

SURREY VOICE

Magazine of the Surrey Campaign to Protect Rural England | Summer 2025



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Green Belt or “grey belt”?

Local government reorganisation

Using town-centre car parks for housing

Heathrow expansion latest



The countryside charity
Surrey

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FROM THE CPRE SURREY CHAIR

Welcome to the Summer 2025 edition of our CPRE Surrey magazine, *Surrey Voice*.

There has been a bit of a “phoney war” since the government introduced the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in December. Developers and councils alike have been unsure of what bits of the Green Belt should be re-designated as “grey belt” and therefore vulnerable to



development. However, we are now starting to see some applications for development come through, and although some are still clearly in the wrong place, a lot of the new applications are potentially permissible under the new framework.

This makes it difficult for CPRE as a charity to object in the process. When we see a case for objection, we will definitely argue it, but with so many applications forecast if the government gets its way and doubles the current new house build in Surrey, we must be careful to target the cases we see as wrong.

In this edition, we have an article on recent “grey belt” cases, that should help clarify what the new NPPF actually states, and especially the implications of the new planning guidance introduced in the spring. We also highlight the potential for car parks to be used for housing.

Meanwhile, applications for “solar farms” are prolific across the country, and we are starting to get more of these in Surrey. We report on the current situation, and explain why we still champion solar on rooftops and brownfield first. We also have an article on the work of our partners in Surrey Wildlife Trust, and an update on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

I look forward to seeing you all at our AGM at Denbies on Saturday 4th October.

John Goodridge, Surrey CPRE Chair

Front Cover image: Narrowboat at Millmead, Guildford (Photo by Andy Smith)

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NEWS...NEWS...NEWS...

Mixed news on solar energy

Under plans being drawn up by the government, the majority of new homes built in England will need to be fitted with photovoltaic panels. This is a major campaign success for CPRE which has campaigned hard to encourage the use of roofs for renewable energy, but there is still no plan, nationally or locally, for the retrofitting of solar panels on existing buildings, including commercial and public buildings with large areas of roofspace, such as factories, warehouses, hospitals, schools, and office buildings. For a true “rooftop revolution”, we need to see a massive expansion of solar on roofs, and we need local authorities to look for other opportunities for solar installations, such as erecting canopies with photovoltaic panels over car parks, instead of the easy option of smothering our agricultural land with so-called “solar farms”.

CPRE Surrey is supporting local communities and parish councils opposing these unnecessary “solar farm” developments, and their associated infrastructure, and we have had some success recently with Mole Valley District Council’s planning committee voting to reject such a scheme on farmland near Fetcham. But elsewhere, these schemes are getting voted through. We need to continue making the case for solar on rooftops or brownfield sites, *not* on our open countryside.

Local government reorganisation

We are expecting to hear soon whether Surrey will have two or three “unitary authorities”, replacing our current system of local government (a single County Council plus a series of eleven district and borough councils). Surrey CC, together with Elmbridge Borough Council and Mole Valley District Council, favour the creation of two unitaries, East and West, while Tandridge District Council and the boroughs of Epsom & Ewell, Guildford, Reigate & Banstead, Runnymede, Spelthorne, Surrey Heath, Waverley, and Woking all favour dividing the county into three unitaries. A public consultation on the options took place earlier in the summer.

Surrey is on a “super fast-track” for reorganisation, and so we are something of a test case for the Labour government’s “devolution” agenda. Elections to “shadow” unitary councils will take place in 2026, with these bodies becoming fully operational the following year, and an election taking place in May 2027 for a “sub-regional” (probably all-Surrey) Mayor. At this point, the history of Surrey’s district and borough councils (created in 1974) and Surrey County Council (created in 1889) will come to an end.

Strengthening local democracy

A number of areas in Surrey are undertaking “Community Governance Reviews” to explore whether there is a public appetite for the creation of new parish councils, or to change the boundaries of current parish councils. This has come about because of concerns – which CPRE Surrey shares – that the local democratic voice, and the protection of community assets (such as parks, recreation grounds and allotments), could be threatened by the abolition of district and borough councils. Much of Surrey, particularly in the north of the county, is “unparished” and there is a strong case, we believe, for the establishment of new parish councils in these areas, and for these parishes to take over ownership of community assets from the soon-to-be-abolished district and borough councils.

Unitary councils will be much larger and more remote from local communities than the current districts and borough councils, and there will inevitably be a significant reduction in the number of elected councillors representing all areas (probably a reduction of representation by two thirds). Added to this, Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner has recently stated that she wants councils to consider selling allotments and other council-owned land to make way for housebuilding, and if the new unitary councils are put under financial pressure they will almost certainly look to dispose of assets. If we are to preserve democracy at the most local level, and protect community assets, we need to ensure that all of Surrey is covered by parish councils.

Heathrow expansion latest

Two different proposals have been submitted to the government for expansion of Heathrow – one by Heathrow Airport and the other by rival developers Aurora. Both would mean years of disruption and environmental damage, but Aurora’s is a slightly less ambitious scheme than Heathrow’s own. The impact on nature, the loss of wildlife habitat, the blighting of local communities, and the noise, light and air pollution from extra flights and road traffic congestion, make any expansion of this already enormous, sprawling airport complex, potentially devastating for the local environment. The government has indicated that it wants Heathrow’s capacity expanded by 50%. This is a chilling prospect for people in Surrey, West London, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire. CPRE Surrey opposes expansion of either Heathrow or Gatwick, the two major airports on Surrey’s doorstep, and will continue to support local action group campaigns in both areas.

Andy Smith

COMMENT:

New threats to our Green Belt



By Andy Smith

Our small team of planning specialists at CPRE Surrey has been busier than ever in recent months, dealing with constant requests for support or advice from individual CPRE members across

the county, and from local action groups, residents’ associations, parish councils and others seeking our input to their planning work or campaigns. As well as providing advice, we have backed local campaigners with authoritative submissions and letters of objections to various planning applications.

However, it is getting to the stage where we may have to turn away some of these requests as we are very thinly stretched and when it comes to deciding which cases to get involved with, we may have to prioritise our own members, and, at the very least, we need to focus our time and expertise on cases where it’s clear we have a strong chance of winning. And, with the goalposts having been moved so decisively by the government in favour of development and against countryside protection, the chances of success are narrowing.

We are always looking for new volunteers for CPRE Surrey, so whether or not you have direct experience of land-use planning or campaigning, if you would like to play an active role in CPRE locally, at the county or district level, please let us know. For all new volunteers, CPRE provides an induction session with the national CEO, Roger Mortlock, and key staff at HQ, and you would also be supported or mentored by one of our experienced local campaigners.

The fact is that Surrey is now in the front line against unsustainable development sprawl and urbanisation, and unless CPRE Surrey can muster sufficient numbers and strength we will not be able to protect our vulnerable countryside and open spaces from the developers. We need more members, more donors, and more volunteers. Will you help?



Developers want our Green Belt countryside reclassified as “grey belt” so that it can be concreted over (Photo by Andy Smith)

Town or village?

The question of whether a settlement can be categorised as a town or as a village is increasingly important in the context of housing in the Green Belt. For example, last year, Mole Valley District Council (MVDC) refused permission for a housing development on a large Green Belt site, a former garden centre, Marsden Nursery, on the edge of Ashted in the north of the district. Unsurprisingly, the developers appealed, using the argument that under the new government rules the site should be re-classified as “grey belt”.

When it came to the appeal, the Inspector considered the matter in light of the Mole Valley Local Plan adopted in October 2024, the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) published in December, and new Planning Policy Guidance issued in February. The land in question is “brownfield” (previously developed land) within the Green Belt. It was not allocated for housing in the Local Plan but developers argued that under the new NPPF it should be redesignated as “grey belt”, meaning that, subject to meeting the government’s “Golden Rules”, it might be suitable for housing. But, crucially, the Inspector rejected this argument on the grounds that the site plays an important role in contributing to the openness of the Green Belt between Ashted and Epsom. Preventing neighbouring towns from merging is a key statutory objective of the Green Belt. Note the word “town”; if the Inspector had considered Ashted to be a village, this point about merging would not have applied and the land could have been reclassified as “grey”.

Thankfully the Inspector concluded that Ashted is actually a small town, and therefore the Green Belt countryside between the two towns of Ashted and Epsom is meeting the core aims of the Green Belt. The Inspector also pointed out in his judgment that as Mole Valley is meeting its housing targets under its adopted Local Plan, and has a 5-year housing supply, there is no demonstrable need for a housing development on this site that would outweigh other factors such as Green Belt protection (the NPPF’s so-called “Golden Rules”).

While we celebrate the outcome of the Marsden Nursery appeal, in other areas the “town / village” question seems to be working against us. Sites are being redesignated as “grey belt” because they do not separate two towns. Perhaps the sites are between two villages, or between a town and a village? In all those cases, such land is vulnerable to reclassification as “grey” due to the new planning guidance.

Many of the local residents and community groups who have come to CPRE Surrey for advice in recent months have sought our help because they’ve faced a sudden dramatic increase in planning applications on Green Belt land since the 2024 NPPF and 2025 Planning Guidance. They have included development threats to villages throughout Surrey, from Warlingham in Tandridge district, to Stoke d’Abernon in Elmbridge, and Normandy in Guildford borough. In all these cases, developers have argued that the land in question should be redesignated “grey belt” because it does not prevent “towns” merging.

Green Belt purposes

This comes down to the fact that, when it comes to deciding which Green Belt sites can be downgraded to “grey”, only three of the five statutory purposes of the Green Belt are brought into play. These are: to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas, to prevent neighbouring towns from merging

into one another, and to preserve the setting of historic towns. The other two purposes – preventing encroachment on the countryside and promoting urban regeneration – are not considered when deciding if a site is still “strongly performing” or not. If a piece of Green Belt land does not perform “strongly” in the three other purposes, it can be downgraded to “grey”. This is the new reality.

To try to correct this, our friends in CPRE Hertfordshire have started a petition to change the basis of “grey belt” designation. The petition states: “We are urging the government to restore Green Belt protections by ensuring that “grey belt” proposals are judged against all five Green Belt purposes, and that this is consistent throughout the NPPF. This will ensure that development needs are appropriately balanced against the many benefits of conservation.”

We encourage all our members to sign the petition at www.petition.parliament.uk/petitions/725558.

We are also asking you to contact your constituency MP and your local councillors to press them to raise this matter in Parliament and at council meetings, so that we build momentum for changes to the NPPF and Planning Guidance to ensure that all five statutory purposes of the Green Belt have equal weight. Please support this campaign to against the weakening of our countryside protections.

Andy Smith is Editor of *Surrey Voice*

Our green and pleasant Surrey



Left: Ashted Pond; Below: Guildford Castle Gardens; and Bottom left: Meadowbank, Dorking (Photos by Andy Smith)

Once it's gone, it's gone

By Alice Pearson

As an inquisitive 10-year-old, I remember working on an extensive “Surrey Project” at school, and like other children I was lucky enough to be taken on trips to many historic and beautiful places in Surrey. We learned about local history – the intriguing mystery associated with the “Silent Pool” in the beautiful village of Shere, Abinger Hammer with its cute town clock, and the horrible history associated with the Devil’s Punch Bowl near Hindhead, made a lasting impression. We enjoyed school picnics in stunning countryside, and I’ll never forget the feeling that I was on top of the world when we had a picnic at Box Hill in the North Downs. After school, we enjoyed playing with our dogs in ancient woodland that had a large and magnificent pond – everywhere was teeming with wildlife and rare plants. All these wonderful places in Surrey, along with the diverse ecology of the local countryside, have enriched the lives of so many Surrey residents and visitors for hundreds of years.

Fast forward to 2025 and the Metropolitan Green Belt, which covers more than three quarters of Surrey and has been such an important historical, ecological and recreational asset, is under an existential threat from the government’s housebuilding strategy, with councils being forced to look for possible development sites within the Green Belt. Elmbridge Borough Council is one of those councils.

Back in 2016 the Council commissioned a Green Belt Boundary Review; this report divided up the Green

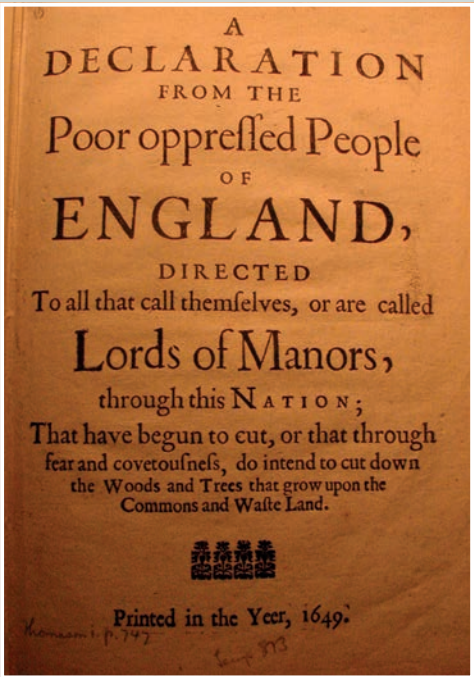
A plea by Oxshott resident Alice Pearson to save precious Green Belt countryside threatened by developers

Belt in Elmbridge into various “parcels” and assessed them as “weakly performing” or “strongly performing” in meeting their Green Belt purposes. The criteria for assessment made no mention of the historical, environmental or recreational significance of these Green Belt parcels but these criteria were used to identify “weakly performing” land.

These so-called weakly performing areas are sadly now being thrown to landowners and developers who, often with little or only recent connections to Surrey, are keen to exploit and profit from green belt development.

I’ll home in one example – a Green Belt area between Oxshott and Cobham, described in the council report as Parcel 14. As a “weakly performing” site, it is up for development, with an application already under review for a “residential park” of 250 houses, which would erase a whole section of ecologically significant woodland. Is this green space really “weakly performing”? It has two features mentioned in Elmbridge Borough Council’s list of local heritage assets and includes common and village green land in Little Heath, Oxshott, which was inhabited by “The Diggers” movement in 1649 – a stop on Elmbridge Museum’s “Surrey Diggers Trail”. The area is also an important ecological habitat with ancient woodland, a large, deep pond supplying the rich and diverse wildlife, and wildlife corridors.

Is it worth wiping out the history and ecology of the green belt forever, just to meet housing development targets? Surely, Green Belt countryside with a rich



The Diggers’ Manifesto 1649

history and strong environmental significance should not be erased? Let’s get real – the housing crisis is about the price of homes and rentals more than the quantity, and it’s been proven that the increase in housing stock has not driven down prices. It is highly unlikely that new houses built in Surrey’s Green Belt will be genuinely affordable, or will meet real local needs. All they will do is allow more quota boxes to be ticked.

The tragedy of all this Green Belt opportunism by development speculators is that many beautiful areas with a rich history and ecology could be erased forever. If all landowners are encouraged to sell up as much of their Green Belt land as possible, take their short-term gains and move somewhere as yet unspoiled, there will be nothing left except the proverbial concrete jungle with a few urban parks like any big town or city. Once an area of countryside is built up, it will stay built up. **Once it’s gone, it’s gone.**

EDITOR’S NOTE: The threat to such “weakly performing” sites is even greater now due to the government’s February 2025 planning guidance which allows any Green Belt land not deemed to prevent urban sprawl, prevent towns merging, or protect historic towns, to be re-classified as “Grey Belt”.

Turning wasted space into housing

CPRE Surrey is supporting an initiative led by our neighbouring CPRE branch in London to show why a change to car parking policies could play a key role in saving our countryside, as well as improving public transport, reviving town centres and alleviate the housing shortage.

The basic premise is that car parks are often a waste of land which could be better used for housing. Putting more homes in or close to town centres, on sites currently used for car parks, will enable more people to live near shops, schools and amenities. Housing can be built at higher densities – “a gentle density”, says CPRE London’s Alice Roberts, “not tower blocks” – which would mean land being used more efficiently.

Over-provision of car parking undermines the financial viability and attractiveness of public transport. It reduces demand for public transport as more people drive, but also impacts bus service reliability due to traffic congestion causing delays. This in turn causes cuts to public transport, further undermining services, creating more traffic and pressure for more car-parking space.

The dominance of car parking and traffic makes town centres unattractive places. “Evidence shows people are more likely to stay longer and spend

more money where places are attractive”, explains Alice. “Historic towns often benefit from a visitor economy which can be an important driver of employment and income locally. But this too can be undermined where the town is unattractive. Town centres, and their economies, can be improved by removing traffic and parking.”

In Surrey, many town centre car parks are owned by local authorities. Using some of these sites for development makes building affordable housing more financially viable, because the land is already owned by the council and does not need to be bought, and because infrastructure costs are much less in a town centre compared to greenfield development, where power, water and road infrastructure all need to be paid for.

Research using the Parkulator online tool – www.open-innovations.github.io/parkulator/ – is enabling CPRE to map the opportunities for building new homes on town centre car park sites. And even where it may not be feasible to completely replace a car park with housing, it may still be possible in many cases to build flats over the car park. This has been done, for example, in several sites in Epsom. Either way, local authorities should be working with housing associations to explore the opportunities for new housing development using the wasted spaces in Surrey’s towns.

We are working with London and other CPRE branches to map these opportunities and to use this data to make the case for using car parks for affordable and social housing.



Heathfield Pond, Oxshott



“The Diggers” heritage trail stop at Little Heath Common, Oxshott

PARTNER FOCUS: Surrey Wildlife Trust: Saving Surrey's Nature

By Sarah Jane Chimbwandira

Few people reading this publication will need persuading that wildlife is in trouble or that much more needs to be done to save it. With one-third of Surrey's species at risk, with some incredible animals like the Wryneck and Pine Marten already gone, the time has surely come to step up our collective efforts to restore, rejuvenate and reconnect Surrey's wild places on a county-wide scale. This urgent priority of course mirrors the national and international goal to protect 30 per cent of land and sea for nature by 2030 – which is a sobering five years away.

Like CPRE, we work hard to encourage people from all backgrounds, including members of the business community, to do their bit for the natural world in whatever way they can. In the last year, in the region of 500 local people volunteered with us, devoting more than 27,000 hours of their time to helping our reserves management staff deliver optimum conditions for nature over the Trust's 60-plus nature reserves. I hope that many readers of this piece will wish to join them – and in the process learn more about local wildlife and practical conservation.

On the woodland sites that it owns or manages, of which over 1,300 hectares is ancient woodland, projects undertaken with the help of volunteers include rotational coppicing, dead hedging, the clearance of ponds which have become overgrown or shaded, and the design of coupes to reduce the impacts of deer browsing. Species benefiting from this work include the Spotted Flycatcher, Tree Creeper, Lesser Spotted, Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Hazel Dormouse, Stag Beetle, Purple Emperor butterfly, Great Crested Newt, Grass Snake, Common Toad, Bluebell and Wood Anemone.

In the west of the county a mosaic of lowland heathland reserves – including Chobham,

Partnership working and engaging every part of the community are now essential to wildlife recovery efforts, says Surrey Wildlife Trust Chief Executive Sarah Jane Chimbwandira.

Brentmoor and Whitmoor Commons and Pirbright and Barossa Ranges – provide one of the UK's most significant concentrations of this internationally significant terrain. The importance of these sites for wildlife including Sand Lizards, Nightjars and Dartford Warblers is hard to overstate, but it takes many thousands of hours each year to maintain this varied palette and prevent, for example, Silver Birch, Scots Pine and Gorse dominating these sensitive landscapes.

This year, volunteers and staff have delivered ambitious scrub clearance, wildfire mitigation, and the installation of basking scrapes, log piles and hibernacula. Conservation grazing using Nofence technology – which removes the need for physical infrastructure and enables animals to be deployed with greater ease and effectiveness – is increasingly used to create a healthy, wildflower-supporting sward mix across these locations. Many volunteers help keep an eye on these animals as "lookers".

But vital though this (and a multitude of other fascinating volunteering work across grasslands, rivers and wetlands) undoubtedly is, it is insufficient to meet the scale of the wider challenge that we face as conservationists. As the effects of the climate and nature emergency bite deeper, the parallel drive for economic growth and improvements in infrastructure



Surrey Wildlife Trust
Chief Executive Sarah
Jane Chimbwandira



mean that all of us in the conservation movement have to get better at defending wildlife and wild places outside of the land we own and manage, and also better at persuading people – from the PM, to local and regional decision-makers, to "ordinary" people – that protecting the natural world as whole is not an impediment to progress, but a condition of it.

My mission for SWT is therefore to extend our emphasis towards educating and inspiring more young people, working with more local communities to help revitalise local green spaces from gardens to sports fields, encouraging much more investment from businesses in sustainable practices and mechanisms like Biodiversity Net Gain, and working with other conservation charities and private land managers to end the fragmentation of good habitat and improve the overall connectivity and resilience of our landscapes. One recent example of this is the Heathland Connections project, delivered by our Nature-based Solutions team on behalf of Natural England. Extending beyond the conservation comfort zone, over the last year the project team



Checking a Dormouse box (© Surrey Wildlife Trust)

engaged with over 50 landowners to carry out large-scale connectivity and habitat mapping and allocated £35,000 of grants to deliver improvements in heathland habitat.

An increasingly urgent area of operations is planning. SWT's Ecology Planning Advice Service (EPAS) works with Local Planning Authorities in Surrey to ensure that potential impacts on nature are properly assessed and considered. The mandating of Biodiversity Net Gain in February 2024 has led to an increased focus on providing ecological advice, including challenging the sometimes-questionable information provided by developers' ecologists. Overall, more than 1,000 development applications were influenced to nature's benefit in 2024/25. With recent developments in national planning policy a point of concern for both our organisations, it's vital that we demonstrate that a sustainable approach to development is not just a "nice to have" but is both eminently deliverable and an essential prerequisite for economic stability and quality of life.

Surrey Wildlife Trust, like CPRE Surrey, is fortunate to be part of much larger federation. With 45 other Wildlife Trusts nationwide, we are already a powerful force. But collaboration at regional and local level is just as vital – and in some cases even more so. Increasing levels of ground-level co-operation and joint campaigning between organisations such as ours can only increase our chances of success in restoring nature, and building a better future for people, in Surrey.

Learn more about Surrey Wildlife Trust and its urgent appeal to Save Surrey's Nature at www.surreywildlifetrust.org.

**Sarah Jane Chimbwandira is
Chief Executive of Surrey Wildlife Trust**



Dartford Warbler
(© Jon Hawkins)

Surrey's Nature Recovery and the role of Surrey Nature Partnership

Surrey Nature Partnership is one of over 40 Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) that were established in 2012 to bring together organisations with an interest in helping nature in their area. That area, in the case of Surrey, was the geographical county using the present-day Surrey County Council boundaries. It was also an opportunity to get business and particularly landowners involve.



Lisa Creaye-Griffin, Director, Surrey Nature Partnership

The nature partnerships were formed at the same time as the Local Economic Partnerships, (known as LEPs). However, the LEPs were funded by Government and used to channel a range of grants to support local economies which gave them a more secure start, although those that covered Surrey have now been dissolved and the County Council has taken over their role.

The LNPs were only given a small amount of pump priming funding and then left to develop their own structure. Surrey, Sussex, Kent, Hampshire and Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire all have LNPs, which now work as separate organisations but also together to help raise awareness and provide support to each other on specific campaigns.

Surrey established a small Board of 12 people representing a wide range of interests in nature, from, the Wildlife Trust, to leads on nature and health, organisations such as Natural England, Surrey Community Action, local authorities, academia and local business, particularly those with an interest in land. We also work with other networks to ensure we have the voice of young people in our work.

Surrey Nature Partnership has two members of staff who both work part-time, a Director and an Administrative Officer. This reflects the constraints



Surrey Nature Partnership
Healthy Environment | Healthy People | Healthy Economy

on our income which comes from two annual agreements with Surrey Wildlife Trust and Surrey County Council, and income derived from activities, such as the annual conference, outlined below. In recent years with the Environment Act 2021 putting a greater focus on the state of nature and our own State of Surrey Nature report in 2017, we have focused more on how to help nature recover.

Over a third of the species in Surrey were found to be declining due to pressure on their habitats, caused by many factors, such as

development, infrastructure and buildings, the quality of our water ways and climate change and pressure on the use of land. These factors need to be acknowledged, and ways found to reverse some of the deterioration. We are fundamentally part of nature we need to find a way to provide what we need and ensure nature continues to thrive. Our work involves monitoring what is happening to nature and facilitating working groups where we see gaps. We also promote the importance of nature to the health and wellbeing of people.

The Partnership runs the Surrey Biodiversity Working Group which is a source of expertise on all aspects of biodiversity in the county, the Surrey Parks and Countryside Forum, where managers of parks and countryside across the county meet to discuss, issues, subjects of interest and exchange ideas. Our third key group is Surrey Local Sites Partnership, which assesses all the potential Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) against a set of criteria. We also support the two Catchment Management Partnerships which are co-chaired by Surrey Wildlife Trust and the South East Rivers Trust.

Surrey's Nature Recovery Strategy

The Environment Act 2021 was the starting point for the Strategy, stating that the whole country should be covered by a nature recovery strategy which would be part of a land management Framework, Food and Farming Strategy and various strategies relating to development of infrastructure and development.

As with many things getting all the key strategies and secondary legislation in place takes time and leaves some gaps until it happens. Thinking about Local Nature Recovery Strategies started shortly after the

Act was passed but guidance from government on what was required was delayed and consequently start on the work was also delayed.

We are working with Surrey County Council (the lead authority, known as the Responsible Authority) and other partners on Surrey's Nature Recovery Strategy, a key step in Surrey's nature recovery. The Strategy is a statutory document and is expected to be reviewed every 3-10 years, so this is an exciting time for nature and just the starting point.

Our main role currently is in engaging the public in the development of the strategy. We have done this principally through a series of themed workshops followed by geographic workshops. These sifted through information on the habitats and came up with key areas to focus the Strategy on. We are attending events during the summer and Autumn to raise awareness of the draft strategy and everyone's opportunity to get involved.

Surrey's Nature Recovery Strategy is currently out for public consultation (until 25th September 2025).

The Strategy consists of a description of the area, a statement of biodiversity priorities, and details of the methodology used and a separate map which shows existing sites designated for nature. It also shows the local sites and where there is an opportunity to recover nature. The latter focusses on the potential to connect sites and provide bigger, better and more joined up habitats.

A separate part of the development of the strategy was to assess priority species in the county and select the ones that are most significant and need a focus on their conservation. As would be expected the list was very long and has now been reduced to 100 for the consultation.

There will be over 40 nature recovery strategies across England which will join to form one map. Joining of the

Tortoiseshell butterfly in Horley



Field at Salfords

mapping is still in an early stage as only a few of the LNRS are completed. Several have just gone out for consultation, and many are still not quite there. Some of the delay in completing the Strategies is because of the Guidance coming out late. Funding was provided from Defra to instigate the development of the Strategy but there was concern that without guidance the strategies would not be consistent.

Funding is also available for a further year, 2025/2026, to allow a change into delivering phase of the Strategy. We will be helping SCC and the other members of the Steering Group to put systems in place to encourage the public and organisations to get more involved in nature recovery and to monitor the outcomes.

It would be wrong of me to ignore the potential impact that devolution and local government reorganisation could have here in Surrey, particularly in the short term. We are therefore watching this carefully to see how we can help to facilitate the delivery through our partners. The government have assured us that inclusion in the LNRS as a priority will attract funding through land management grants and an uplift in the metric used to assess Biodiversity Net Gain. We are beginning to see the



Ancient oak in Horley

latter, but reassessment of grants has delayed any real evidence of how the LNRS will impact grants.

Biodiversity and Planning

SYNP plans and runs an annual Biodiversity and Planning Conference as we see a key part of our work is to help planners and ecologists understand each other's position and ensure new areas of legislation are understood by all sides.

Last year the government introduced Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), where most planning applications must provide at least 10 percent BNG. The location of that gain follows a hierarchy, where it should be on site preferable, near the site, or as a last resort, units can be purchased elsewhere to compensate for the loss. The latter two options have provided opportunities for landowners to provide areas of land that are managed for nature conservation as units that can be sold to developers. These areas must be managed for 30 years for nature with landowners entering into an agreement covering that land. In some cases, these units of conservation land are being managed by separate companies buying land to provide BNG or entering into agreements with landowners to manage the land for them. The requirement for BNG on most planning applications has now been running for over a year. The concept is sensible and is needed to help nature recover while the nation tries to deliver the government's target of 1.5 million new homes and to extend the nation's businesses and build new roads.

Surrey is affected by a considerable amount of new development, and we are keen to see a high level of mandatory net gain required by our local planning authorities. Two of these authorities (Mole Valley and Guildford) have now adopted 20 percent BNG minimum in their Local Plans, while others have stayed with the minimum of 10 percent. However, as you may be aware the government has recently closed a consultation on plans to amend the way BNG is applied to small developments and National Significant Infrastructure (NSiP). That doesn't mean it isn't required but can be provided in a different way or off-site to speed up the implementation of these projects. Exactly how this will pan out is yet to be seen.

The Planning and Infrastructure Bill has also caused considerable concern among nature organisations and has led to a lot of debate in Government as the Bill progresses. Again, it is the desire to speed up development that has led to ideas that could mean important sites for nature conservation have less protection than they have now. We, with our colleagues across the country, would argue that development and biodiversity are not mutually exclusive and in fact can't be mutually exclusive if we want to survive, we are prepared to work with developers and Government to find a solution that gives us all what we need without destroying the natural world that we are fundamentally part of.

A very useful section on BNG if you would like to know more has been put on the County Council's website: <https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/land-planning-and-development/planning/bio-diversity-net-gain2>. Next year's Biodiversity and Planning Conference will take place on 17th March 2026 at the Living Planet Centre in Woking. More details will be posted on our website shortly: <https://surreynaturepartnership.org/>.

Lisa Creaye-Griffin is Director of Surrey Nature Partnership

CPRE Surrey 100 Club

The 100 Club is our members-only lottery and provides a regular flow of income to CPRE Surrey while offering our members a chance to win cash prizes. The Summer draw main prize for the 100 Club was for £295.20 and was won by Mrs J Last. The runner-up prize of £73.80 was won by Mr R Whittaker. Congratulations to both. 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

What's new in Surrey's Local Plans?

By Keith Tothill

The majority of the eleven Surrey districts have over the last few years adopted a new local Plan that will guide the development in their areas, the latest being Mole Valley in 2024. However, most are already over five years old. Two local authorities, Tandridge and Elmbridge, have had their Plans found "unsound" by the Planning Inspectorate, which leaves them at an additional disadvantage and open to increased speculative development. Two others, Surrey Heath and Epsom & Ewell, have recently submitted their draft Plans to the government and they will be examined in the near future.

However, local planning is subject to significant and far-reaching changes. First, the Levelling up and Regeneration Bill became law in October 2023, containing details of a new simplified Local Plan process, and secondly we had the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which was published by the Labour government last December, and which radically changed – for the worst, in CPRE's view – the guidance on Green Belts and housing numbers. Further secondary legislation and regulation is needed to establish



Green spaces are crucial local assets – vital for people's health and wellbeing. (Photo by Andy Smith)

the details of the new Local Plan system, but it was clear that Local Plans needed to be submitted to the Secretary of State by 25th June 2025 in order to be examined under the existing (but soon to be replaced) Local Plan system.

Both Epsom & Ewell and Surrey Heath submitted their draft Plans before the June deadline. All other districts that have not yet completed their Plan process will need to produce their new Local Plans under the changed Plan system, which is described as "streamlined", "simplified" and "faster", with increased emphasis on digital tools. It is proposed that the process will consist of three consultations, regular assessments termed "Gateways", involving Planning Inspectors, to ensure the Plan stays on track. The process will be limited to a 30-month time period, once a "notice of start" has been forwarded to the Inspectorate. This short period of time is expected to be very challenging and only time will tell if it is achievable. The 30 months excludes the of pre-commencement work and evidence gathering.

The government requested that all local planning authorities produce and publish an updated Local Development Scheme by 6 March 2025; this to include all the policy documents including a revised Local Plan programme, if necessary, for the next three years. All Surrey local authorities, with the exception of Epsom & Ewell and Surrey Heath, have produced new timetables outlining the timescales for their new Local Plans. However, a major complication for future Local Plans is Local Government Reorganisation in Surrey, which is proposed to be implemented by April 2027, although elections for the two (or three) Unitary Authorities is planned for May 2026. It is still unclear as to how the existing Local Plans will be "merged" into the new Unitary Councils, for example the Local Plans of Mole Valley, Epsom & Ewell, Elmbridge, Tandridge and Reigate & Banstead (all of which are at different stages).

Keith Tothill is a Trustee of CPRE Surrey



MOLE VALLEY LOCAL PLAN 2020-2039

ADOPTED OCTOBER 2024

Celebrating and preserving Surrey's architectural heritage

By Hazel Morris

Surrey Historic Buildings Trust celebrated the county's historic buildings at the Surrey Heritage Awards 2025, held in the Old Library at Wotton House near Dorking. The ceremony was attended by the High Sheriff of Surrey and the Major of Guildford, along with over 80 building conservation professionals and representatives of local heritage groups, who were welcomed by the Chairman, Amanda Lewis. Robin Stannard of ADAM Architecture gave a short talk about Henry Woodyer, the Surrey-based architect who extended Wotton House between 1864 and 1877. Charles Brooking, the architectural historian, displayed items from his acclaimed collection of architectural detail.

The entries for the 2025 Awards were of exceptionally high quality and the judging panel, led by Dr Deborah Mays, Director of the Lutyens Trust, had much deliberation before selecting the winners. There are three categories:

Best Design in an Historic Context was won by **Chinthurst Hill** in Wonerh for a impressive extension to this Grade II listed country house designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens. Local Bargate stone has been used for the external walls, to match the original. The award recognises outstanding and sympathetic new design, either in the setting of an historic building or in an historic or architecturally significant area. The judges were impressed by the quality and design of this project. The architects, Moxley Architects of Clapham, led by John Bradshaw, have adopted Lutyens' motifs in their design, without aping the building, and the entire piece has been undertaken with great care and skill.

Best Design in an Historic Context



Chinthurst Hill

Best Building Craftsmanship



Crowhurst Place

Best Overall Conversation Project



Burstow Farmhouse

Best Building Craftsmanship was won by **Crowhurst Place**, a Grade I listed moated house dating from 1485, which had been unoccupied and required extensive repairs to the timber frame and windows. The award is for the conservation works to the double height bow window, that have been undertaken to the highest standard, by the contractors Smith Heritage, led by Tom Tallon. This award recognises outstanding craftsmanship including attention to detail and use of traditional workmanship, and the judges are pleased to present the award to this exemplary example of conservation work.

The judges were also impressed by the standard of work and the thorough research undertaken for the beautifully crafted repairs to a lovely wooden trellis porch at **Stoke Cottage**, Guildford and this project was **Highly Commended**.

Best Overall Conservation Project was given for the conservation work to **Burstow Farmhouse** in South Nutfield. This is the top award given for a project which demonstrates the highest standards of conservation and repair or sympathetic new design. This is a Grade II* listed fifteenth century hall house, with later additions and a Georgian façade. The repairs to the brick and stonework and to the roof timbers have been sensitively undertaken. The judges are delighted to recognise the great skill of the contractors, Applecross Building Company, led by Malcolm Brown, and Lighthouse Surveyors. The works were commissioned by the National Trust. The judges were particularly impressed by the recording of the works that will be stored in two separate places to guarantee future knowledge.

Highly Commended



Stoke Cottage

The judges also **Highly Commended** a project to conserve an historic farmstead at **Emley Farm** in Bowlhead Green, that comprises works to three lovely sixteenth century Surrey barns. The works were conservative and discreet, and the character of this beautiful collection of agricultural buildings retained. The works were commissioned by the National Trust, overseen by Piers Guyenette, and carried out by Malcolm Chirles Conservation Ltd.

The standard of entries for the Heritage Awards 2025 was very encouraging. The judges noted the impressive quality of work and skills of the craftspeople involved. The Trust is pleased to acknowledge the other finalists in the Awards:

Cernes Farmhouse in Marsh Green, for the sensitive repairs carried out to this traditional vernacular farmhouse and the small extension to provide a modern home without destroying historic fabric. The architects are Victoria Mustard Architects and the contractor was Bryan Williamson & Daughters.

The Dovecote at Titsey Place is part of an historic estate set in a Grade II Registered Landscape. The repairs, undertaken by David Bagley Construction, ensure that the previously ruinous building can now be enjoyed by visitors to the estate.

Moor Farm, Dormansland, has undergone sympathetic refurbishment to this timber-framed Surrey style Grade II listed farmhouse, with contractors Steadberry Restoration. The owners are proud of the green credentials of their home.

Spencers in Charlwood has a kitchen extension to this late 17th century cottage that is in striking contrast to the cottage and linked by a glass structure to give a clear definition of old and new. The architect is Sam Willoughby and the structural engineer, John Marshall Associates.

For more information on the work of Surrey Historic Buildings Trust, please visit the SHBT website at <http://www.surreyhistoricbuildings.org.uk>.



Hazel Morris is a Trustee of Surrey Historic Buildings Trust

Highly Commended



Emley Farm



The countryside charity
Surrey

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Surrey Campaign to Protect Rural England

on Saturday 4th October 2025

at 10.30am for 11.00am start of business

at Denbies Wine Estate, Dorking RH5 6AA (www.denbies.co.uk)

AGENDA

1. Welcome from Chairman and apologies received
2. Minutes of AGM 4th October 2024 for approval
3. Chairman's Report
4. Treasurer's Report for Accounts year ended 31st December 2024
5. Members to approve the Accounts and appointment of the Independent Examiner
6. Special Resolution
7. Appointment of Trustees and Hon. Officers of CPRE Surrey
8. Any Other Business

GUEST SPEAKERS

Sarah Jane Chimbwandira, Chief Executive, Surrey Wildlife Trust

Lisa Creaye-Griffin, Director, Surrey Nature Partnership

Formal proceedings to conclude at 1.00p.m.

R.S.V.P. to Andy Smith by email: asmith@cpresurrey.org.uk or telephone: **07737 271676**.

Copies of the Annual Report and Accounts for year ended 31st December 2024 and Minutes of the 2024 AGM are available on request from CPRE Surrey.

Members may appoint a proxy to exercise their rights to attend, speak and vote at the meeting. If you wish to appoint a proxy, please contact Andy Smith with your details and those of your proxy.

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