Surrey Chairman John Goodridge has written to all of these MPs to congratulate them on their General Election victories and seeking to engage with them so that we can develop a constructive working relationship with all of our Parliamentary representatives.

new development is sustainable, a systematic effort to unleash the potential of the nation’s brownfield sites should provide enough land to give us the new homes that we need.

Unfortunately, the government does not seem to have grasped this opportunity. Instead, it proposes to re-classify certain Green Belt sites as “grey belt” so that they can be built on. And, under the new NPPF, it appears that “grey” will have a very wide definition indeed. Together with the reimposition of mandatory housing targets, this means added pressure on local councils to re-classify Green Belt sites as “grey” and earmark them for housing.

The Green Belt is the “countryside next door” for millions of people in England. Almost 75% of Surrey lies within the London Metropolitan Green Belt, making us one of the most “Green Belted” counties in England. Yet, this “protected” countryside is already being nibbled away by development, and Local Plans have seen Green Belt boundaries re-drawn so that land can be offered up for housebuilding.

Rather than weakening the Green Belt, the government should be expanding its statutory purposes, to recognise its role in public health and wellbeing,

biodiversity and nature recovery, flood prevention and climate change mitigation, and food security. These should be enshrined in law, and the New NPPF.

The new Prime Minister has said that his government will be “bold” in promoting economic growth. He has a chance to demonstrate this boldness in positive ways. He could set even more ambitious targets for genuinely affordable and social homes. He could ensure that these new homes are close to where people already live and work. He could change the definition of “affordable” so that it meets local needs. And he could ensure that new building is accompanied by stronger protections for our countryside and green spaces, so that everyone has the chance to experience the benefit of having accessible countryside on their doorstep.

Policies like this could make a measurable difference and help the nation meet its housing needs in a sustainable way. If the Prime Minister chooses the other path – that of reducing democratic rights within the planning system in order simply to speed up the granting of planning permissions – we will lose much of our countryside, and the only “growth” we will see is in the size of the profits made by speculative developers.

## “Postcards from the Future”

### What do you think the Surrey Hills should be like at the end of this century?

Whether you are an avid bird watcher, hiker, horse rider, cyclist, or a lover of scenic views, National Landscapes are at the heart of creating a thriving place for nature and people. This year marks the 75th anniversary of the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act which was the foundation for our protected landscapes. National Parks and National Landscapes (AONBs) can do so much to help us deal with the impacts of climate change and support nature recovery.

The Surrey Hills Board is seeking imaginative thoughts through a “Postcard from the Future” on what the Surrey Hills could be like 75 years from now, at the dawn of the Twenty-Second Century. Embark on a journey to the year 2100 and envisage the Surrey Hills as a thriving place for nature and people. Picture the landscape, feel the ambience, and let your creativity flow in describing the Surrey Hills as a

thriving landscape for the nation’s nature and people. Here are some ideas of to think of for your postcard:

- What does the landscape look and sound like?
- Reflect on what animals and plants are thriving in the landscape.
- Describe how people and nature coexist harmoniously.
- How do you access the Surrey Hills?
- Are there new ways to experience nature for people of all abilities and interests?
- How has the cultural and historic environment evolved?
- What do farms and rural businesses look like in 2100?
- Has technology played a role in enhancing the Surrey Hills?

You can submit your “Postcard from the Future” on the Surrey Hills National Landscape website [www.surreyhills.org.uk](http://www.surreyhills.org.uk) and become a part of shaping the next chapter for the Surrey Hills. Your ideas will help inspire the next Surrey Hills Management Plan, which is the blueprint for this cherished National Landscape for the next five years.





# SUPREME COURT VICTORY



## How the campaign against oil drilling at Horse Hill made legal history

By Sarah Finch

**A five-year legal fight over planned oil production at Horse Hill, near Horley – which CPRE Surrey has backed from the start – won a historic victory in June.**

The case, which I brought on behalf of the Weald Action Group, started out as a challenge to Surrey County Council's 2019 decision to grant planning permission for new oil wells and 20 years of oil production at the Horse Hill site, in Green Belt countryside near Horley.

I felt that this decision must be unlawful because the Council had failed to consider the greenhouse gas emissions that would result from burning the oil to be produced at Horse Hill. These emissions were an inevitable result of extracting the oil – and would inevitably affect the climate – so I felt they should have formed part of the Environmental Impact Assessment.

It quickly became apparent that the case highlighted a gaping hole in planning law around fossil fuel production. Emissions from the use of the fuel were increasingly being left out of Environmental Impact Assessments for fossil fuel projects. In fact the same thing had happened over plans for a new

coal mine in Cumbria, which Michael Gove approved in 2022, and new North Sea oil developments including the giant Rosebank oil and gas field in the North Sea, approved in 2023.

Assessing the environmental impact of fossil fuels without looking at what happens when you burn them makes about as much sense as assessing the health impacts of cigarettes without actually lighting them.

So although my request for a judicial review got knocked back in the lower courts several times, I was confident that this point was too important to drop and so I persisted with appeals. In the end, I was vindicated by a win at the UK's highest court, the Supreme Court.

### **Sending ripples through the UK fossil fuel industry**

The Supreme Court agreed that the environmental impact from burning fossil fuels must be considered when deciding on applications for new extraction projects. The planning permission for Horse Hill was quashed. Following the judgment, the government conceded that the permissions granted for the Cumbria coal mine, and for an onshore oil site in Lincolnshire, were also unlawful, and will no longer defend these decisions in court. I hope that further dominoes will fall, including Rosebank, which is subject to its own legal challenge. And internationally, this decision from the highest court in the UK is

likely to have significant persuasive value in other jurisdictions too. All thanks to a fight over an out-of-the-way site in the Surrey countryside.

### **CPRE Surrey's steadfast support**

I was lucky to have the backing and support of many local and some national organisations and individuals. CPRE Surrey was one of the first to get behind the case, with a donation towards the legal costs, and by informing supporters and potential donors about it, and keeping them updated as the case wound its way through the courts. CPRE Surrey had helped lay the groundwork for the case by submitting its own detailed and well researched objections to the plans back in 2019. The Norwood Hill Residents' Association and Salfords and Sidlow Parish Council were also supportive. Nationally, Friends of the Earth was a tower of strength and Greenpeace also got involved in the case at the Supreme Court stage.

So the victory belongs to us all. We have clarified an important area of law, and from now on, oil and gas companies can no longer pretend that downstream emissions are someone else's problem. We can all feel proud that we have played a part in making the future safer.

Read more about the judgment at:  
<https://www.wealdactiongroup.org.uk/2024/06/horse-hill-supreme-court-judgment>

Groundbreaking as it is, the Supreme Court judgment on Horse Hill doesn't have a direct impact on sites that are too small to meet the criteria for Environmental Impact Assessment.

There are several such sites in Surrey including Brockham (where oil production restarted this year after a lull, and where Angus Energy has ambitions to scale up production) and Dunsfold, where UK Oil & Gas Ltd (UKOG) – the same company as at Horse Hill – has planning permission for two oil and gas wells and three years of exploration work.

They have to start work at Dunsfold by 7 June 2025 (three years after the consent) to keep the permission alive and still have some conditions to discharge before they can start work. One of these is a permanent speed limit reduction at Pratts Corner, which requires public consultation under the Road Traffic Act. So time is not on their side.

The Weald Action Group will keep its eye on activities at these and other sites across the county.

The Weald Action Group is an umbrella for local groups campaigning against oil & gas extraction across the Weald and the Isle of Wight in the South East of England.

## Climate Action Plan

Mole Valley Council has approved a new Climate Action Plan which is designed to drive forward the Council's efforts in decarbonisation and includes a range of carbon-saving initiatives as well as an overview of initiatives for future years. The plan is built on seven key pillars:

- **Governance** – enhancing monitoring, reporting, and data collection processes.
- **Education & behaviour change** – investing in knowledge-sharing to drive sustainable transitions.
- **Buildings** – reducing emissions through energy efficiency improvements.
- **Energy** – maximising local low-carbon energy generation.
- **Waste** – promoting a circular economy to minimise waste.
- **Land Use** – exploring carbon sequestration opportunities.
- **Transport** – adapting transport systems to reduce car-dependency.

Key projects include decarbonisation of Council buildings through LED lighting, solar projects, and energy efficiency improvements; completing the roll-out of 90 Electric Vehicle Charging Points; community and business engagement such as supporting local businesses and communities with sustainability initiatives; implementing waste reduction initiatives and recycling; and localised energy generation and energy storage schemes.



Wildflowers at Mole Valley Council in Dorking  
(Photo: Andy Smith)



# Enlargement of the Surrey Hills National Landscape moves a step closer

By Andy Smith

The Surrey Hills National Landscape (AONB) could be set to grow by more than 25% following the long-awaited report of the boundary review by Natural England, the body responsible for conserving and enhancing the natural environment. The Surrey Hills AONB Boundary Variation Report was published on 24 July following analysis by Natural England of the results of the public consultation held last year.

CPRE Surrey welcomes the report’s proposed expansion of the National Landscape, particularly the recommendation to include within the protected landscape substantial areas of countryside around Limpsfield and the Woldingham Valley in Tandridge, and the additions of further sites in Guildford, Mole Valley and Waverley. However, we are disappointed that Natural England has not at this stage chosen to include Langley Vale, Banstead or Walton Heaths (Reigate & Banstead) or Eashing (Waverley).

CPRE Surrey has been actively involved in the boundary review process from the outset – and had indeed pushed for this review for more than

a decade. We also commissioned detailed studies of land around the AONB, including Areas of Great Landscape Value (a local Surrey designation) that we considered appropriate for inclusion.

The latest report from Natural England is a great step forward for us, and, while there are some disappointments, we are nonetheless grateful that Natural England has resolved to move this process forward and to extend the statutory protection of AONB status to so many new areas. We are still hopeful that yet more will be added between now and the final Variation Order being published next year.

The 2023 consultation by Natural England produced 1,518 responses, an overwhelming majority of which were supportive of the proposed extensions, and it was the evidence provided through this consultation process that became the basis for the review report and the recommended expansion of the National Landscape. CPRE Surrey provided its own submission to the review, as well as encouraging CPRE members to make individual submissions, which many did.

### What happens next?

This is not the final report, however, as several additional areas of countryside, including land in the far west of Surrey, stretching over the county

boundary into Hampshire, were identified during the 2023 consultation as possible candidates for inclusion in the National Landscape. So, a further, final, consultation will run from September to November this year. Details will be posted on the CPRE Surrey website and social media in due course.

Once that next exercise is complete, Natural England will prepare a Variation Order under the terms of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. It will then be up to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs to decide whether a public inquiry is necessary at this stage, or whether to simply confirm the Variation Order.

The complete Surrey Hills AONB Boundary Variation Report (together with supporting documentation) has been published on the Natural England website at <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/ne-landscape-heritage-and-geodiversity-team/surrey-hills-boundary-variation/>. For further information email [SurreyHillsAONBboundaryreview@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:SurreyHillsAONBboundaryreview@naturalengland.org.uk).

*Note: AONBs were recently rebranded as National Landscapes; however, when designating, Natural England still legally designates an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. If additional land is subsequently designated, it would then be branded as part of the Surrey Hills National Landscape.*

## We are looking for Hedgerow Heroes

By John Goodridge

CPRE Surrey is working with the Surrey Hills Society on a volunteering project this coming winter which will involve planting around 2km of hedgerows in the Surrey Hills – and we need your help. We are hoping to have a number of days working in the National Landscape during the winter months, planting trees on farms that need hedgerows. CPRE will provide all the necessary equipment and even some sustenance!

Since the Second World War, Britain has lost 50% of its hedgerows. The last government undertook in 2022 to increase the total length of hedgerows in the UK by 40% by 2050, and there is every indication that the new administration will continue this policy. CPRE had pioneered the campaign (“40 by 50”) and lobbied the government to secure this commitment. It was inspiring to see our work and campaigning have such a real effect. CPRE Surrey wants to help on the ground and that’s why we are aiming to recruit volunteers to help us this winter to help plant 2-2.5km of hedgerows in the Surrey Hills.

Hedgerows are a supercharged way of retaining our natural environment. They are homes for

*Planting and laying new hedgerows is a practical way to enhance the environment. (Photo: Andy Smith)*



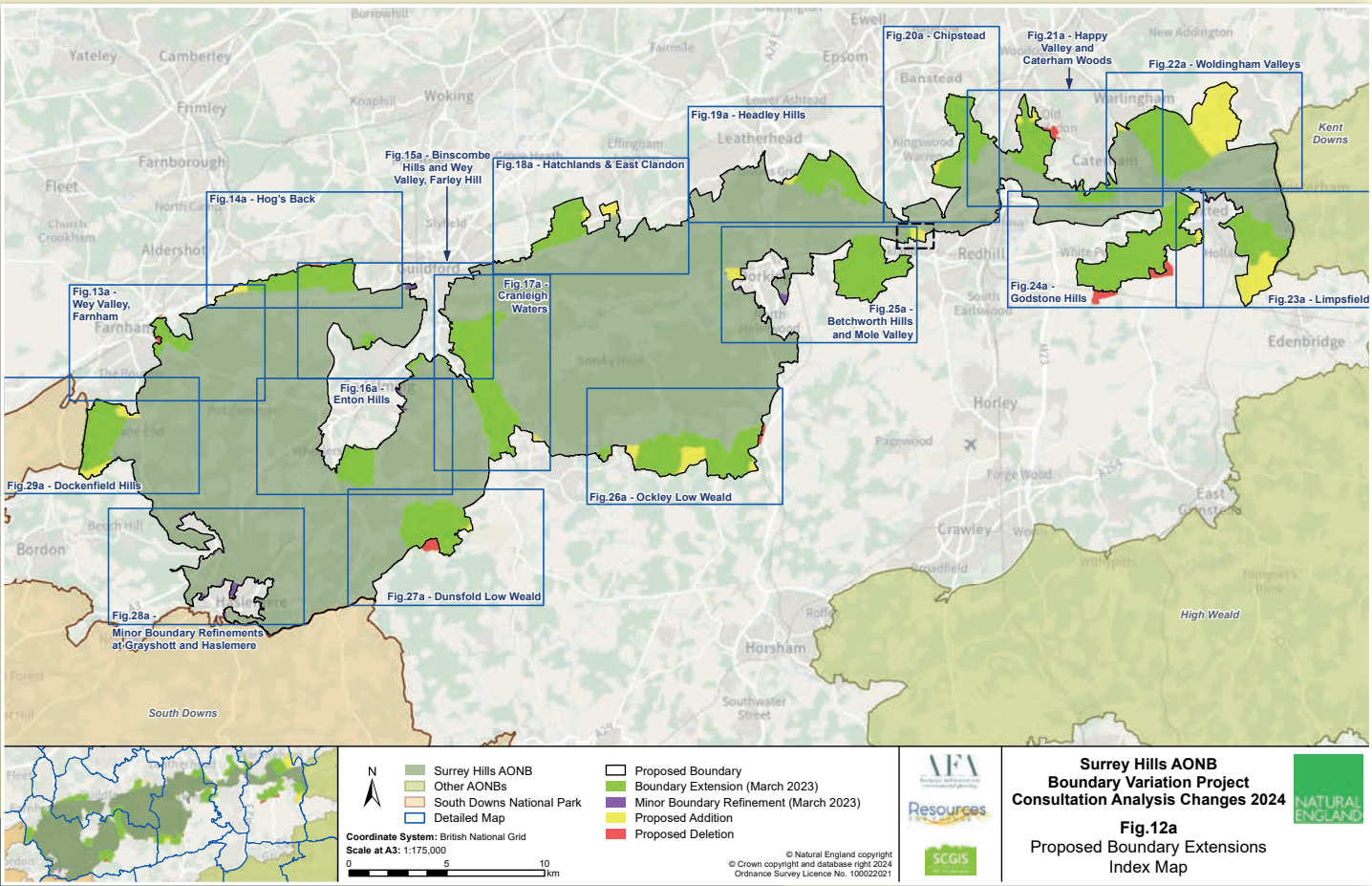
wildlife, providing shelter and sustenance. They protect the soil on our land from erosion due to wind and flood. They clean the air by pumping out oxygen and retaining climate-changing carbon. In short, they are a brilliant way for us to manage a thriving countryside.

A network of healthy hedgerows could help reverse our biodiversity crisis whilst also fighting climate change. The impact of increasing our hedgerows by 40% by 2050 cannot be underestimated. A September 2021 study by the Organic Research Centre, commissioned by CPRE, concluded that this work could result in over 25,000 new jobs over a 30-year period for hedgerow planting and maintenance. For every £1 invested in hedgerows, they calculated that the wider economy could grow by up to £3.92 when the right hedgerows are planted in the right places. So, they are good for nature, good for the climate, and good for our economy.

We have high hopes for our hedgerows project and while we are focused on the Surrey Hills National Landscape for this year’s project we hope to spread to other parts of Surrey in the coming years, planting more hedgerows and also hedge-laying, the traditional process that cuts down the height of older hedgerows to a more manageable level. (If left, a hedgerow will degrade as it becomes hollow at the base and provides little shelter for wildlife, maybe even collapsing as it becomes top heavy.) Hedge-laying allows blossom and berries to form, filling out the hedge to provide a stock proof barrier and a dense habitat for wildlife. It also encourages new growth that starts a new life cycle for the hedge. But that is down the track a bit...

This is a tangible way to boost the biodiversity of our county, whilst fighting climate change. If you are interested, or if you think a member of your family or friend might want to join our hedge-planting project, please contact us at [info@cpresurrey.org.uk](mailto:info@cpresurrey.org.uk).

John Goodridge is the Chair of CPRE Surrey





# DEVELOPMENT NEWS

## Council scheme ignores residents' opinions and scientific realities

By Nigel Rowe OBE

**The rising tide of residents' opinions and the increasing headwinds of basic science have dogged Spelthorne Borough Council's plans to pepper Staines with tower blocks of tiny flats to accommodate a 50 per cent population increase.**

Six local residents' associations – grouped together as the Riverside Residents (Staines) Coalition – joined up four years ago to fight plans for a massive Arora hotel and apartment development in the riverside Conservation Area by Staines bridge, the main gateway into the town. The partnership also turned its guns on the Council's plans to overdevelop the town with a campaign against *"High-rise hell for residents, High-rise heaven for developers"*. The Arora project was abandoned; but it re-emerged in May this year as a proposal for a smaller development albeit still out of scale and out of character with its context, and now known to be in one of the town's flood-risk "hot spots".

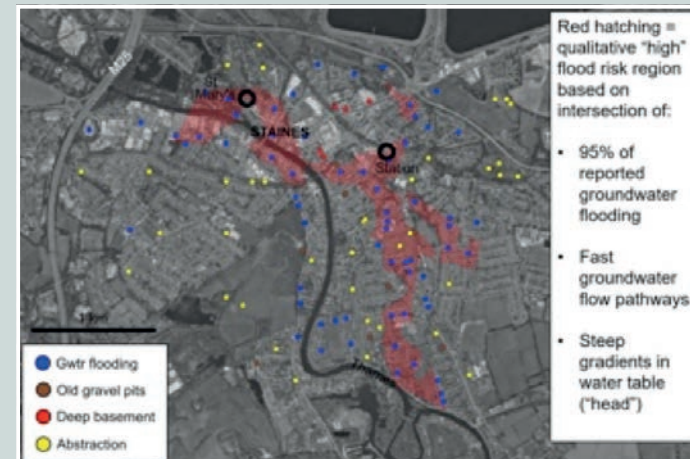
In 2022 the Environment Agency told Spelthorne Council that its draft Local Plan was "unsound" because

of flood risk in Staines; but the Council decided nevertheless to press ahead – with the Environment Agency still labelling the Plan unsound to this day.

In recent months, prospects have just got a good deal worse for riverfront development schemes and the Local Plan.

### Riverfront overdevelopment

The campaign against emerging Spelthorne Council proposals for developments on sites at and close to the riverfront led to claims from some in the Council that the Riverfront Residents Coalition was exaggerating the level of local community opposition. So, the Coalition sponsored an independent residents' survey. The results released at the end of May this year were conclusive: Nine out of ten residents say they "strongly agree" that Staines riverfront is a prized asset, currently under-valued as a leisure and recreational space for residents and visitors, and must be protected from overdevelopment by new buildings out of scale and character with the area. They believe new developments must not be approved if they would increase flood risk in the area, and that the community's views must be sought on any proposed major new developments before contracts are



*Illustration from Royal Holloway, University of London, research report on flood-risk in Staines. Source: Dr Jonathan Paul, Senior Lecturer in March Science.*

signed with developers. Fewer than three in a hundred disagree with any of these conclusions.

### Flood risk

Flood risk has been a massive issue for Staines residents, highlighted by flooding in the town at the beginning of the year. The Council has been trying to agree a mandatory Statement of Common Ground with the Environment Agency for at least a couple of years without success. The Agency's long-held view that Spelthorne's draft Local Plan is unsound because of flood risk has been given significant further impetus by a piece of major research from Royal Holloway, University of London. The findings were released at the beginning of June.

The river and surface water flows from heavy rain are well documented causes of flood-risk and flooding in Staines. However, until now, little has been known about the third cause: water flowing through the thin

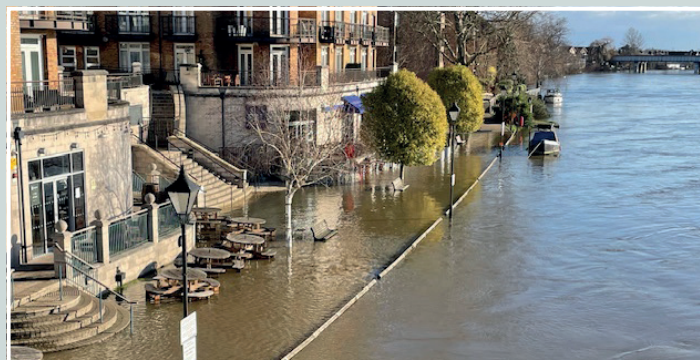
gravel substrate the town is built on. The Royal Holloway research reveals that this is a major contributor, as significant as flooding from the river. Furthermore, the River Thames Scheme (which the Council has been relying on to mitigate flooding in the town) will have no impact on reducing flood risk from ground water flows. The research also predicts that flood-risk is likely to increase and become more widespread in the future because of climate change, with the additional risk of further significant increase from basements and foundations of new developments having a damming effect on ground water flows.

The research has identified *"dramatic and localised fluctuations"* in the thickness of the gravel substrate and speed of water flows through it. Sixty-five flood sites across Staines were identified and reviewed in January. Flood-risk hot-spots stretch across the town (the areas marked in red on the map).

### Council's community obligations

The main sites earmarked for redevelopment are owned by the Council. The Coalition has taken the view that the Council therefore has an obligation to the community to set conditions and constraints on how they are developed, and that these must cover height, bulk, design, and not least that any new development must not increase flood risk in the area. Residents are placing great store in the Council's new administration's pledge to put residents at the heart of everything they do, with a promise of significant improvements in community communications and consultation. The Council is currently negotiating a contract with Arora Group. So, this will be a good test of whether the Council is listening.

**Nigel Rowe represents the Riverside Residents (Staines) Coalition**



*Images of flooding in Staines, January 2024. Source: Riverside Residents (Staines) Coalition.*



## Legacies

We are always surprised at the generosity of our members. Funds left to us in your Will enable us to continue our campaign to promote, protect and enhance the beautiful countryside we live in here in Surrey. Most of our work does not require much funding, just lots of volunteers and enthusiasm! But some of our work, especially when we object to bad development in the courts, can be very costly.

### Why gifts in Wills are so important

Your gift can ensure that the countryside is rich in nature, accessible for all and protected for the future. A future where hedgerows and peatlands are restored to tackle climate change and local communities get a say on what gets built where they live. A future where brownfield sites are recycled, valuable farmland is protected, and deep, dark skies are enjoyed by all.

### How to leave a gift in your Will

Legacy gifts to a charity like CPRE are inheritance tax free. Plus, if you leave more than 10% you can reduce the amount of tax you pay on your remaining taxable estate. If you would like to include CPRE in your Will, you can create or update your Will with any practicing solicitor. If you need to update your current Will, we suggest you contact your solicitor to ensure that the changes you make are legally binding.

When you are ready to make or update your Will and would like to leave a gift to CPRE, here is the essential information you will need for your solicitor:

- **Name:** Surrey Campaign to Protect Rural England
- **Address:** Campaign to Protect Rural England, PO Box 865, Godalming, Surrey, GU7 9LH
- **Charity Number:** 1106245.



# LOCAL PLANS IN SURREY

## The current state-of-play

By Keith Tothill

Since the last update in *Surrey Voice* earlier this year there has been significant progress in Elmbridge, Mole Valley and Spelthorne, and some movement in other districts. So, here is the state-of-play in the five districts that have a Local Plan at an advanced stage, together with some details of the others six.

**Elmbridge:** The Examination held by a Planning Inspector duly started on 27 February for a day. On 3 March the Inspector confirmed that the Examination could proceed to the next stage as she was satisfied that the Duty to Co-operate had been met. The Second Stage, which commenced on 25 April, contains the heart of the Examination with discussion on the approach to Green Belt, housing need and requirement and housing allocations. The Borough Council was asked by the Inspector to update their housing trajectory and 5-year housing land supply. They came back on 30 April requesting that the Examination be paused as they could not update the figures due to serious anomalies in the database and saying that they needed to completely re-base the entire database, which would take up to five weeks. Unsurprisingly, the Inspector was annoyed, but agreed to a pause until 17 June.

The Council supplied updated housing figures on 11 June which showed a reduced housing supply from that included in the Regulation 19 Plan (now only half the supply figure required using the Standard Method). Hearings continued through June and July. The Inspector has, of course, made no decision at this stage, but it would not be a surprise if she found that additional housing sites are still required to increase housing supply, and these may have to come from the existing Green Belt.

**Spelthorne:** The Examination has been paused since June 2023, but in December the Borough Council agreed to set out a programme and timetable to resume it. At an Extraordinary Committee meeting on 29 February councillors considered three possible Options concerning the Green Belt sites in the Plan: 1) Keep the Green Belt allocations in the Plan, 2) Remove all Green Belt allocations from the Plan, 3) Remove all GB allocations except two solely for Gypsy and Traveller sites. They agreed Option 3.

Additionally, it was agreed to remove four urban sites at high risk of flooding and move further sites to later in the Plan period. This results in a reduction of housing supply from 9613 to 8500 dwellings, which is some 87% of the Submitted Plan, including 13 Green Belt sites totalling 865 dwellings, of which 438 are categorised as “affordable”.

It was agreed to put forward these changes as Modifications to the Inspector and to request her to consider them in order to resume the Examination. Planning guidance makes it clear that it is the Inspector’s decision to consider Modifications only if it is necessary to make the Plan sound or legal, so it is not certain that she will accept them. She could reject them and then there may be further delays and even a risk of Government intervention if there is not some agreement on how to move forward. As of now, the Council is in discussion with the Environment Agency over the high-risk flood sites and will then inform the Inspector of the results.

**Mole Valley:** It was agreed by the District Council on 25 January, on a split vote, to retain the Green Belt allocations in the Plan (25 sites with 1348 dwellings and an additional two sites with 337 dwellings already permitted) and to move towards consulting on the Main Modifications put forward by the Inspector at the Examination in October 2022. Consultations took place in March and April 2024. They were, in the main, relatively minor, but did include extending the Plan forward 2 years to 2039, reduce the yearly requirement to 336 dpa (from 353), increase the overall requirement to 6384 (from 6000) and agree to an early review of the Plan. There were 87 representations, but no major alterations were agreed to by the Council. The Inspector does not anticipate any further hearings and will now write her Report which will be sent to the Council later this year. Mole Valley is hoping to adopt the Plan in October.

**Epsom & Ewell:** The Plan was “un-paused” on 25 January 2024 when it was controversially agreed by the Borough Council to maintain the five Green Belt allocations in the Plan (amounting to 2175 dwellings on up to 140 hectares or 0.67% of the total Green Belt). Tim Murphy, a Trustee of CPRE Surrey and our local Chairman in Epsom & Ewell, outlined the opposition of thousands of residents to this decision in the last *Surrey Voice*. Nothing concrete is known on the inclusion or not of these Green Belt sites in the next version of the Local Plan, much to the frustration of the public. The Council is working towards taking a Pre-Submission version of the Plan to the

Licensing and Planning Committee in November and to Full Council in January / February 2025.

**Surrey Heath:** Public consultation on the Surrey Heath pre-submission Regulation 19 Local Plan 2019-38 will take place from 7 August to 20 September 2024.

**Tandridge:** The Inspector’s Report into the Draft Plan was received on 14 February 2024 and on 18 April at a Full Council meeting the decision was taken to formally withdraw the Plan. The process had cost £3.5m and had taken over eight years. The District Council agreed to commence work on a new Plan. In June 2024 a new Local Plan Programme was published. A Regulation 18 Consultation will take place in the second quarter of

## Guildford councillors urged to reject farmland solar scheme

CPRE Surrey supports renewable energy but believes that solar panels should go on rooftops or brownfield sites, not on open countryside. As reported in the previous issue of *Surrey Voice*, there is an ongoing battle over plans by the University of Surrey to put solar panels on farmland which it owns on the edge of Guildford. A new planning application has recently been submitted for this proposed solar farm and we have submitted a detailed objection to Guildford Borough Council.

Arguments have been raging for two years over these proposals which in our view would be a blot on the landscape, scarring the northern slopes of the Hog’s Back. The site for the so-called solar farm is on the edge of the Surrey Hills National Landscape, as well as being within the Green Belt. CPRE Surrey believes that the harm this development will do to the local countryside far outweighs any benefit in terms of renewable energy.

The latest application (Planning Application No. 24/P/00441) was submitted to the Borough Council by Scottish & Southern Electricity (SSE) after the previous proposal was withdrawn last year. CPRE believes it is a mistake to allow any sort of development on the University-owned farmland and we are calling on Guildford Council to say no to the latest scheme. There had been 64 objections to the original application but as this was a new application the Council advised us that the earlier objections would not be carried forward, so we had to start all over again by mobilising local opposition to the scheme and appealing for local people to register their objections to the new application.

CPRE Surrey Chairman John Goodridge says: “We are in favour of renewable energy but the Hog’s Back site is totally unsuitable. It is not only Green Belt but it is close

2025 / 2026 and a Regulation 19 (Pre submission Plan) will be published in Q1 of 2026 / 2027.

Other local authorities are in the very early stages of reviewing their adopted Plans, including Reigate & Banstead, Waverley, Guildford, and Runnymede. Reigate & Banstead began work in February 2023 and is planning to consult on a Preferred Options stage at the end of 2024. Waverley has undertaken early engagement this year and will publish a Preferred Options stage in mid-2025. Runnymede Borough Council has recently published a revised timetable (Local Development Scheme) for its new Local Plan.

Keith Tothill is a Trustee of CPRE Surrey

to the Surrey Hills National Landscape and is a candidate area for inclusion within an expanded National Landscape.”

“There is, in CPRE’s view, no justification to construct solar farms in our local countryside when there is ample space for the installation of solar panels on rooftops. Not only the University itself but any large building is ideal for a solar energy scheme, including council facilities, schools, libraries, multi-storey car parks, and office blocks. Also, surface car parks could be used by placing roof structures with solar panels over them.”

“Putting photovoltaic panels on large areas of roof space is the obvious answer to the need for more renewable energy. Indeed, research by CPRE has shown that we can meet most of the UK’s solar energy targets through rooftop installations, without the need for solar farms on the Green Belt or open countryside.”

CPRE Surrey has objected to the SEE/University of Surrey application on the following grounds:

- The solar farm includes a services road that traverses the setting to the existing National Landscape. The two southernmost parcels of land are also in the setting of the National Landscape and one is highly visible from the Hog’s Back ridge. The southernmost parcel is an Area of Great Landscape Value.
- The largest parcel of land earmarked for the solar farm is on land classified Grade 2, considered very good quality agricultural land.
- Two of the three fields earmarked for solar panels are highly visible from existing National Landscape, as is the proposed access road.
- The access road splits to deliver three roads all utilising the public bridleway 447 on which you have the right to use on foot, on horseback

*continued on page 14*



- or on a bicycle (cyclists should give way to walkers and riders) but not by vehicle. It also utilises the route joined by and linking public footpaths 479 and 480. This is clearly potentially dangerous.
- The whole of the proposed solar farm is within the Green Belt. The Green Belt boundary on this side of Guildford has already been moved in two successive Local Plans, resulting in the loss of around 140 hectares of productive farmland. One of the features of the green belt is supposed to be its permanence. Also, the University has publicly stated that its strategy is to develop all its landholdings on the Hog's Back, and there is a risk that, once the solar farm is built, the land will become classified as "brownfield" and more at risk of housing development in the future.
  - The land earmarked for the proposed solar farm is nestled between three belts of ancient woodland. It supports five bird species that appear on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (skylark, yellowhammer, linnet, mistle thrush, and song thrush).
  - The landowner, the University, has more than 20 hectares of surface-level car parking across its estate, and many of these are large-scale car parks. It also has more than 30 buildings in the Research Park, and more than 100 buildings on its campus. In line with the Council's "brownfield first" policy, all opportunities to site solar panels above this infrastructure should be taken before high-grade farmland is taken out of production and high-value landscape is harmed.
  - The proposal includes over five miles of cable and each metre losses some of the power generated. The cable route goes directly over a large active badger sett.
  - The scheme will set a dangerous precedent for similar installations elsewhere in the Borough and throughout Surrey.
- We will notify members when there is any news from the Council on this important matter.**

# SURREY NATURE DAY

## Saturday 28 September 2024

Join the Surrey Nature Recovery team at West Horsley Place on Saturday 28 September from 10am to 5pm for a day of nature-themed, family fun.

Meet representatives from some of the organisations involved with nature recovery in Surrey and talk to them about what they are doing to help "bring wildlife home". The highlight of the day will be *Wild Walks*, an original piece of theatre produced and directed by Guildford Shakespeare Company.

### Wild Walks

In *Wild Walks*, serious messages about nature conservation are brought to life by a host of wild creatures and delivered through an exciting blend of modern language and Shakespeare's prose in this family-friendly, interactive, outdoor performance about nature recovery in Surrey. Build a den with a dormouse, rescue a newt from a crayfish, negotiate with a nightingale and treasure hunt for a butterfly's favourite flower in a series of audience participatory scenes. All designed to bring to life the concept of habitat restoration in an engaging, easy-to-understand way.

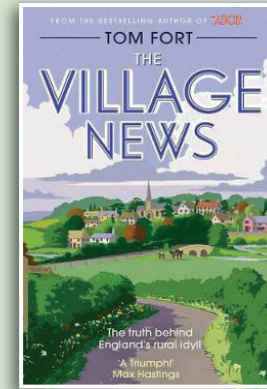
The performance has been created in collaboration with Surrey Nature Recovery, to draw attention to, and educate young people and grown-ups alike, about the forthcoming Local Nature Recovery Strategy consultation in Surrey.

Surrey Nature Day is a free event but pre-booking is essential. Go to <http://www.westhorsleyplace.org> to book your tickets.



## BOOK REVIEW: *The Village News: The truth behind England's rural idyll*

By Tom Fort | Published by Simon and Schuster UK | Hardback | £14.99



The English village is not dead, declares Tom Fort in the introduction to his new book. It is "simply too strong to fail." Journalist, author and broadcaster Tom Fort is perhaps best known to many of us for his engaging BBC television documentary from a decade or so ago, "The A303: Highway to the Sun". In his book *The Village News*, he takes us on a tour of rural England, dropping in on several dozen different English villages, starting with his childhood home of Twyford, and taking in such diverse locations as Robin Hood's Bay in North Yorkshire, Troutbeck in Cumbria, Myddle in Shropshire, Foxton in Cambridgeshire, North Moreton in Oxfordshire, and Luccombe in Somerset – looking at what makes each one of these villages special, and finding out how the inhabitants are coping with changes, both good and bad.

Tom grew up in the "largish village" of Twyford in Berkshire and admits that during his childhood neither he nor his parents played much of a part in village life. His father was a Member of Parliament and his mother the headmistress of Roedean, and during his parents' regular absences from home "everything was organised by my grandmother, who lived next door" and it was grandma who was the pillar of the local community, the Women's Institute and the parish church, a familiar face to everyone in the village. For Tom it was only after returning from university and by joining his brother in the village cricket team that he started to feel the pull of his rural roots. Fifty years later he still plays cricket for Twyford.

The Surrey chapter of *The Village News* focuses on a cluster of villages – Upper Bourne, Middle Bourne and Lower Bourne – near Farnham. The author uses the history of the Bournes to chronicle such processes as the decline of traditional agriculture, the twentieth century rediscovery of English folk songs, and the rise of the WI. He also notes "the creeping spread of suburbia" in the 1930s and cites CPRE's success at the time in "enlisting writers and campaigners to denounce these evils". *The Village News* is a powerful plea for better-planned, better-executed new development, where such development may be needed. Tom Fort advocates greater use of local building materials and appropriate vernacular styles, instead of identikit "executive homes". He castigates the volume housebuilders for their "boring" designs, calling their influence on modern housing "malign", and raging that if action is not taken yet more villages "will be squeezed and suffocated by housing estates pushed through the planning system by the power of the volume builders".

All is not lost, however. In the author's view, Neighbourhood Planning is one way to stop English villages being wrecked by soulless developers and short-sighted planners. Through Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDPs), "Localism ... can be made to mean something", and by energising our rural communities we can "head off the frontal assaults of the land predators". Sonning Common, for instance, the Oxfordshire village where Tom lives now, has been "a juicy target for developers" but the NDP has enabled locals to head off some of the threats. So, Tom's final clarion cry is for villagers the length and breadth of England to take up the challenge of Neighbourhood Planning, and for district and borough councils to welcome the role of "well-meaning amateurs" in shaping the future of our villages. After all, he writes, "we are here in greater numbers than before, active for longer than before, ready and able to do what people have always done, which is to serve our communities."

Reviewer: Andy Smith

## Can you help restore nature in Surrey?

Surrey County Council is calling on residents, businesses and community groups to help shape a new "Local Nature Recovery Strategy" (LNRS). Developed with partners, the new strategy will set out a roadmap for the restoration and enhancement of Surrey's natural environment, ensuring that it is sustainable now and for future generations.

Marisa Heath, Cabinet Member for Environment at SCC, explains: "We are at a crucial, formative stage of a plan that we hope will create an environment where wildlife can truly thrive in Surrey. To ensure that everyone embraces the LNRS and to maintain momentum in taking action to help nature, we want to make sure that as many people as

possible are involved right from the start. That's why we encourage and welcome insight and opinion on what people want from their natural environment. Whether it's more flower rich grasslands buzzing with life, or a new woodland on your doorstep that will provide future generations with dappled shade and homes for our precious wildlife." She adds: "A healthy natural environment provides us with so many undervalued benefits from clean breathable air to protection from the worst effects of climate change such as flooding or drought. Please do get involved and help us shape this vital plan." Residents are encouraged to have their say by completing an online survey or by attending the in-person "Surrey Nature Day" event on 28 September at West Horsley Place.





The countryside charity  
Surrey

Surrey Campaign to Protect Rural England

# ANNUAL MEETING

Friday 4th October 2024

from 10.30am to 12.30pm

at Denbies Wine Estate, Dorking RH5 6AA

([www.denbies.co.uk](http://www.denbies.co.uk))

Come and hear about CPRE's current work and exciting plans for the future, and meet the CPRE Surrey team.

Speakers include Roger Mortlock, the national Chief Executive of CPRE, and climate change campaigner Sarah Finch of the Weald Action Group who will talk about her recent Supreme Court victory and what it means for Surrey.

**Refreshments provided**

Registered Charity No. 1106245 | Company Limited by Guarantee No. 04551761

