



The  
countryside  
charity

# Fieldwork



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## Pressure builds on the Green Belt

**F**ebruary saw planning and environmental organisations, government officials and MPs attend a virtual roundtable event to launch CPRE's new report, *Countryside Next Door: State of the Green Belt 2021*. Our latest look at the threats facing the open land around our cities found that housing pressures have more than quadrupled since 2013, despite a soaring public appreciation of the green space it offers.

While our new polling reveals that 67% of adults think protecting and enhancing local green spaces should be a higher priority after lockdown, local plans for housing on the Green Belt mean that countryside accessible to over 30 million people is increasingly being targeted for development. Our research revealed

plans for 257,944 homes to be built on land removed from the Green Belt – a 475% increase on the numbers from 2013. Meanwhile, our survey of over 2,000 people found that 46% reported visiting green spaces more since the start of lockdown – up significantly from 35% in April 2020, and suggesting that people have increasingly been looking to local countryside for their mental health and wellbeing.

Commenting on the findings, CPRE chief executive Crispin Truman said: 'Local countryside and green space has been a lifeline through lockdown. The government can and must act to stop the loss of Green Belt and ensure greater access to nature and green space is at the heart of our planning system – by making the best use of brownfield sites.'

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# Fieldwork

Volume 18, Issue 1

## Editor

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Fieldwork is the newsletter of the CPRE The countryside charity, published in April, August and November.

CPRE is the countryside charity that campaigns to promote, enhance and protect the countryside for everyone's benefit, wherever they live.

ISSN 1744-8905 (Print)  
ISSN 1744-8913 (Online)



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## Pressure builds on the Green Belt

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### The brownfield alternative

CPRE continues to highlight the previously developed sites that provide a sustainable alternative to building on the Green Belt, and could supply enough land for over 1.3 million homes. One such site, York Central, next to the city's railway station, has recently been approved for a regeneration scheme that is set to provide up to 2,500 new homes (40% of which will be affordable) on 100 acres of land, creating around 6,500 new jobs. In contrast, a York Green Belt site of the same size that would have had a negative impact on Askham Bog Nature Reserve (and was spared from development last year following a CPRE-supported campaign) would only have provided 500 car-dependent homes.

The proposed affordability of the York Central site also highlights that only one in ten of the homes built on Green Belt between 2015/16 and 2019/20 are considered to be affordable. On this trajectory, we risk losing ever more Green Belt while having no impact on the affordability crisis. Furthermore, since we last reported in October 2019, the average density of newly created residential addresses within the Green Belt land has remained at just 14 dwellings per hectare (dph). This is an incredibly land-hungry rate and half the 31dph average of developments outside of the Green Belt.

### ● The proposed uplift in housing targets for cities and urban centres will massively increase the pressure on some Green Belts ●

In December 2020, the government announced a change in approach to calculating housing need in England, announcing a 'cities and urban centres uplift' whereby 20 of England's largest urban areas will have their housing targets increased by 35%. This proposed uplift will massively increase the pressure on the Green Belts that surround six of these cities which don't have enough

brownfield land on their registers to accommodate such numbers. London and Bristol will face the largest pressure on their Green Belts, having to find space for 177,907 and 5,948 homes respectively once all of their current brownfield land has been developed.

### The need for proactive planning

While the government's recent urban focus is welcome, there needs to be more proactive identification of brownfield, and the government needs to allow time for this. Otherwise, Green Belts will continue to be lost to unaffordable housing while swathes of derelict land lies wasted and underused. The threat to Green Belt land has increased considerably since regional plans were abolished in 2009, and since the adoption of the NPPF in 2012. The consequences of these policies needs to be addressed if we are to prevent the further loss of the land that is crucial for people's health and wellbeing, for the wildlife that calls it home and for mitigating the impacts of the climate emergency.

### ● The Strategic Environmental Assessments process must continue to identify less harmful alternative sites ●

To enable the Green Belt to continue to fulfil its function, while allowing for the provision of new homes, CPRE recommends the government reintroduces the use of strategic city regional planning into planning law through the upcoming Planning Bill. The Strategic Environmental Assessments process must also be maintained, so that it can continue to identify more sustainable and less harmful alternative sites. Most importantly, the government must introduce a clear 'brownfield first' policy in the Planning Bill, to ensure that suitable previously developed land can be prioritised for redevelopment through a more proactive approach to identifying brownfield sites.  
**Find out more:** Read our full State of the Green Belt report at [cpre.org.uk/resources](https://cpre.org.uk/resources)



# Break through

How volunteers are making a difference



© Richard Gravett

## Eastbourne becomes 'Treebourne'

CPRE Sussex has been taking an active role in a project that helped volunteers plant over 6,000 trees at community events held just before Christmas. While lockdown meant that planting paused for a while, the 'Treebourne' project still aims to double the town's urban canopy and bring nature back into the streets.

After Eastbourne Borough Council declared a climate emergency last year, CPRE Sussex became part of the Eastbourne ECO Action Network – a volunteer-run organisation created to help the council achieve carbon neutrality by 2030. Treebourne organisers continue to search for sites, raise the money to buy

trees, and recruit the volunteers needed to plant them. Anyone interested in helping out should visit [treebourne.org](http://treebourne.org) and click 'get involved'.

Meanwhile, CPRE Sussex's Plant your Postcode project has helped Hove Junior School plant an evergreen hedge around the playground. The school is by a busy road and hopes the hedge will help screen air pollution as well as attract wildlife. Elsewhere, the project has recently planted a community orchard for the Sylvan Hall estate in Brighton, providing a fruitful green space to enjoy. Keep a look out for the latest projects and other campaign news at [cpresussex.org.uk](http://cpresussex.org.uk)

## 'Ox-Cam Expressway' cancelled

CPRE celebrated the March decision to scrap the Oxford to Cambridge 'expressway' road following campaigning from CPRE groups along the route.

CPRE Oxfordshire director, Helen Marshall, welcomed the decision, but will be monitoring any other unsustainable proposals – with 'targeted, localised road improvements' still on the cards. Meanwhile, CPRE Bedfordshire urged a rethink of plans to build a million homes in the 'Ox-Cam Arc' and called for a less damaging route for East West Rail

in order to protect the countryside of the Great Ouse Valley.

Paul Miner, CPRE's head of land use and planning, said the road was 'in complete contradiction to the government's commitment to protect our rural heritage and tackle the climate and ecological emergencies.' Instead of risking large areas of farmland, he said 'we want to see the levelling-up of the midlands and the north prioritised' to make use of their vast areas of brownfield land in urgent need of regeneration.

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### Archbishops 'Coming Home'

CPRE was one of the organisations who endorsed a February report from the Archbishops of Canterbury and York. Coming Home called for a number of reforms to planning and housing policies in order to tackle the housing crisis, many of which chime strongly with CPRE's campaigns and the work of our local groups to help parishes identify land for affordable homes. CPRE's head of land use planning Paul Miner also spoke at a launch event organized by the Diocese of Gloucestershire.

In their joint foreword to the report, the Archbishops said: 'This report by the independent Commission on Housing, Church and Community lays out a positive vision for good housing ... to be sustainable, safe, stable, sociable and satisfying. We both firmly believe the Church of England has a major role to play in realising this vision. This means putting our land and other resources to good use ... including new housing developments that align with our five core values.' The report recommends that the Church of England carries out a review to examine how their land can be used to deliver more truly affordable housing. To maximise this potential, the commission is creating an interactive map to identify all church land within dioceses, alongside guidance to help churches respond to local housing need.

# News round-up

Keeping you on top of the latest relevant issues

## A vision for better planning

**The government should rethink major elements of its controversial planning proposals and work with stakeholders to deliver a planning system that puts people, climate and nature at its heart. That was the call from a CPRE-led coalition of 18 housing, planning, transport, environmental, heritage and public health organisations when launching our alternative joint vision for planning in January.**

The vision is part of our response to the government's Planning White Paper proposals that would erode local democracy and put countryside at risk. In contrast, our joint vision is founded on local democracy – calling for local communities to have a legally guaranteed say on specific planning projects and be actively involved in the wider planning of their areas. It proposes improvements to the Community Infrastructure Levy and other processes designed to ensure that all developments provide the right amount

of affordable and social homes. Meanwhile, the creation of new 'highly protected areas' should protect vulnerable species and habitats, alongside strategically planned Nature Recovery Areas.

The vision also calls for the appointment of design ambassadors at local authority level, to champion attractive and sustainable building while ensuring all new homes are built to zero carbon standards as soon as possible. Informed by our 2020 Housing Design Audit with Place Alliance, CPRE recently responded to a consultation on design-related changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). We recommended amendments that would ensure major new developments are only built where there are existing sustainable transport options. We also called for changes to prioritise the maintenance and retention of existing trees and hedgerows, while creating more opportunities to incorporate new planting in urban environments.

## A fair deal for the countryside

**February saw the launch of a new CPRE research report showing how rural communities are being left behind when it comes to government spending – facing a triple threat of higher costs, greater need and lower funding than many other areas in the country.**

Jointly commissioned with the Rural Services Network, Britain's Leading Edge (a coalition of rural councils) and the housing association English Rural, the report argues that inadequate investment in essential public services is deepening rural disadvantage. Per person, government capital spending is 44% higher in towns and cities than for the rural areas which, combined, are home to more people than Greater London.

Rural minister Lord Gardiner stated in November that the government's 'vision

remains that rural communities should prosper, benefiting from the full range of government policies designed to level up opportunity and take the country forward'. But rural communities remain poorly served by government's mechanisms for allocating public funds – known as the 'green book' process. For instance, rural areas' funding deficit delivers 36% fewer affordable homes per capita than elsewhere.

Together with our partners, we're calling on the government to make sure tackling rural disadvantage is a priority within its decision-making – with all growth investment open to public scrutiny at local authority level. To ensure this happens, we want a cabinet minister to lead a cross-government taskforce with the power to 'rural proof' budgets, spending reviews and policies.





© Dee Haas

## Valuing local landscapes

**W**ith 296 hectares of countryside south of the village of Cliddesden proposed for a ‘garden village’ of at least 2,500 dwellings, CPRE Hampshire volunteers have been helping local people assess the protection this landscape merits in the context of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

Their assessment took account of a number of factors, including the quality of views, sense of tranquillity, and the potential for the enjoyment of local people from footpaths and permissive rights of way. The volunteers concluded that the area is a Valued Landscape as defined by

the NPPF, and should be protected as an essential part of the North Hampshire Downs – a recommendation they’ve made to Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council.

CPRE Hampshire volunteers also joined parish councillors from Hursley and Oliver’s Battery to visit the proposed site of a controversial 5,000-house new town known as ‘Royaldown’. They again found the site was worthy of Valued Landscape status thanks to the accessibility and attractiveness of its distinctive undulating farmland – evidence that will form part of the CPRE response to Winchester City Council’s local plan consultation.

## Transforming rural bus services

**O**ur groundbreaking new transport research report, *Every village, Every hour*, has set out how we can build a bus service to truly meet the needs of rural England.

Named after the pioneering public transport target of North Hesse in Germany, the report uses modelling by Transport for Quality of Life to support CPRE’s calls for the government to recognise a universal basic right to public transport. We argue this should be backed with statutory duties for local transport authorities to provide Swiss-style legal minimum service frequency standards to villages and towns.

We want to see a transformed rural public transport network that is affordable or free, to put an end to rural transport poverty and to provide an attractive

alternative to car use that will help address the climate emergency. The impact of the coronavirus pandemic now means that emergency funding should be invested into rural bus services to stop the remaining network from collapsing completely.

While we welcomed the government’s long overdue announcement of a National Bus Strategy, it is not clear how much of its £3bn funding will be available to rural areas – but it will not come close to providing the long-term support that is needed. CPRE continues to call on the government to redirect funding currently earmarked for environmentally damaging and unnecessary road building. Such a change could support the rural bus services that will reduce traffic and air pollution, while boosting local economies and social mobility.

## Refreshing the Countryside Code

Before Christmas, CPRE were consulted on Natural England’s ‘refresh’ of the Countryside Code planned for April. Our submission highlighted the need for a revised code to promote Green Belts, Country Parks, Community Forests and undesignated local countryside, to help take the pressure of ‘honeypot’ locations in National Parks and AONBs.

We’d also like to see links to reliable sources of information on wheelchair accessibility, tips on how to prepare for a trip to the countryside (including things like bringing a bag to take your rubbish home in), and prompts for opportunities to enhance the countryside. Fundamentally, we recommended that the code should attempt to strengthen the message that the countryside is a crucial wildlife habitat and source of ecosystem services, so that visitors begin to associate their home countryside with concerns they already have about global environmental issues.

CPRE’s chief executive Crispin Truman used his January Countryman column to suggest the code could benefit from the jobs the government promised to create in their plan for a green industrial revolution. He proposed these roles could include ‘visible advocates for a new Countryside Code, running education and outreach activities while helping young volunteers gain experience in land management and conservation.’

## Promoting Middlesbrough's regeneration

CPRE North Yorkshire is urging Middlesbrough Council to reconsider plans for 1,670 homes in a development that would engulf the town's locally valued Mandale Meadow. Campaigners are supporting the numerous residents who have contacted CPRE expressing concerns about the proposals and their impact on the character and openness of this still agricultural landscape. The Green Wedge is one of the few remaining areas of major open space in Middlesbrough, which has many more suitable brownfield sites for housing.

The 'masterplan' for the Stainby development also involves a new major road running the meadow – opposed by an online petition signed by over 1,600 local people. Citing the mayor's target for Middlesbrough to be carbon neutral by 2039, CPRE North Yorkshire's submission highlights the low-carbon solution of urban regeneration. They argue that recycling land at other sites could provide the homes needed while bringing biodiversity and attractive green design into the urban environment. At the very least, campaigners believe that increased homeworking, changing ONS population forecasts and the need to tackle the climate emergency constitute the 'changed circumstances' that render the proposed road unnecessary.

# letter from the field

Words from local campaigners



## Celebrating our churchyards

**R**obert McIntyre writes on why caring for our beautiful churchyards and cemeteries is not just beneficial for our wildlife, but great for people too.

Ranging in size from a small garden to 100 acres, these sacred, and to some extent, overlooked spaces are some of the most biodiverse ecosystems found in the UK. But many churchyards are facing several significant challenges. With ageing church congregations and declining attendances (the average congregation size for a rural church is 22, in some parishes it's less than 10) comes financial hardship. Consequently, the maintenance of church buildings and the land they occupy becomes a significant problem facing many rural communities. Churchyards struggle to generate any new income for maintenance; without this, the area becomes vulnerable to neglect or abandonment. Liability is often handed over to the local authority, which, according to the charity Caring for God's Acre, is 'frequently without an agreed management plan that is sympathetic to the site'.

In response to these challenges, many parishes now rely on the generosity of volunteers for their survival. Over the last 20 years, we have seen a number of other conservation groups and charities established, including Friends of York Cemetery and The Beautiful Burial Ground Project. All share a collective vision: to protect, regenerate and share our treasured churchyards. They aim to invite local communities in, giving them an opportunity to connect with nature and receive practical guidance in actively managing churchyards to benefit wildlife.

Making churchyards and cemeteries

accessible and inclusive can also help us achieve a more holistic state of health and wellbeing. Many of our churchyards are located in rural communities, which offer limited opportunities for wider social interactions. Poor communications and transport infrastructure, along with post office and library closures, add to rural isolation. Caring for our churchyards gives us an opportunity to challenge this, by encouraging volunteers to build social relationships and a sense of community inclusiveness.



Aysgarth churchyard

© ah1/flickr Creative Commons

There is a need to recognise, and champion the valuable work volunteers are doing to protect churchyards. With this in mind, CPRE North Yorkshire has launched its inaugural North Yorkshire's Best Churchyard competition for 2021. But the judges are not seeking the most pristine or manicured churchyards; the competition aims to recognise and reward the North Yorkshire churchyards which are well-managed to provide a peaceful haven for people and wildlife. Entries are encouraged from churchyards of all denominations by 31st May.

Find out more about how to take part at [www.cprenorthyorkshire.co.uk](http://www.cprenorthyorkshire.co.uk)



# Good ideas

Learning from each other



Cleaning up Somerset

**D**espite the challenges of lockdown, CPRE Somerset have made a great start to their #2minute Litterpick Project, having already recruited a small army of over 30 volunteers across the county who are sprucing up their local patch.

Thanks to investment from CPRE's national strategic collaboration fund, the group can kit out anyone who will commit to a regular local litter pick with their own litter grabber, high-vis vest, bag and gloves. CPRE Somerset has set up a dedicated Facebook group to help the volunteers share ideas and experiences as part of a connected community, ahead of planned in-person events later in 2021.

The group hopes to install five #2minute Litterpick stations in strategic locations around the county, so that passing members of the public can get involved. Visitors will be able to borrow the equipment for a few minutes if they spot any litter that will otherwise pollute popular places. A number of cafes and visitor centres have been excited to support the campaign and are eager to put out the stations when lockdown ends. CPRE Somerset is currently fundraising to make sure the stations can be fitted with essential hand sanitiser units.

As well as helping keep Somerset litter free and promoting outdoor exercise, the project has had a number of other

benefits. Most importantly, it has helped attract new volunteers – many of whom are new to CPRE – including four students working towards Duke of Edinburgh Awards. The new volunteers have already been a great source of website articles and photographs, all of which has helped increase CPRE Somerset's media profile. The project has also opened up useful partnerships with like-minded local charities, community campaigns, businesses and the Somerset Waste Partnership – who have even created a special new Pledge Against Preventable Plastic that the volunteers are encouraged to sign and share.

If you live in Somerset and can spare two minutes regularly to help reduce litter and pollution in your countryside, or would simply like to help with the fundraising efforts, CPRE Somerset would love to hear from you via [cpresomerset.org.uk](https://cpresomerset.org.uk)



Rupert and Roger Emery doing a great job

## Devon rail reopening

CPRE were delighted to welcome the recent news that, for the first time in nearly 50 years, daily rail services are set to resume between Okehampton and Exeter. Trains on the 14-mile stretch should be carrying commuters from December, with services running every two hours, seven days a week. CPRE Devon has been actively supporting the scheme for a number of years, with director Penny Mills previously arguing that reinstating the service 'would make such a huge difference to so many people across a large area of Devon and North Cornwall. Both local residents, businesses and visitors alike would benefit. It would also be good for the environment by helping to get cars off the road.'

With the line having been in use for Sunday leisure services since 1997, CPRE research has confirmed it provides the perfect location to start reversing some Beeching cuts. Our national 2015 report, Rural Reconnections, was based on the Okehampton to Exeter case study, and examined the wider benefits of opening a second main line for Devon and Cornwall following flooding and landslips on the main route to the south west. In a major boost for the re-opening campaign, it concluded that the line would provide major economic and social benefits for the rural areas along the route – including by improving connections with the existing public transport network.

© Martin Gumbrell

## Helping Nature recover

November saw the government's Natural England agency launch the Nature Recovery Network (NRN) delivery partnership – a commitment of the 25-year Environment Plan aim to provide '500,000 hectares of additional wildlife habitat, more effectively linking existing protected sites and landscapes, as well as urban green and blue infrastructure'. CPRE will be joining the national delivery partnership and advising our county and local groups on joining partnership as they develop around England.

The NRN is designed to improve landscapes' resilience to climate change while increasing biodiversity – the topic of a January joint letter to the government from CPRE and over 30 other organisations calling for a reversal of the decision to approve a bee-killing pesticide. We joined the Zoological Society of London, the RSPB and the Wildlife Trusts in arguing that 'allowing farmers to use these harmful pesticides seriously undermines the UK Government's own objective to leave the environment in a better state than it found it.' The pesticide, Cruiser SB, has been found to be lethal to bees and birds that come into contact with it. We also pointed out the folly of the proposed mitigation measure of using herbicides to destroy nearby flowering plants to prevent bees being exposed to the pesticide.

# step by step

## Starting a community campaign

**M**y name is Lyndsey Ashton, I am a very ordinary person who has over the past 12 months had their life turned upside down, all because of my love and enjoyment of the natural world, and my natural heritage. The simple yet wonderful enjoyment of being outside in the picturesque countryside of our village is something so precious, yet so easily taken for granted by those tasked with protecting it. When this happens, the community must step in.

Back in January of last year the council announced that it intended to, quite literally, pave paradise. A disproportionally large number of new homes, approximately 600 of them, were proposed for our sleepy village, on the beautiful Green Belt that runs alongside the brook and further into the rolling Yorkshire hills that characterise our village.

I knew that I had to do something to save our natural heritage, but I had never done anything like this before. I didn't feel daunted, I didn't feel doubtful; I felt empowered and determined, and I would like to share with you some of the key steps I have taken during my campaign, so that you might feel inspired to do the same. These steps can be applied to any community campaign.

### 1 Hold a public meeting

I organised a meeting in the local church, and two other local mums helped me post flyers in the rain to as many homes in Greetland as we could, our soggy children in tow. I was worried that no one would come, but my fear that people would feel indifferent to the cause soon mutated into a dread of speaking in front of a substantially large crowd, as residents came in droves to hear what I had to tell them about the proposed development. So many people came to the meeting at the church hall that some were forced to hang over the balcony upstairs; the rafters were quite literally packed.

### 2 Create an online presence

After the meeting, my friend Helen and I set up a Facebook group, and we quickly gained members until we grew to fourteen hundred strong, which seemed astonishing considering that the issue we were campaigning for only affected our small village. Everyone seemed to care as passionately as I did, and that gave me the energy to work day and night to make sure that I didn't let my community down.

### 3 Build community spirit

Before the pandemic, we held a community protest walk, and a litter picking walk, both along the Green Belt in Greetland. Our 'Community Walks with Purpose' helped to strengthen community cohesion and to educate residents young and old in the idea that preservation and sustainability start at home – with the natural world on your door step. Although we have had to pause our group events, the riverside walk is more popular than ever. It has offered a lifeline to residents during an incredibly hard time, and many people have commented on our Facebook page how this piece of countryside has been of the upmost importance to their mental and physical wellbeing.

### 4 Maximise media attention

Even though the council and developer have not acknowledged the conclusions of an independent flood risk assessment on the riverside site (a functioning floodplain), it has proved a newsworthy issue on more than one occasion. This allowed me to raise the profile of the campaign on BBC and ITV local news, while The One Show even contacted us to run a national story on our Green Belt.

While crucial evidence (including our submitted photographs and films of the flooded site) has been systematically ignored by decision-makers, the media has helped to get the reality of our situation into the public eye. It was another mum, Laura, who helped with this,





© Lyndsey Ashton

Greetland Pressure Group showing that a threatened site is a vital floodplain

as she took over correspondence with the press. We seem to have a team of mothers fighting to protect Mother Earth, and this has not been lost on the community. We have had support from many wonderful men, but women have certainly been the driving force behind this campaign.

### 5 Get up to speed on planning

I have been heavily occupied with educating myself on planning practice, with the help of CPRE West Yorkshire, and I have fed my research back to the community group we named Greetland Pressure Group – always through social media, as this is fast and effective. The knowledge that we gained and shared helped to ensure that the community was equipped to write the most effective objections we were capable of submitting. The objections were strong and they were vast in number.

### 6 Make your collective voice heard

Communities like ours are waking up to the power of numbers, and the need to stand up, be heard and be counted. Half of the objections to Stage 2 of Calderdale's Local Plan came solely from objections to sites in our village of Greetland; collectively, we submitted around a thousand objections. The hearing stage of the consultation period had to be postponed by months due to the unexpectedly high number of objections. We had put Greetland on the map. The planning inspector had to create a new hearing session specifically for our village. No one else would have done this for us, we had to mobilise ourselves and we had to work together as a community.

### 7 Celebrate every victory

My verbal statements to the Stage 2 hearing before Christmas discussed the impact that development would have on the landscape, using the developer's own evidence base. Off the back of those statements, the inspector's January letter to the council recommended that a large portion of a number of the sites in Greetland should be removed from the development plan to preserve the 'well-used' and 'pleasant rural views' of the riverside walk. The inspector also suggested that other sites should be reduced in size to preserve the village's 'character and appearance'. We are now arguing that the non-developable areas of the site should be removed completely and remain within the Green Belt. This is a huge victory that some suspected would never be possible.

We have won some very important battles, and our victories spur us on as we prepare for the Stage 3 of the consultation process. It is not unthinkable that all of the Green Belt in our village could be saved. We have aimed for the stars and landed on the moon, but our journey is not over yet. We are warriors, and so are you.

#### Lyndsey Ashton

Greetland Pressure Group

*With the next stage of the Calderdale Local Plan hearing due to take place this summer, CPRE West Yorkshire are working closely with a range of community groups to champion better outcomes in the area.*

Follow the latest at  
[cprewestyorkshire.org.uk](http://cprewestyorkshire.org.uk)

### Supporting community renewables

CPRE recently became a member of Community Energy England (CEE), the central voice for the community energy sector. We therefore welcomed the Environmental Audit Committee's February announcement of a new inquiry into community energy. This follows on from our submission last year when we called for community energy to be much higher on their agenda, due to the decarbonisation and community benefits it can bring. It has been estimated that by 2030, the community energy sector could power 2.2 million homes, saving 2.5 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions every year.

In response to the inquiry, campaign group Power for People have drawn up a Local Electricity Bill which will allow neighbourhoods to use the renewable energy they can generate (through solar rooftops, for instance), rather than having to sell it to utility companies. Commenting in support of the bill, CPRE chief executive Crispin Truman said: 'We need to empower local communities to lead the way with a new generation of renewables. Part of this means making it simple and financially viable for locally generated energy to be sold directly to local people. The bill holds the potential to help provide a big boost to the small-scale, community owned renewables that best fit with the character of our wonderful countryside'.

**Suffolk success**

Suffolk Preservation Society (SPS), which represents CPRE in the county, welcomed a February decision to refuse an application for 279 homes on a greenfield site west of Needham Market. Their objection highlighted the likely landscape impact of the development on this rural farmland. Furthermore, SPS campaigners argued that a previous application for 152 dwellings on the site had been refused due to the unsustainable nature of the location. The latest decision by Mid Suffolk District Council was centred on the impact of flooding on an access point, while councillors also recognised that the site had not been proposed for development in either their emerging joint local plan or the neighbourhood plan being developed by the parish council.

**Walford win**

CPRE Herefordshire and Walford Parish Council welcomed a November decision from the county council to refuse plans for eight homes on a horticultural nursery, within the Wye Valley AONB at Howle Hill. Councillors agreed that such a development in open countryside was not sustainable and contravened the landscape's protected status. The parish council's own assessment highlighted alternative sites in the area which would be better served by local infrastructure and public transport.

# Parishbeat

Supporting work to enhance your parish

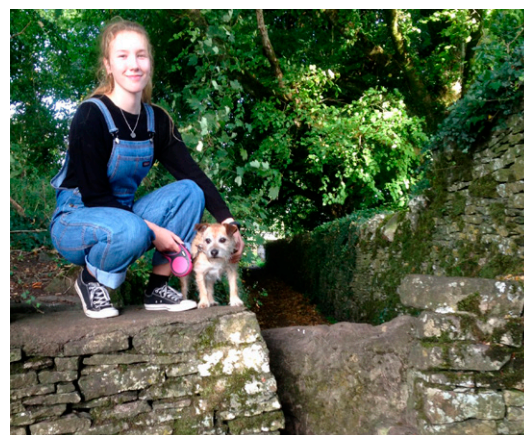
**Save our stone stiles**

**Parish councils could be a big help to a Gloucestershire initiative looking to locate and record the county's unique heritage, with CPRE member Peter Wilson leading a Stone Stile Project to track down these historic monuments.**

Peter is now seeking help from local volunteers with a knowledge of their own parish's history, geology or archaeology. The aim is to create a comprehensive record of the history of the stiles, building up a countywide database of locations and images before any are 'lost' forever. The information received will then be made available to develop an interactive App, to help people discover these unique landscape features.

Thanks to support from CPRE Gloucestershire, the Cotteswold Naturalists Field Club and other keen

walkers, almost 450 stiles have been recorded so far. But it's thought there are at least 100 more stiles yet to be mapped. Find out how to get involved at [cpre.org.uk/creating-a-record-of-gloucestershire-stone-stiles/](http://cpre.org.uk/creating-a-record-of-gloucestershire-stone-stiles/)

**Positive news for a Sussex parish**

**The village of Ninfield celebrated a local hero last autumn, after their community shop was awarded a special Gold Lockdown Award in CPRE Sussex's annual Countryside Awards.**

Ninfield Village Stores in East Sussex is a small business that has been making a big difference to its local community throughout the pandemic. The store's proprietor, Chris Moore, quickly adapted to the situation, providing free deliveries to those who needed to isolate, and keeping the post office running for essential business. 'He and his small staff have been instrumental in ensuring that the extremely vulnerable and self-isolating can obtain the necessities they require,' says the grateful customer who nominated him for a CPRE Sussex Award. 'They have been delivering personally up to five times a day rather than forcing the elderly to travel further.'

The award followed more good news in the village, when Wealden District

Council refused permission for a 70-house application behind the High Street. CPRE Sussex welcomed the reprieve for a site that is outside the development boundary and important for the landscape and farmland birds. Meanwhile, Ninfield Parish Council's objection argued 'the proposal would also cause harm to the amenity value of the public footpaths to the south and west of the site.'

Wealden District Council's decision said that while the site's fields were not in agricultural production, they clearly marked 'the beginning of the countryside. Any residential development on this site will inevitably and irrevocably change the character and appearance of the countryside by extending the spread of development southwards.' They also remarked on the importance of the landscape setting of the listed Church to the south, noting that the development would 'divorce' it and Church Wood from their countryside setting.



# Campaigner



© Stonehenge Alliance

## The defence of Stonehenge World Heritage Site

**C**PRE, as a supporter of the Stonehenge Alliance, has been campaigning for many years against government proposals for dualling the A303 with a short, c.3km tunnel past the Stonehenge monument.

The scheme is one of eight planned improvements along the A303/A38/A358 corridor aiming for congestion relief, a few minutes journey-time reduction and a boost for the economy of the South West. None of these aims can be met, since only three of the road improvements have been brought forward and, as CPRE has pointed out in 2019's End of the Road report, road building generally induces more traffic and rarely leads to economic gains. Indeed, the A303 Stonehenge project itself is admitted by Highways England to be low to poor value for money.

The scheme, as a nationally significant infrastructure proposal, underwent formal examination by senior planning inspectors who, in January 2020, strongly recommended refusal, largely owing to severely adverse impacts on the 25 sq km landscape and archaeology of the World Heritage Site (WHS). Deep cuttings for the four-lane expressway would lead down to twin-tunnel portals well within the 5.4km-wide WHS. There would be major interchanges on the WHS boundaries.

The inspectors had found that the scheme's benefits 'would not outweigh the harm arising from the excavation of a

deep, wide cutting and other engineering works, within the WHS and its setting, of a scale and nature not previously experienced in this "landscape without parallel". UNESCO's World Heritage Committee had earlier advised that the project should not proceed in its current form. Despite these obvious concerns, transport secretary Grant Shapps approved the scheme in November 2020, adhering to the current political emphasis on carbon-generating infrastructure schemes despite the problem of climate change.

In May 2020, individual members of the Stonehenge Alliance formed a limited company, Save Stonehenge World Heritage Site, in case legal action on the A303 decision would be warranted. The company subsequently applied for a judicial review in December 2020, on the grounds that the secretary of state's decision was unlawful, mainly in respect of the requirements of planning policy and the World Heritage Convention.

There is to be a hearing in the High Court on 23–25 June. Considered a 'significant' case, the judicial review has been expedited, with an outcome expected later this year. The cost of the case has risen and the CrowdJustice fundraiser target has been set at £80,000. Please visit [stonehengealliance.org.uk](http://stonehengealliance.org.uk) for more details.

**Kate Fielden**  
CPRE Wiltshire trustee

## The power of punk

Ex punk musician and campaigning trout fisherman, Feargal Sharkey, joined CPRE Cambridgeshire & Peterborough at an online event on protecting our rivers and water supplies. The activist spoke at the Save the Cam event organised by the Friends of the River Cam in December, highlighting that the rivers tributaries are part of the East of England's rare system of chalk streams. 'There are just 225 on the whole planet and about 85% of them are to be found in the south east and south of England. [In this area] you are looking at quite a high percentage of an incredibly rare global ecosystem. And yet the Cam and its tributaries are now over-abstracted and poisoned by phosphates.'

In a region that is the driest in Britain, CPRE Cambridgeshire & Peterborough is spearheading efforts to protect the natural water supplies through its Great Fenland Basin Project. The initiative covers an area which includes the Nene, the Great Ouse and the Cam and is also at risk from flooding from projected sea level rises. Campaigners are concerned that linked issues around protecting drinking water supplies and arable land, plus flood risk from over development, will be exacerbated by the new Greater Cambridge Local Plan. Chairman Alan James commented: 'We must take water management more seriously and treat water as a precious resource.'

### Rolling out rural broadband

CPRE is currently supporting of the efforts of the Rural Services All Party Parliamentary Group to secure better broadband for rural areas. The group has written a letter to digital minister Matt Warman, setting out concerns regarding the government's approach to broadband and the impact this will have in rural areas. The letter expressed dismay at the government's Spending Review decision to allocate just £1.2bn to the issue – less than a quarter of the £5 billion funding needed to support roll-out to the hardest to reach 20% of premises.

Our recent research on the government's urban-focused approach to public spending highlighted that the Shared Rural Network deal to provide 4G phone coverage to 95% of the UK by 2025 will still leave 5% of the country (almost certainly all rural) without faster mobile speeds, at a time when cities will likely be serviced by 5G. We argued that with reliable and speedy internet now an essential service for many, as demonstrated in the pandemic, the lack of provision in some rural areas will further widen the gap in productivity. The NFU's 2020 Digital Technology Survey recently found that 93% of rural internet users believe that broadband is an essential tool for their business, but only 42% receive sufficient speeds.

# In review

## Our perspective on environmental issues

### Reusing redundant retail space

**The coronavirus pandemic will lead to an increase in redundant retail space that, added to existing empty spaces above shops, could deliver 250,000 new homes overall, according to analysis from CPRE.**

Retail experts have estimated the pandemic could lead to 42 million square metres of shopping space becoming redundant across the UK (as much as 40% of current shop space), equivalent to 175 Westfield Londons or 284 Bluewater shopping centres. Assuming new homes are built at the current average of 76 square metres per hectare, if just half the empty space above shops and redundant retail space came forward for housing, it could deliver at least 250,000 additional homes. These homes would have well-connected transport links, and be close to work, leisure and health facilities, while retaining a proportion of important retail and community space and reducing pressure on precious greenfield land.

Commenting on the figures ahead of November's Global Counsel retail panel discussion, CPRE President Emma Bridgewater said: 'It's high time we tapped into the fantastic potential of empty spaces above shops and ever-increasing redundant retail space. Today, I'm calling on the government to provide dedicated grants to encourage the regeneration of empty properties specifically into affordable homes, close to transport links, amenities and services.'

Emma argued that this approach would help regenerate our struggling high streets while retaining and supporting shops, facilities and vital local businesses, pointing out that coronavirus has accelerated an existing trend in more and more people choosing to shop online. She concluded by calling for local councils to be given the powers they need to assemble underused land and buildings to provide high-quality affordable homes and community facilities.

### The perils of permitted development

Emma also warned of the dangers of using 'permitted development' rights to cut local voices out of decision-making over the conversion of retail spaces. And January saw CPRE join the Town and Country Planning Association, Civic Voice and 15 other organisations in demanding the government rethink proposals to allow high street businesses to be changed to housing without full planning permission, thereby risking lower housing standards.

February then saw CPRE's chief executive Crispin Truman join 27 leaders from across the property, retail, leisure, hospitality and planning sectors, in signing a joint letter to the communities secretary Robert Jenrick. The letter made the case that town centres must be planned by local authorities working alongside businesses and the community. It argued that while the residential sector will play a vital role in future town centre recovery, the government's proposed new permitted development rights could threaten the existence of community services, education, healthcare and leisure on our high streets.

The letter concluded: 'Putting ground floor housing in a random and uncontrolled manner within high streets does not draw footfall, does not support new businesses, reduces the potential for business growth and will undermine the viability of existing retail, cultural and commercial activities on the high street and remove convenience stores from local neighbourhoods.'



Altrincham is reviving its centre with a mix of uses

© Tony Smith Alamy



# Q&A

## The answers you need

### Improving and enforcing design standards

**Q** New homes are a major source of carbon emissions, but judging by what is being built in my area, developers and councils are not incorporating obvious energy saving ideas. Ahead of the UK hosting the UN climate conference, what hope is there that our government will enforce low carbon design?

**A** The Government's recent response to the Future Homes Standard consultation allows local authorities to set more ambitious targets for energy efficiency in new developments than are in the national guidance. CPRE welcomed the fact that local authorities will have continued freedom to insist on higher standards in their planning policies, while agreeing that the new minimum standards will help to solve the problem of new homes exacerbating the climate emergency.

The government has proposed that new homes will be expected to produce 75% lower carbon emissions by 2025 as part of the legally binding target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050. The government also committed to ensuring that new homes will be 'zero carbon ready' by 2025 – meaning no refurbishment will be necessary to reach that goal, taking into account the decarbonisation of the electricity grid and the fact that no new home built under the Future Homes Standard will be reliant on fossil fuels.

While local authorities must be able to set very ambitious targets, Selby Martin of CPRE Shropshire has raised the importance of ensuring that councils have the power to enforce their guidance. Selby highlights that local developers are failing to take account of the Planning & Building Control Guide to Sustainability published by Shropshire and Telford Councils, which promotes the opportunity for passive solar gain through careful orientation – an idea that could reduce carbon emissions and fuel poverty.

CPRE's recent response to the National

Model Design Code (NMDC) consultation highlighted the fact that the current housing policy is putting pressure on local planning authorities to give permission to housing development at all costs – a reality that is likely to hamper the ability of councils to refuse schemes that do not meet their local design standards. We cited the case of the Sherford urban extension near Plymouth, where the developers were able to get the design code for the scheme relaxed on grounds of financial viability. We called on the government to remove the 5-year Housing Delivery Test to ensure that viability considerations are no excuse for watered down design quality.

Ultimately, CPRE believes there is an urgent need to enhance the capability of local planning authorities to be the effective agents of change that the National Model Design Code guidance is calling for. As a first step in this direction, we also asked for the immediate implementation of Sir Oliver Letwin's recommendations to provide local authorities with the powers and support needed to enforce design codes that will otherwise remain aspirational.

Furthermore, our response to changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) strongly welcome the first part of paragraph 133 and its statement that 'development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design'. We believe it raises the level of expectation for design quality by implying that not only should poor design be rejected, but also mediocre design, which constitutes over half of the audited schemes in our Housing Design Audit. CPRE therefore believes that to secure the achievement of well-designed places, the NPPF should make clear that financial viability grounds should not outweigh design quality requirements set out in local policies and government guidance.

#### Building Better?

January saw the government respond to the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission's Living with Beauty report, on how to promote and increase the use of high-quality design for new build homes and neighbourhoods. They accepted the commission's recommendation for a stronger focus on beauty in national planning policy, 'to ensure the system helps to foster more attractive buildings and places, while also helping to prevent ugliness', and the 'compelling case for more certainty about design principles'. These priorities are reflected in the NPPF changes and National Model Design Code referred to in the adjacent 'Q&A'. The government also intends to establish an interim Office for Place, to explore options for establishing a new expert design body from 2022.

Commenting on the government's response, CPRE's chief executive Crispin Truman said: 'Good design and beautiful places go hand in hand with a locally led, democratic planning system. It is heartening to see the government putting good design at the forefront of how we create new communities. These must be low carbon neighbourhoods, connected via affordable public transport and bursting with green spaces and nature. Sadly, the evidence tells us that this is not currently the case. It's high time ministers prioritised people-led planning'.

### Defending Devon's air quality

North Devon District Council stood firm against plans for a 59-home development, citing concerns over air quality and ribbon development. The February refusal also noted that the plans did not comply with national design guidance and were contrary to the emerging neighbourhood plans of Chivenor and Braunton. Despite concerns over the council's lack of a five-year housing land supply, councillor Joe Tucker said: 'Leave some open green spaces rather than fill them up with concrete. You've only got to walk around Barnstaple and see the brownfield sites that developers are sitting on.'

With the centre of Braunton identified as an Air Quality Management Area, councillor Derrick Spear noted that air pollution 'kills people or shortens people's lives. Here we are adding something to the A361 at the gateway to northwest Devon. It will act as a blockage to traffic and problems in the summer are getting worse'. CPRE Devon welcomed the decision as a 'significant statement that North Devon Council is not prepared to allow the area to become a developers' free-for-all'. Trustee Steve Crowther concluded: 'recent High Court and Appeal Court decisions have confirmed that councillors are perfectly entitled to continue to refuse applications that are unsustainable or don't comply with their broader planning policies'.

# Campaign spotlight

## Litter in lockdown

**D**ecember saw the launch of new CPRE polling revealing that just over three-quarters of the English public (78%) agree that the government should be taking more action to tackle litter. To accompany the poll, we published *Litter in lockdown*, a study that looks at trends in litter and waste since the start of the coronavirus outbreak.

The report was launched at an online event attended by Environment Minister Rebecca Pow MP; Isla Lester, 9-year-old anti-litter advocate and CPRE 'Green Clean' participant; and Feryal Clark MP, member of the Environmental Audit Committee. Compiled between April and October 2020, it used litter surveying, testimony from local authority officers and the CPRE network and a comprehensive review of media articles to analyse trends in litter and waste during the coronavirus outbreak.

### The Essex experience

Although our research spanned the country, we looked in greatest depth at Essex, with 10 of the county's 14 local authorities providing information about their experience of littering in 2020. Lockdown saw a big increase in demand on Essex's waste and recycling services, with 90% of those councils that responded reporting changes in where rubbish bins were most heavily used and all rural councils observing increased usage. Four in five councils redeployed staff away from town centres to parks and open spaces.

The Essex litter survey of over 140 sites in September and October included 30 parks and open spaces where local authority officers reported a huge rise in littering once restaurants and cafes started offering takeaway services. Nine out of 10 parks and open spaces were affected by packaging litter, with

43% of sites affected by the presence of discarded alcohol containers. Overall, the Essex survey showed the most common types of litter were smoking materials (99% of all sites), packaging of all kinds (90%), drinks containers (67%) and PPE (38%). This composition was broadly the same as in previous surveys with the notable addition of PPE.

### The rise of fly-tipping

Reports of fly-tipping via the media indicates significant increases during lockdown. Reports to Clearwaste, an app to report fly tips and deal with illegal dumping of rubbish, rose by 75% while 40% of those in our CPRE commissioned poll said they had noticed more taking place. The nature of this fly-tipping also seems to have changed. Industrial fly-tipping and illegal waste operations fell dramatically. But this was replaced by a big rise in domestic fly-tipping. The City of London Corporation reported a 52% increase in the number of fly-tips in Epping Forest in the spring of this year, consisting mainly of furniture, household items and garden waste.

The fine weather combined with people having extra time on their hands led many to start tending neglected gardens and doing DIY jobs they'd been putting off.



CPRE Sussex clearing fly-tipped items





CPRE Shropshire team up with local volunteers for their 2019 Green Clean

The problem was that most ‘local tips’ were closed in the first few months of lockdown and many local councils had paused collection of garden waste and bulky household items. As a result, grass cuttings and other waste ended up being dumped in woods, lay-bys and even the open countryside.

### Making the polluter pay

The way that waste is disposed of, and how that is funded, needs a major review. CPRE welcomed the government’s efforts in this area with the announcement in 2018 that they plan to apply a principle of ‘Extended Producer Responsibility’ (EPR) to the use of resources and the disposal of waste. At present, cash-strapped councils foot the bill for around 90% of the costs of dealing with waste and recycling – that includes the costs of bin and recycling collection, litter picking and the processing of materials. Meanwhile, excessive use of materials, and single-use plastics in particular, has soared with no consequences for the producers of these items and all the impact being felt by councils and the environment.

It is time the polluting producers paid the full costs associated with the products they place on the market. EPR should be designed to encourage more sustainable, lower-impact design of packaging while raising money to cover the costs associated with dealing with packaging

waste. We, along with other environmental organisations, want to see a future proof EPR system that can tackle the dual crises of plastic pollution and the climate emergency. At minimum, the EPR system must be designed to encourage a wholesale move away from non-essential packaging, into reusable and refillable alternatives.

Producers pay little attention to how their products are disposed of or the damage they may cause, so it is little wonder this feeds through to consumer behaviour. Coronavirus has clearly exacerbated the prolific throw-away culture in the UK and we need solutions that tackle its root cause. On the back of our research we reiterated our recommendation that the government commits to a comprehensive Deposit Return Scheme, involving glass, plastics and metal drinks containers of all sizes, by the end of 2023, to reduce littering of these items.

By the same deadline, it must also introduce a full EPR scheme, to ensure producers bear the cost of cleaning up when their items are littered. Using a combination of taxes and charges can also help to incentivise a reduction in single-use items and packaging right across the supply chain. We also need much more anti-litter education, including better promotion of the Countryside Code, online advertising and engagement with schools.

### A real litter hero

A keen young volunteer of Litteraction, CPRE’s online litter picking community, has been given a Houghton Young Hero award in a scheme run by Northumbria Police and Sunderland City Council. Eight-year-old Thomas Hackett and his dad Steve had already been presented with a hamper in return for their efforts, by grateful residents of East Rainton Community Group. Police Community Support Officer, Daniel Hawksby, set up the awards to reward young people who make an outstanding difference: ‘After hearing about the work that Thomas has been doing in East Rainton, giving up his spare time to pick up rubbish and fill bags of litter, we thought he encapsulated everything we want in a winner. It’s been a difficult year for all our communities, but Thomas has used his time while out walking to keep East Rainton clean of litter and has shown an amazing community spirit beyond his years.’

### A brownfield haven

CPRE Isle of Wight has welcomed the proposed development of six homes in the village of Havenstreet. The site – a disused garage and petrol station – is listed on the council’s brownfield register and CPRE campaigners have commented that the proposed two-bedroom cottage-style houses are in line with the local housing needs assessment and existing village character.

# Matter of fact

Support for your case

## A snapshot of rural England

**L**ongdendale, stretching from Mottram in the west to Thurlstone Moors in the east, has some magnificent countryside. From the reservoirs in the valley bottom, to the wooded slopes rising to the wilder peat moorland it provides many benefits to us all – drinking water, flood mitigation, carbon sequestration and extensive opportunities for open air recreation in a dramatic landscape.

It is crossed by no less than three national trails – the Trans Pennine trail, the Pennine Bridleway and the Pennine Way. Much of it lies in the Peak District National Park's Dark Peak, with Black Hill to the north and Bleaklow to the south. But the stretches outside are equally beautiful, such as Swallows Wood, Warhill and Harrop Edge, despite being hard pressed by suburbia.

A major new source of pressure comes from Transport for the North and Highways England's vision for Longdendale: as the lynchpin in a Southern Pennines Strategic Development Corridor, based on dualling the A628 corridor with a 5.7mile tunnel under the high moors. This would connect the M67 in Manchester with the M1 near Barnsley. With only a select group of stakeholders engaged in the development of the idea, this is a vision being progressed behind closed doors.

Last summer, CPRE Peak District and South Yorkshire set up a survey which asked local people how they value the countryside of Longdendale, and what changes, if any, people would like to see to make it even more special. The aim was to hear as many disparate voices and views as possible, to help future collaborations

to realise a sustainable long-term future for Longdendale. The results provide a fascinating snapshot of the views of a rural community in 2020.

### A much-loved landscape

There were 245 respondents and many thoughtful contributions. 40% of people identified themselves as living within the valley, with the remainder comprising regular visitors from the wider area – indicated by the 38% of respondents who appreciated Longdendale's proximity to Sheffield, Manchester or Barnsley.

Walking was by far the most popular leisure activity with 88% naming it as their favourite, followed by watching wildlife (58%) taking photographs (43%) and cycling and mountain biking (30%). The most loved aspect of Longdendale are the views and landscape (91%), with its wildlife, public rights of way, and peace and quiet all nominated by around a third of people.

64% believed Longdendale could be enhanced with better wildlife conservation, followed by fewer cars and lorries (60%), with more trees, burying overhead cables, slower traffic speeds and more frequent public transport all scoring in the 40s.

### Climate concerns

People were particularly concerned about the threat of potential developments including major housing schemes (79%), substantial holiday or leisure developments (64%) and quarrying or mining (56%). Other notable concerns included off-road driving on unsurfaced tracks (74%), second homes (56%) and the burning of moorlands (46%).

The latter is just one thing that could increase Longdendale's



Woodhead Reservoir from a Longdendale path

© Steven Gillis Alamy

carbon footprint, something that respondents thought could be best reduced by more low carbon public transport (36%) and re-routing HGV traffic – a specific suggestion of 16% of people. In terms of people's preferred method of low carbon travel, around two thirds of people prioritised good quality and affordable bus and rail services, while 55% want to see segregated cycle ways – perhaps linked to Greater Manchester's Bee Network of routes.

68% of people did not want to see road building allowed in Longdendale (including a majority of residents), citing traffic and climate concerns. Of those who did, the main reason given was to reduce the congestion and pollution through Mottram, Hollingworth and Tintwistle. But that support was often caveated by the need for any schemes to be supported by local people and be delivered in conjunction with better public transport and segregated cycle routes.

Given that transport and travel were the most frequent concerns of both visitors and residents, CPRE Peak District and South Yorkshire hope to be able to influence local measures that reduce the impact of journeys on the climate emergency, and on the wildlife, people, landscape and tranquillity of Longdendale.