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countryside  
charity

# Fieldwork



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## Improving rural transport options

**W**e hope that the current health crisis will not cause long-term disruption and distress, and that Fieldwork readers are blessed with good health throughout. But with the country facing severe travel restrictions due to coronavirus, the issue of rural isolation has come to the fore for charities – like CPRE – concerned with people's ability to access vital services. Our new research has shown that, even before the pandemic, more than half of English small towns surveyed had such bad transport connectivity that we've had to coin the phrase 'transport deserts' to describe them.

A 'transport desert' occurs when a community lacks the public transport options to meet residents' everyday travel needs, and the research that

has identified this phenomenon was conducted for CPRE by the Campaign for Better Transport (CBT). The accessibility and frequency of public transport services – including bus, train and community transport options – were scored in over 160 small towns servicing rural communities in the south west and north east. The analysis showed that in 56% of the cases, residents who can't drive or are unable to afford a car are at risk of being cut off from basic services – equating to nearly one million people (975,227) in just two regions.

The research shows that the lack of public transport in some individual counties is even more severe, with 10 out of the 14 small towns in Dorset already transport deserts or at risk of becoming one, after 80% cuts to

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# Fieldwork

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## Improving rural transport options

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spending on bus services in the county. Meanwhile, in County Durham, only six of the 22 small towns covered by the research still have a train station.

### A living countryside?

CBT's chief executive Darren Shirley said: 'Nearly a quarter of the country's population lives in small towns, too many of which have become transport deserts. In some cases, towns that lost their railway stations in the Beeching cuts of the 1960s are now losing the bus services that were brought in to replace them.' According to CBT's Future of the Bus report, cuts to local bus services have impacted 3,000 bus routes between 2010 and 2018. That's more than one bus route lost every single day for the last eight years.

### ‘We’re calling on the government to reconnect everyone with proper public transport options with a dedicated rural transport fund’

CPRE's vision of a thriving countryside depends on well-connected small towns and villages serviced by low carbon public transport that fits into people's everyday lives. But transport deserts are having a dramatic effect on rural communities – young people are compelled to move away, older people are left isolated and lonely, while less affluent families can be sucked into a cycle of debt and poverty.

CPRE's chief executive Crispin Truman said: 'We're calling on the government to act to reconnect everyone with proper public transport options. That means establishing a dedicated rural transport fund. But recent government funding to reopen some railway lines across the country does not go nearly far enough – especially in the shadow of the £27 billion planned spend on roads. If the prime minister and this government are serious about "spreading opportunity to every corner of the UK" we need decisive action to stop the march of transport deserts'. Following extensive coverage of the February launch of our report in

The Times, we welcomed a government announcement that very afternoon of a huge £5b fund for local bus and cycling schemes, in addition to an earlier announcement of a £170m fund specifically for low-carbon bus routes.

### A rural-proofed strategy

But with our research suggesting that the countryside is particularly impacted by transport deserts, we want to see a fair proportion of that funding reserved for the rural local authorities with the greatest need for public transport. This allocation must also be available for both revenue and capital spending, so that the money can be invested in local infrastructure or used to subsidise the expansion of bus routes and rail services – including an ambitious national programme of rural rail reopenings.

### ‘A fully rural-proofed national bus strategy will encourage investment in cleaner vehicles and help create a mindset in which we use cars only when necessary.’

CPRE is also calling for a national bus strategy that sets out a clear and ambitious target for the proportion of people living within walking distance of a regularly served bus stop. This aim was endorsed by the chair of the Bus Users charity, Ben Colson, who said: 'A fully rural-proofed strategy will encourage investment in newer, cleaner vehicles and help create a mindset in which we use cars only when necessary.' Our Transport Deserts report argues that increasing the percentage of journeys taken by bus could cut carbon emissions and tackle air pollution while reducing road congestion. With the technology already in place, we want all buses to be zero emission by 2035.

Uniquely for a major transport mode the UK has had no national strategy for buses; once the coronavirus passes, CPRE looks forward to working with the government to help it deliver on its aim of publishing one within this Parliament.



# Break through

How volunteers are making a difference



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## Keeping Test Valley beautiful

CPRE campaigners recently joined community groups in celebrating news that Wheelabrator Technologies had withdrawn its plans for a large-scale incinerator project in the Test Valley. The decision came after a February 'Love Run' (above) where dozens of local runners raised awareness of the impact of the 55 metre-tall waste to energy incinerator (with 100m chimneys), proposed for a greenfield site on high ground near the village of Barton Stacey.

CPRE Hampshire liaised with the local Bin the Incinerator action group in carrying out a detailed assessment of the potential impact on the landscape and rural character of this beautiful area. Test Valley is also an area of acute water stress, and CPRE Hampshire had strong concerns about the incinerator's impact on water quality and drainage, and its usage of enough water to serve approximately 1,100 households. Read more on CPRE Hampshire's work at [cprehampshire.org.uk](http://cprehampshire.org.uk)

## Bristol airport expansion rejected

Early February saw North Somerset Planning Committee turn down Bristol Airport's expansion planning application by a majority of 18 to seven, after nearly five hours of debate. CPRE Avonside chair David Worskett was one of a number of objectors speaking against the plans using evidence commissioned from independent consults, the New Economics Foundation. The CPRE/NEF report, which concluded that the Airport's own claims of economic benefit did not stack up, was frequently referenced in the debate and arguably one of the most influential documents in the process.

The report found the airport had failed to include the economic costs of the extra carbon emissions created, while overestimating the benefits of increased tourism spending, erroneously boosting the business case in favour of the expansion. David concluded: 'The airport's consultants tried to rebut the arguments in the NEF paper. However, their "rebuttal" simply did not deal with these central criticisms. The economic benefits are significantly overstated while the disbenefits, applicable right across the West of England, were significantly understated.'

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### Budget a missed opportunity?

While the short-term focus of March's Budget statement was quite rightly the UK's response to the global coronavirus crisis, chancellor Rishi Sunak failed to deliver on the promised 'greenest Budget ever'.

CPRE chief executive Crispin Truman said: 'The announcement of the £27 billion-worth of tarmac, and the continued fuel duty freeze, clearly undermine the government's claim to be tackling the climate emergency. This sort of investment will only serve to encourage more people into cars instead of using sustainable and reliable public transport, where significant investment is sorely needed. Road investment means more carbon emissions fuelling the climate crisis and poorer air quality choking our cities, towns and rural communities.'

However, it was heartening to hear the chancellor announce the creation of the Nature for Climate Fund with more investment to ensure we harness the power of nature to tackle the climate emergency. Investing in restoring peat bogs and planting more trees, both of which lock up carbon, is welcome. Let's ensure this fund focuses on planting more hedgerows, which need to be increased by at least 40% in order to tackle the climate emergency.'

# News round-up

Keeping you on top of the latest relevant issues

## 'Levelling up' housing investment

**New CPRE analysis published in March revealed that the public money spent on housing schemes in Greater London is three times that in the midlands engine and northern powerhouse 'super regions'.**

Recent allocations for London from three Government funds designed to promote and reward increased house building (the New Homes Bonus, the Housing Infrastructure Fund and the Home Building Fund) equalled the combined total spend in both super regions, directly contradicting the government's 'levelling up' agenda. CPRE is calling on the government to reform these house building schemes immediately and to invest a fairer share of funding in the north and midlands, where there is potential to make this public money go much further in providing affordable

homes as part of transformative urban regeneration schemes.

The New Homes Bonus – a grant paid by central government to local councils to reflect and incentivise housing growth in their areas – has shown some particularly stark contrasts since it was launched in 2011. Central Bedfordshire (pop. 280,000) has received more funds than Manchester (545,000), while Cambridge (125,000) has had more than Newcastle (292,000). Indeed, spending decisions have tended to favour the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Arc, which is getting substantially more funding per capita than the north. To right this imbalance, there should be a more explicit focus on regenerating deprived areas. Indeed, nearly four times as many new homes could be built on suitable brownfield land in the Northern Powerhouse as in London.

## Social housing waiting lists grow in most rural areas

**Waiting lists for social housing in rural communities are on the rise, necessitating a significant uplift in investment in homes that people can afford to live in.**

According to recent CPRE research, the backlog in unmet demand for social housing is continuing to grow year-on-year, with hundreds fewer genuinely affordable houses delivered last year compared to the year before. Over half (58%) of rural local authorities' waiting lists for social housing have grown between 2018 and 2019, according to analysis of the government's own housing figures. In 2018/19, a little over 1,000 social homes were delivered across 91 rural local authorities in England. On current building rates, it will take 154 years to clear the backlog in social housing.

The councils that have seen some of

the biggest increases in waiting lists include North Kesteven and Suffolk Coastal – which had 4,321 households on the waiting list compared to 1,751 the previous year, and no social homes delivered for the past three years. This trend is pushing young people out of rural areas, as well as those working in essential services. By investing in social housing, CPRE argues that we can attract the 'missing millennials' back into the countryside, which will boost spending and investment in local economies and improve social diversity.

Overall, the number of people on rural authority housing waiting lists has fallen marginally from 173,584 to 167,160. But government figures have shown that the number of families classified as homeless in rural towns and villages across England has increased by 85% between 2018 and 2019.





© Martin Pickup Photography

## Promoting the Rimrose Valley

**A**bracing February day saw CPRE Lancashire host a special 10km walk (above), raising awareness of the threat to the Rimrose Valley Country Park in South Sefton.

The park is currently under threat from Highways England plans to build a new road that would scythe through a vital Green Belt asset providing important green, open space in this largely urban area. Dozens of hardy walkers were joined by CPRE chief executive Crispin Truman

and co-campaigners from the Friends of Rimrose Valley group. The Friends' Stuart Bennett said: 'When our daughter was born a few years ago, one of the best ways of getting out of the house with a baby was to go out for a walk, and Rimrose is right on our doorstep – I've got really fond memories of that. Loads of families use this as a recreational space – I've lost count of the number of people who've told us that they learned to ride their bike here.'

## Flight Blight hits the headlines

**A** report published by the CPRE South East region's aviation group in January gained national coverage of its calls for government to improve the way it monitors aircraft noise.

Their research – carried out by aviation consultants To70 – shows that current maps seriously underestimate the problem, which is becoming a major issue in the face of proposals for airport expansion. The study maps data which measures the impact of noise pollution at lower levels than those currently mapped in the UK. These low levels, which are already used for monitoring noise pollution in other European countries, are believed to be a better indicator of the true impact of noise pollution on the countryside and urban areas.

The CPRE report, *Flight Blight: The social and environmental cost of aviation*

expansion, uses Gatwick airport as an example and finds that applying European standards increases the area impacted by aircraft noise fivefold. It recommends that the UK should monitor and report aviation noise at lower threshold levels, commission independent research into its impact on health, and give the Independent Commission on Civil Aviation Noise (ICCAN) statutory powers to restrict it.

Elsewhere, CPRE Hertfordshire and CPRE Bedfordshire are strongly objecting to the expansion of London Luton Airport from 18 to 32 million passengers per annum. They argue that 103,000 additional flights a year – a 60% increase on current levels – will result in hugely increased emissions. Furthermore, increased traffic to the airport would cause significant congestion in the area, requiring new roads and an additional 7,750 parking spaces.

## Green Belt link road halted

CPRE West Yorkshire had an early Christmas present in December when Leeds City Council scrapped plans for a new link road to Leeds Bradford Airport. Unfortunately, the council is still intending to go ahead with related developments near to the airport, including 36.2 hectares of commercial development on undeveloped land to the north of the site. They are also proposing to go ahead with plans for a new 'Parkway' railway station on Green Belt land about a mile to the east of the airport, providing park and ride 'opportunities' and a shuttle bus service to the terminal.

Campaigners fear that both of these related developments would still be a massive intrusion on the Green Belt and act as a magnet for longer-term development around the airport – including other local road transport improvements, now the link road has been scrapped. The council and airport say the Parkway station will 'ensure a significant amount of car journeys are taken off local roads with all the carbon and congestion benefits this provides', but many think the council should be more ambitious and propose a direct train link in to the airport. CPRE West Yorkshire continues to scrutinise the plans and is calling for a more strategic review of development around Leeds Bradford airport.

## Reprieve for Dorset AONB?

Controversial plans for 90 homes on a 6.5 hectare site outside Bridport have been withdrawn following objections from local people supported by CPRE West Dorset. They argued that the site is greenfield farmland within the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), and would breach local and national planning regulations and guidelines. CPRE concluded 'the development would cause irreparable harm to the landscape and environment and to the character and heritage of the town of Bridport, and place increased strain on already over-burdened local services, while offering no reasonable public interest benefits in the form of genuinely affordable housing for local residents.'

Unfortunately, it appears that one of the reasons the scheme has been withdrawn is because permission has already been granted for up to 930 houses at Vearse Farm – a proposed urban extension to Bridport that would be the biggest ever development on AONB land. CPRE Dorset has been supporting the ADVEARSE local campaign group in challenging this development through a legal review of the decision. CPRE's Richard Nicholls joined campaigners at the full Judicial Review hearing at the end of January 2020 and we are currently awaiting the judge's written verdict.

# letter from the field

Words from local campaigners



## Dark skies matter

**J**ohn Evans of the Dark Skies Matter campaign writes on why light pollution is much worse than ugly, and what we can do about it.

Dark Skies Matter is a partnership between CPRE Surrey, Surrey Hills AONB, Surrey Wildlife Trust and RSPB Guildford. These organisations have come together to speak with one voice against the spread of light pollution in Surrey and to share up-to-date information on its harmful effects. We hope and anticipate that others will join us.

The soiling of the nighttime environment by badly designed and ill-directed lighting, and by lights that are on when they don't need to be, has devastated our view of the night sky. It has wiped out in a few decades a source of wonder, inspiration and understanding that has been there for us from the earliest times.

There is now evidence identifying the disruption of our natural rhythms by artificial light at night as harmful to human physical and mental wellbeing, and linked to the occurrence of specific diseases. Also well documented is the harmful impact of artificial light on biodiversity and on animal communities on which we depend. Then there are the obvious issues of waste, and the impact on climate change of keeping lights burning throughout the night. Light pollution has now joined the list of human behaviours that we now recognise as cause for real and urgent concern.

With this knowledge comes shared responsibility. The harm due to waste light impacts everyone. Homeowners need to ask themselves whether their 'designer' lighting looks prettier than



the natural night it is helping to destroy. Businesses need to query whether office blocks need to impersonate urban lighthouses after everyone has left and gone home. Technology gives us the opportunity to take control of street lighting not simply in order to cut costs, but to implement lighting regimes that reflect current knowledge.

The amount of polluting artificial light in Surrey is already well beyond the point that should trigger serious concern. Using the lower energy costs of LED technology to justify maintaining these current levels would mean allowing damaging, old habits to shove aside the environmental evidence and compromise the future. Given what we now know, the defensible amount of artificial light at night is the minimum amount consistent with meeting genuine need. Where such need exists, for example on busy roads, measures should be taken to limit the collateral damage of glare and spillage.

There is no place for light pollution in a modern environmentally aware society. It has no upsides, only downsides. But we can do something about it. Please consider getting involved by emailing [darkskiesmatter@gmail.com](mailto:darkskiesmatter@gmail.com)



# Good ideas

Learning from each other



© Dr Pat Clissold

## Celebrating Gavray Meadows

CPRE Oxfordshire has been supporting communities across the county in producing films celebrating their local areas and explaining why they need protecting from development. The latest film has been produced by the Save Gavray Meadows campaign group to promote this accredited Local Wildlife Site – the only remaining area of untouched damp grassland in the Bicester area. Grazing cattle maintain the grasses and flowers here, allowing birds to thrive – including migratory warblers, kestrels,

sparrowhawks, buzzards and red kites. The small wood at the north end of the meadows provides roosting for bats and shelter for smaller birds, while foxes, rabbits and butterflies abound. Gavray is threatened by development and the film makes the case that it must be preserved not only as a wildlife site, but as a piece of a living history that records how our countryside was managed for hundreds of years. Find out the latest news and view the film at [facebook.com/savegavraywildlifemeadows](https://facebook.com/savegavraywildlifemeadows)

## Supporting rural schools

CPRE Sussex presented a cheque for over £120 to Firle Primary School in November, as part of its work to support rural communities across the county. 'As the countryside charity, CPRE believes that village schools are important for thriving rural communities,' said CPRE Sussex director, Kia Trainor. 'Many small schools in Sussex find it hard if the number of children attending drops due to demographic changes. CPRE Sussex has been working with the Firle Estate to support the development of new affordable housing which also helps to keep small schools viable.' The money was raised by members of the local CPRE

Lewes group at a tour of the Firle Estate last summer. 'We are delighted to give this money to the children of Firle school,' said CPRE Lewes chair Phillip Pople 'The children have a great list of things they are fundraising for!'



## Saving Helland Bridge

This ancient stone bridge, situated between Camelford and Bodmin, was built around 1470 to get people, animals and the odd horse and cart across the River Camel. But having a double bend in it and being extremely narrow, it is a test of skill for even the most competent motorist. With 136 knocks and scrapes in the last two years, CPRE Cornwall were asked for their ideas to make the access lane quieter and reduce the damage to this rare and picturesque piece of rural Cornwall. They have produced a report with recommendations about how this could be done by restricting and informing approaching vehicles, in harmony with the rural surroundings. Find out more at [www.cprecornwall.org](http://www.cprecornwall.org)

## Wild swimming in London

In a move that could create new green space for London, CPRE London has joined forces with Save Lea Marshes to campaign for the historic filter beds on Lea Bridge Road, once owned by Thames Water, to be transformed into a venue for wild swimming. A petition to Waltham Forest Council gained over 1,200 signatures in support of their vision for the site, which also includes new planting and landscaping, rewilded areas and space for small-scale food growing. Read all the latest news from the capital at [cprelondon.org.uk](http://cprelondon.org.uk)

**Living in beauty**

Our new housing design audit (right) had an immediate impact on government thinking, with the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission immediately taking on board our recommendations in their Living in Beauty report calling for local authorities to 'refuse ugliness' and make 'beauty an essential condition of planning permission'.

Secretary of state for housing Robert Jenrick said: 'We need to ensure our planning system, with all its flaws and complexities and convolutions favours beauty as the default rather than the exception, with more opportunities for smaller developers, for self builders, for entrepreneurs, for visionaries, for great stewards of their landscapes. I will establish a "fast-track for beauty" [for] individuals and developers who have put in the time to create proposals for well-designed buildings, which use high quality-materials which take account of their local setting.'

CPRE's chief executive Crispin Truman said: 'The commission is right to call for stronger local policies and more weight given to beauty in planning decisions. New homes and new places must be attractive, but also easy to get around without a car, pleasant to live in, low-carbon and friendly to nature. We urge ministers to take up the commission's recommendations.'

# step by step

## Towards better housing design

**T**he design of new housing developments in England is overwhelmingly 'mediocre' or 'poor', with less-affluent communities the worst affected, according to A Housing Design Audit for England conducted by UCL for CPRE and the Place Alliance.

The audit of over 140 housing developments built across England since 2007 found that one in five of these developments should have been refused planning permission outright, as their poor design was contrary to advice given in the National Planning Policy Framework. A further 54% should not have been granted permission without significant improvements to their design having been made first.

The audit also found that less affluent communities are ten times more likely to get worse design even though better design is affordable, while low-scoring housing developments were let down by architecture that does not respond to local character or create a sense of place. CPRE's campaigns and policy director, Tom Fyans, said: 'The government has presided over a decade of disastrous housing design and must raise standards immediately. This research is utterly damning of larger housebuilders and their failure to build the homes our communities deserve. They must significantly raise their game if we are to create the sorts of places that future generations will feel proud to call home. It's no wonder so many of our communities feel apprehensive towards new development when the design is so poor. That's why significantly improving the quality of design is central to addressing the housing shortage.'

Despite the negativity of the overall findings, the report managed to identify enough examples of good practice to help devise the following principles of good design. We hope that these steps will help local authorities and national government to improve the future standard of housing.

### 1 Set clear aspirations, then review

The use of proactive tools that encompass design aspirations for specific sites – notably design codes – are the most effective means for local authorities to positively influence design quality. Such tools give greater certainty for housebuilders and communities, but their use and the sorts of design ambitions that they will espouse should be made clear in policy, well in advance of sites coming forward for development. Local authorities should also establish or commission a design review panel and subject all major housing projects to a programme of design review.

### 2 Deal with the highways/planning disconnect

Highways authorities should take responsibility for their part in creating positive streets and places, not simply roads and infrastructure. Highways design and adoption functions should work in a wholly integrated manner with planning, perhaps through the establishment of multi-disciplinary urban design teams, and by involving highways authorities in the commissioning of design review.

### 3 Refuse sub-standard schemes on design grounds

The NPPF is very clear in its advice that 'good design is a key aspect of sustainable development'. Consequently 'poor' and even 'mediocre' design is not sustainable and falls foul of the NPPF's 'Presumption in favour of sustainable development'. Local planning authorities need to have the courage of their convictions and set clear local aspirations by refusing schemes that do not meet their published design standards. Some well-designed large schemes are being undermined by poor phasing strategies resulting in the delivery of disconnected parcels of residential only development. Delivery of design quality requires both





Well-designed housing can deliver distinctive places that people are proud to live in

the whole and the parts to be properly scrutinised by local planning authorities at all stages during the design and delivery process.

#### **4 Be more prescriptive on density**

The clear benefits of designing at higher (not high) densities is apparent. The best schemes averaged 56 dwellings per hectare (dph), approaching double the current national average of 31 dph – which is almost exactly the average density of schemes scoring ‘poor’ in the audit (32 dph). Government should be more prescriptive in seeking more urban densities (compatible with other contextual factors) in the NPPF – densities of at least 50dph that are able to support public transport, and a mix of uses and local facilities.

#### **5 Learn from best practice but publicise rejected schemes**

Work with the industry to seek out, and proactively showcase good design by volume housebuilders, for example through online case studies and dedicated national housing design guidance – this should cover everything from the design of bins and storage to the location and connectivity of housing. The Planning Inspectorate should be encouraged to reject schemes that do not live up to the design aspirations as set out in the NPPF – regardless of whether local housing targets have been met or not – and publicise these decisions.

#### **6 Understand design in less affluent contexts**

Commission research into delivering design quality in less affluent areas, including on how standard housing units can be used in more creative ways to deliver distinctive places, and how local authorities can become more engaged in delivery through public/private partnerships or other means.

#### **7 Require place-first highways design and parking**

This could begin by requiring highways authorities to adopt the Manual for Streets or an equivalent place-focussed guidance on highways design and by issuing national guidance on what it is reasonable to charge for adopting trees and other landscape elements. How parking is handled can make or break the design of residential environments. National research on the successful integration of parking across different densities should be commissioned as the basis for guidance to be adopted on the subject nationally and locally.

#### **8 Continue to audit progress**

A Housing Design Audit for England provides a new baseline from which to measure progress on the design of housing, but the Place Alliance will struggle to repeat the exercise given the resource implications and the reliance on voluntary input. The government has a duty to monitor the design quality of the residential sector and should fund its own repeat audit no later than 2024.

## **OTHER NEWS**

### **Planning for the future**

March saw housing secretary Robert Jenrick set out proposals to ‘bring Britain’s planning system into the 21st century’ by encouraging urban regeneration and ensuring the redevelopment of high streets is housing-led, building upwards and above and around stations. The changes come ahead of plans for an ambitious planning white paper – set to radically reform the planning system by speeding up the decision-making process so homes can be built quicker where they are needed the most.

Good design and place-making will be at the heart of the new system, championing tree-lined streets and a commitment to lower carbon emissions in all new homes – for a green revolution in housebuilding. In response to the proposals, CPRE chief executive Crispin Truman, said: ‘The housing secretary is absolutely right – we need more well-designed homes that people can afford to live in delivered through a democratic, locally-led planning system. But the devil of these announcements will come out in the detail. Pledges to review the assessment of local housing need is one of many areas that needs work. We must ensure this enables councils to plan for homes that people can afford to live in rather than a simplistic housing target, which allows house builders to build whatever they like.’

**A successful alliance**

The CPRE North East Newsletter reported how a successful alliance between CPRE Durham and Middleton St George Parish Council has helped win the legal battle to stop a greenfield development on the edge of the village. When developers challenged the local authority's initial rejection of the 280 houses and 60-bed care home, our campaigners and the parish council joined forces to assemble expert witnesses for a public inquiry. Faced with strong opposition, the developers then withdrew their appeal, to the delight of CPRE North East chair Richard Cowen: 'This was clearly inappropriate development which would have harmed the countryside and affected the quality of life of people living nearby.'

**Unsustainable development**

CPRE Cambridgeshire helped defeat a speculative and unsustainable development of 110 homes on a 10 acre field outside Haddenham. They argued that this went way beyond the local plan's long-term vision for the village, which has already seen over 80 new homes approved since 2012. Haddenham Parish Council said approving the application would 'seriously undermine the work done to identify suitable housing land supply' within the village. East Cambridgeshire planning officers agreed, refusing permission on the grounds of the 'sustainability of the scale'.

# Parishbeat

Effective solutions for your parish

## Signposting the way for Somerset's heritage

**CPRE Somerset has been allocating grant funding to parish councils for the restoration of historic fingerpost signs, with Stogursey Parish Council doing amazing work on 16 local signposts.**

Their team of volunteers has worked very hard but now has the satisfaction of seeing these wonderful features restored to their former glory. They found that some posts were very rusty but that this could be fixed with some strong wire brushing and careful repainting using rather expensive specialist paint. However, other signposts were in need of serious surgery with broken arms, often damaged by passing vehicles. Replacement arms (in some cases a bit shorter to avoid vehicle

damage) and collars had to be ordered from Somerset Forge at considerable cost.

The group has also offered grants to Woolavington, Williton and Mark Parish Councils and look forward to seeing their successes. A few other parishes have expressed an interest and CPRE Somerset hope to receive applications from them well before the funding deadline of September 2020. The project is limited to parishes within 10 miles of Hinkley C (funded by the Hinkley C Community Fund) but our campaigners are working with Somerset County Council and exploring funding opportunities to roll it out countywide if possible. Keep up with the latest news at [cpresomerset.org.uk](http://cpresomerset.org.uk)

## Setting a precedent in Bedfordshire

**CPRE Bedfordshire and Langford Parish Council are celebrating together after successfully opposing the proposed development of 55 new homes on greenfield land on the northern edge of the village, close to the tranquil River Ivel.**

The village's neighbourhood plan was nearing completion and this site had not been allocated for development within it. Central Bedfordshire Council duly rejected the planning application, but the developers then took the case to an

appeal inquiry. The proposed site was visited by the Inspector several times during the Inquiry in order to gain first-hand knowledge of Langford's rural character. Campaigners and locals were relieved that the Inspector decided that the benefits offered by the development of the site were far outweighed by the need to protect the landscape setting of the village. The case is now helping CPRE Bedfordshire defend other similar challenges and promote more sustainable development.

## Championing Avebury's byways

**CPRE Wiltshire is supporting Avebury residents campaign to get damaged byways around the village repaired and protected. Routes around the nearby ancient historic site of Windmill Hill are now so badly damaged by off-road motorists that they have become impassable, with tree roots exposed and ruts more than two feet deep.**

CPRE's Anne Henshaw has been trying to bring together interested community and charity groups to set up something similar to the Cotswold Warden scheme. Stephen Stacey, chairman of Avebury Parish Council said: 'These byways are for everyone's use, but the actions of a few selfish people have made them inaccessible.'



# Campaigner

## Des Brennan and Keith Francis

**W**e are delighted to report that CPRE Lancashire trustee Dr Des Brennan (who recently celebrated his 89th birthday) has been awarded the Countryside Medal, CPRE's most prestigious recognition for volunteers.

Debbie McConnell, Chair of CPRE Lancashire, Liverpool City Region and Greater Manchester, commented: 'Notwithstanding his venerable age, Des is a very active member of the team, making an enormous and invaluable contribution to our work. He is adept at planning policy and climate change science and councils, regulators and developers alike have learned to respect (not to say fear) his submissions, which are always factually well founded and clearly argued. The medal is more than well deserved'.

As recently as October, Des was fielded by CPRE Lancashire to give evidence at the public inquiry into proposals to build an 18-hole championship golf resort on the historic Green Belt estate of Hulton Park, near Bolton. He gave an excellent, considered and detailed representation concerning a legal agreement – which has since been amended to be watertight – that no development can commence on site before it is certain that a bid to host a Ryder Cup tournament has been successful.

Des had previously come to national attention in 2011, when plans to build a new marina on Green Belt land alongside the Leeds-Liverpool Canal at Lydiate capsized after opposition from local people. Local MP Bill Esterson was fulsome in his praise, saying: 'Des Brennan from the CPRE in Sefton gave an excellent presentation [to a public meeting attended by over 140 local people], which may well have swung the decision in favour of the residents.'

### Changing Essex for the better

Meanwhile, one of CPRE Essex's most faithful servants has been rewarded for his efforts with a Length of Service Award



Des receives his medal from Debbie and CPRE North West chair Peter Raynes

and volunteer medal. Keith Francis, from Orsett, who at a mere 86 years old is still fighting for his beloved south Essex, received his award and medal from Tricia Moxey, CPRE Essex vice-chairman. Both had been in London for a meeting with Highways England on the proposed Lower Thames Crossing. The scheme has been one of Keith's primary concerns in recent years, while he has also helped monitor development of the London Gateway port at Tilbury and campaigned to save Orsett Hospital from closure.

Keith has been involved with CPRE Essex for some 20 years and been a trustee for 'about half that time'. Tricia said: 'There can be few more deserving recipients of these accolades. Keith has been an example to us all of how campaigners can help change things for the better, no matter how difficult the odds might initially appear. His energy and enthusiasm are boundless and I am proud to know him – CPRE Essex would be a very much poorer organisation without Keith Francis. I only wish we had more like him.'

### The route to success

Friends of the Peak District, which represents CPRE in the National Park, has been awarded a Community Grant of £4,000 from the South West Peak Landscape Partnership and the National Lottery Heritage Fund to promote their Peak District Boundary Walk. This 200-mile route around the edge of the National Park was developed by the Friends in 2017 to encourage people to understand, cherish and want to protect its outstanding natural beauty. Five of the 20 stages of the Boundary Walk are in the South West Peak region, stretching from Waterfall to Buxton.

The grant will help the Friends engage with local residents and community groups to encourage them to explore the walk. It will also help build connections with local businesses along the route, who would benefit from welcoming walkers to the area. In addition, the project will provide volunteering opportunities for people in the region to get together and gain new skills in monitoring and maintaining the route, and becoming local Boundary Walk ambassadors.

In further good news for the walk, the Ramblers Holidays Charitable Trust has agreed to support the Peak District Boundary Walk with a project grant of £2,000 to further this community engagement and protect footpaths along the route. Find out more at [friendsofthepeak.org.uk/boundary-walk](https://friendsofthepeak.org.uk/boundary-walk)

## London's 'climate safety belt'

CPRE London's latest research has revealed major threats to Green Belt in nine London Boroughs, and they argue that only stronger controls over development will allow it to continue to function as our 'climate safety belt'.

Between November 2019 and February 2020 CPRE London analysed Borough Local Plan Review documents to assess the level of threat. Alice Roberts of CPRE London said: 'Of the nine boroughs, Hounslow is top of our list, proposing to destroy Green Belt the size of 200 football pitches. Elsewhere Kingston-upon-Thames has listed 22 Green Belt sites up for development, Croydon has three sites in mind and Enfield sees the Crews Hill as an area for development. Boroughs say they must find space for housing but planning permission is already in place for a quarter of a million new homes in London and there is enough previously developed land to build for at least 20 years.'

'Our Green Belt is our climate safety belt, promoting the development of a compact, efficient, low-carbon city where people travel less by car and goods don't have to be moved so far. But with more extreme weather events, our Green Belt is also now vital in managing rainfall and flooding and reducing high temperatures generated by the urban heat island effect.'

# In review

Our perspective on countryside issues

## A positive vision for the Green Belt

**The All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on the London Metropolitan Green Belt has been supported by CPRE in publishing A Positive Vision for London's Green Belt, with an introduction by CPRE chair Su Sayer and London Green Belt Council chair Richard Knox-Johnston. Both argue that the Green Belt is more important than ever, due to 'the significant changes that are needed to address the climate emergency, the increasing disconnect of young people from nature and the considerable amount of evidence in support of green space and its beneficial effects on health and wellbeing'.**

In the context of the UK's responsibility to address the climate emergency, they stress that 'Green Belt also has the ability to sequester carbon, reduce the threat of flooding and provide clean air and fresh water. In addition, there is the increasing role of mitigating urban heating as well as providing space for those living in urban communities to relax, play and explore.' In supporting this positive future vision, the APPG recommended a number of actions, beginning with the boundaries of the Green Belt being reconfirmed in perpetuity, in the way that Sites of Special Scientific Interest were confirmed in the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act. It also wants to see a full strategic review by government of land use within the Green Belt, securing clean air, clean water and restored soils and ecosystems – which would help build in resilience for urban areas and improve microclimates.

### Investing in nature's recovery

The vision calls for the creation of new access plans to reconnect people with food growing, increase health and wellbeing, and create opportunities for young people to engage in outdoor learning and play. It says creating a long-term (25 year) statutory strategic plan for London's Green Belt, similar

to management plans for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, can help take a natural capital approach to valuing those benefits. Such a plan could guide and apply the proposed new Environmental Land Management System within the Green Belt, and act as a test-bed for developing Local Nature Recovery Strategies as proposed in the Environment Bill.

**6 Encouraging landowners to enhance accessibility and reverse biodiversity loss will help promote healthy recreation and strengthen ecological networks 9**

Developing a local nature recovery network covering the Green Belt, in collaboration with stakeholders and communities, could help guide investment in enhancement projects like tree planting and extending existing forests and copses on low-quality agricultural land. This would improve the landscape, assist in flood prevention and CO<sub>2</sub> absorption, and provide opportunities for nature-based therapy. Encouraging landowners to enhance public accessibility and prioritise the reversal of biodiversity loss will help promote healthy recreation and strengthen ecological networks.

Finally, the vision is keen that agricultural land and sustainable farming activities should continue to be supported, with national and local planning policy that promotes sustainable land management. It argues that farming in the Metropolitan Green Belt is well placed to serve local markets, and wants to see the promotion of more outlets for local farm produce to increase its availability to London, the east and the south east. As the Government reviews policy in a food strategy, decision makers should strategically assess the impact of other development on farmland and food production – particularly as an additional nine million meals will be needed per day in London and the south east by 2045.



# Q&A

## The answers you need

### Community needs vs developer viability

**Q** I regularly see local housing decisions focus on the viability of the scheme for developers, rather than the infrastructure needs of the community. Surely, promised developer contributions are more important than ever – given the lack of funding in local councils – and must not be a condition of planning approval?

**A** CPRE Lancashire has been making the case that developers must adequately cover the costs of community facilities and infrastructure in order to be granted approval, and to ensure that new developments are in line with the local plans. They wrote to Burnley Council in response to the developer contributions Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) consultation to urge that contributions allow new developments to comply with local policies, including those on affordable homes, school places, school buses, play equipment, healthcare and trees.

They report that local people in Cliviger

were baffled when council officers appeared to ask for a lower level of developer contributions due to the imposition of a 'viability cap'. Following local pressure, the developer voluntarily increase its contribution, including for 'off-site' affordable housing. However, CPRE Lancashire believes this should be a matter for the SPD to assert rather than being at the developer's behest. In both instances, our campaigners highlighted the legal judgment in the case of [2018] EWHC 991 (Admin), where a developer tried to bypass a council's affordable housing requirements. The judgement established that community infrastructure requirements as set out in local plans must be adhered to, with Mr Justice Holgate calling on professional bodies and the government to revisit guidance on how to calculate financial viability. CPRE Lancashire has made its arguments to the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors which is currently updating its own guidance on developer viability.

### Fossil fuels post-Heathrow

**Q** What does the recent Court of Appeal ruling on Heathrow's third runway mean for other planning applications that will cause significant fossil fuel emissions – particularly the extraction of coal, shale and oil?

**A** CPRE Sussex have been arguing that the Heathrow judgement doesn't just have legal implications for airport expansion in the UK, but that we must also rethink fracking and other forms of fossil fuel extraction. Trustee Michael Brown has written to West Sussex County Council in relation to the current live application for oil exploration at Balcombe, highlighting that the recent Heathrow judgement ([2020] EWCA Civ 214) gives additional grounds for the council to take account of

national climate change policy, including commitments under the 2015 Paris Accord, when deciding this application. CPRE Sussex was already objecting – partly on climate change grounds – to this application, and the letter reiterated that 'in the light of the new game-changing Court of Appeal ruling, [you need] to give full and careful consideration to the climate change impacts of the proposal'. It concluded that as the development proposal is so inconsistent with Government policy as set out in chapter 14 of the NPPF ('Meeting the challenge of climate change'), that factor must carry greater weight than the limited economic benefits of oil and gas exploration in this case. We await the rationale given for the eventual decision.

#### Against the tide of shale

CPRE Lancashire is objecting to an application by Aurora Energy Resources for shale exploration at Sutton's Lane, Great Altcar. They say that as well as being contrary to the UK's legally binding climate change commitments, the activities would significantly increase the proportion of heavy goods vehicles on narrow country lanes. Furthermore, the application had already been called in by council planners due to the significant impact of the development on the openness of the Green Belt, and the potential loss of amenity to nearby residents.

Not only will tranquillity and dark skies be adversely impacted, but the local landscape character will be harmed by a highly visible drilling rig (illuminated at night) and well compound. The area has a flat topography and limited intrusions due to the ditch field boundary system, so is ill suited to shale exploration. CPRE Lancashire is also concerned about the impact on the Downholland Moss SSSI, fearing birds using that habitat will avoid noisy activity and prominent structures. They will continue to argue the development is 'against the tide in terms of climate change' and call for 'cleaner renewable technologies to support the rural economy and jobs in the future.'

**Biodiversity offsetting?**

Stoke-on-Trent City Council's planning committee recently approved plans for a 65 hectare housing development that will raise almost £250,000 to 'offset' the biodiversity it damages, including barn owl habitats. Planning officers had argued that without appropriate compensation, the development would have had a very damaging effect on habitat and wildlife such as the EU-protected great crested newt. A 'suitable financial contribution towards off-site mitigation' was agreed between the developer and the council using the DEFRA Biodiversity Metric 2.0 calculator – the most up-to-date tool for calculating the monetary value of natural habitats. In total, the developer has been asked to pay £9.4m in payments to the council, which will go towards affordable housing, education and leisure provision.

While the council's own ecologist believes the measures enabled by the money will equate to a biodiversity net gain of 39%, CPRE campaigners have argued that the permanent loss of 45ha of habitat for habitat improvements of 5ha did not justify planning permission. Biodiversity net gain, as set out in the Environment Bill, requires developers to ensure habitats are enhanced and left in a measurably better state than they were pre-development, delivering at least a 10% improvement in biodiversity.

# Campaign spotlight

## Tackling the climate emergency

**T**he climate emergency is likely to change our countryside beyond recognition. We risk losing the cycle of the seasons, the food we depend on, and the wildlife that makes our country, and our world, so wonderful. But, it doesn't have to be this way. By planting more trees and hedgerows, taking better care of our soils, restoring peatlands, and supporting farmers to produce our food in a more sustainable way, the countryside can be at the heart of solving this crisis, while also restoring and enhancing the natural world that surrounds us.

The threats posed by the climate emergency to our countryside and rural communities are profound. The UK's Committee on Climate Change (CCC) has identified a number of risks, including: loss of quality of cropland; sea level rise affecting land and communities in coastal areas; new pests, disease and species migration posing risks to crops, livestock and trees; greater water stress affecting the ecological health of lakes and rivers; degradation of peatland; and increased extreme weather events that will pose increasing threats to communities, businesses, infrastructure and the natural environment.

### An equitable transition for rural areas

CPRE wants to see a thriving, beautiful countryside rich in nature playing a crucial role in our nation's response to this emergency. Both mitigating the worst future impacts of climate change and adapting to the changes already being felt are essential. The solutions to tackle the climate emergency – from making our homes more energy efficient to creating new sustainable public transport – will require transformational change across

the country, touching every sector and community.

At the heart of our approach will be the need for an equitable transition for rural areas. We must move towards a net-zero future that is equitable and democratic; that empowers and benefits rural communities; supports a thriving rural economy and the ecosystems it relies on; is sensitive to our cultural heritage and wildlife and works in harmony with our valued landscapes. The countryside's role in delivering net-zero emissions provides an unrivalled opportunity to ensure the necessary changes help create a more resilient and diverse landscape.

Many decisions will need to be taken at a devolved level, and it is important to ensure that power should be exercised as much as possible at the lowest practical level – close to the people affected by the decisions. Local authorities must have the ability to respond to what local people need and want, not just what they are told to do by central government. CPRE will advocate for the full consideration of all environmentally sustainable options and the use of democratic decision-making processes. Deliberative approaches such as citizens assemblies can ensure that the voices of local communities are considered.



Extreme weather will cause even more rural floods





CPRE protesters supporting the 2019 climate strike

### A low-carbon land use strategy for England

There are many aspects of the climate emergency that require urgent action, but after extensive consultation with stakeholders we have chosen to focus on the four areas of land use (including farming and forestry), building, energy and transport. We will call for significant changes in land use that will require a fundamental shift in public policy, towards discouraging greenhouse gas emissions and rewarding carbon storage and sequestration. Changes must be carried out in a way that enhances landscape character and nature, while supporting thriving and sustainable rural economies and communities. CPRE believes it is essential to develop an integrated, low carbon land-use strategy for England (with associated action plans), to ensure the required changes in land use and management are sustainable.

All future development must contribute to efforts to mitigate and adapt to the climate emergency. Sustainable development needs to be redefined to focus on living within environmental limits and the importance of addressing the climate emergency. A radical overhaul of the planning system should deliver zero carbon development alongside social, economic and other environmental benefits, not as a trade-off with them. Building Regulations must also be

radically tightened up to ensure that new and existing buildings meet zero carbon standards.

### Empowering communities on energy and transport

A transition to a decentralised, zero carbon energy system must empower and benefit local communities, and be delivered in harmony with our natural environment and landscapes. CPRE wants to see local people empowered to help shape their local energy response. We will also support rural communities to make the transition to low carbon heating solutions, such as heat pumps, in a way that addresses fuel poverty and delivers better comfort and health outcomes for residents.

We want to see the government develop a single, binding national carbon budget and reduction plan for the transport sector as a whole. This should include the implementation of a functional transport hierarchy approach to travel choices which prioritises active travel (walking and cycling), then provision of public transport. The aviation sector must be included in the UK carbon budget with targets for progressive reduction, with internal flights phased out and replaced by improved electric rail services. There should be no further airport expansion, and higher rates of taxation and other disincentives for frequent fliers should be developed.

### Making regeneration sustainable

CPRE South Yorkshire has responded to a pre-application consultation by Patrick Properties on their draft plans to redevelop the huge derelict Hepworth's factory site in the Loxley Valley on the edge of Sheffield. Whilst our campaigners welcomed some positive aspects of the proposed development, they continue to have some very big concerns about the impact of building up to 350 houses in a Green Belt location with few facilities and poor infrastructure. They have warned that the site could become an unsustainable enclave, pushing up the city's carbon footprint as villagers travel elsewhere in their cars to meet their everyday needs.

The developers say their proposals are the only way of funding a clean-up of derelict works that were abandoned by Hepworths in the early 1990s. But CPRE South Yorkshire say they share residents' concerns and are urging Patrick to scale down their plans for this sensitive location. Head of campaigns Andy Tickle said there were some welcome features to the draft scheme – including fast broadband workspace, extensive tree planting and enhanced rights of way alongside the River Loxley – but feared 'there is little commitment to ensuring the development is climate-friendly. When we are facing a climate emergency, this development must be very low carbon from the start.'

# Matter of fact

Support for your case

## Reviving county farms

**C**ounty farms were set-up at the end of the 19th century, inspired by Joseph Chamberlain's 1885 General Election pledge of 'three acres and a cow' for landless workers. His idea was that county councils should buy up land and lease it out, at low rents, to small tenant farmers. These smallholdings became known as county farms and proved to be a huge national asset, providing rural employment and cheap food during a long period of agricultural depression. Now, with agriculture – and our supply of fresh, local food – facing the unique challenges of Brexit and Climate Change, they have the potential to become new exemplars of sustainable farming.

But their recent decline is hugely worrying, with the area of county farms in England falling by over half from 426,000 acres to just under 209,000 acres since the late 1970s – as a result of privatisation, austerity and short-term thinking by governments and councils. Since 2010, three quarters of the 53 'Smallholdings Authorities' have sold off some of their farmland, while 9 no longer have any tenants. More than 15,000 acres (7%) of council-owned farmland has been lost in the past decade, with 60% of this land sold off in the past two years. This alarming trend, warns CPRE's Reviving county farms report, could continue unless new legislation that protects county farms for future generations is introduced.

More positively, seven out of nine councils that responded to the survey gave details of environmental and social benefits provided by their county farms (in addition to supporting new farmers), ranging

from tree planting to local education initiatives. CPRE is also arguing that county farms could play an important role in addressing the climate emergency while delivering benefits to local communities, such as providing locally-grown food for nearby schools.

### Whitehall Farm's innovative approach

Whitehall Farm is a 100 hectare farm owned by Cambridgeshire County Council and managed by Stephen Briggs on a 15-year tenancy, alongside over 300 hectares of other land. Stephen has taken an innovative agroforestry approach to build the profitability, resilience and sustainability of the farm. He has interplanted arable crops with 4,500 apple trees that provide an income, hold soil together and protect growing crops from the risk of extreme weather. Wildlife and birds such as tree sparrows, reed buntings, yellowhammers, English partridge and owls are also flourishing in this natural habitat.

Stephen said: 'The support I've received from my local county council has been invaluable. I'd like to see all local authorities encourage new entrants with fresh ideas and perspectives like myself to go into agriculture to keep this wonderful resource in the community as a vital asset. There are economic incentives for councils too, as the rent from our county farm and its innovative diversifications goes straight back to the county council, helping fund frontline services.'

### A rejuvenated purpose

Our report also recommends that the government should protect the future



Stephen Briggs on Whitehall Farm

of the county farm estate by legislating for a ministerial lock on their disposal, and issuing a rejuvenated purpose statement. A forthcoming Agriculture Act should also make it incumbent on councils to submit a report to the Environment Secretary detail how they plan to manage their county farms to deliver on a range of stipulated social and environmental purposes. The end of austerity and the lifting of some borrowing constraints would give councils greater leeway to create new farms as starter units for new entrants – including horticulture near towns and cities – and support them through reduced rents and business support.

All councils should promote the value of their county farms, working with tenants to boost public access, support farm open days and publicise their county farm locations and activities. A protected network of accessible and well-promoted county farms could help restore the public's relationship with agriculture – including by supplying fresh food to local schools, care homes and hospitals. Equally importantly, it will give a new generation of innovative and highly-motivated growers the chance to show how post-Brexit farm payments can help revitalise landscapes and wildlife.