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countryside
charity

Summer 2021

Fieldwork



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Growing demands for planning improvements

CPRE helped put planning right at the top of the political agenda in June after the Conservative Party's loss of the Chesham and Amersham constituency (above) – previously held by the late Dame Cheryl Gillan, president of CPRE Buckinghamshire.

The result was widely blamed on the unpopularity of the government's planning proposals, which The Times reported cabinet ministers feared would risk alienating many southern voters; this followed CPRE's recent research showing the disproportionate loss of countryside they would suffer, with 400,000 homes potentially being forced on to greenfield sites in the south of England.

Our campaign against the deregulation of planning announced in last year's Planning White Paper has also highlighted the loss of local democracy if, as proposed, people lose the right to challenge individual planning applications. A cabinet minister quoted by The Times said the by-election showed that the government needed to 'tread carefully on planning. We say that communities will be involved but then they're not. If you're going to say that they will have a voice then that voice has to count.'

Within days, the paper was reporting a new 'recognition in Whitehall that some local authorities face constraints that make it harder for them to accommodate

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Fieldwork

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Growing demands for planning improvements

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more houses, and the plans are being reconsidered.' It concluded that 'ministers are also likely to fine-tune other reforms to the planning system announced last year', including those to prevent community objections to individual applications.

Testing the government

As we went to press, CPRE was eagerly awaiting the government's response to its white paper consultation, which we hope will show a vastly improved understanding of the concerns raised by CPRE. In order to measure progress, we've worked with other major charities including Friends of the Earth, the RSPB and the Wildlife Trusts to create a set of criteria that we'll use to scrutinise the draft legislation.

The tests will judge each criteria at key milestones and rate them 'green', indicating changes that are compatible with creating a planning system fit for the future, amber (more progress needed), or red (failing). There are six tests in all, firstly to ensure that future planning rules retain and enhance genuine, accessible community participation and accountability throughout the planning process. Secondly, the government must deliver an evidenced strategy for building affordable homes and provide local authorities with the power to turn down developments that don't create affordable housing.

● We're calling on the government to urgently change course and put people and nature at the centre of the upcoming Planning Bill ●

In light of the climate emergency, we also want to see the proposals accelerate climate action to ensure planning can help the UK meet its net-zero commitments. Meanwhile, any legislation must protect sites that are important for biodiversity and nature's recovery, along with heritage sites and landscapes with special protections. Lastly, but of huge importance, we want to see human health, wellbeing and equality embedded into any new planning system,

which should prioritise improving access to natural green space, encouraging active travel and reducing air pollution.

A backbench rebellion

CPRE chief executive Crispin Truman said: 'Unless ministers change direction, they'll not only fail many of these key tests but will have failed to reach the ambitions espoused in their own Planning White Paper. That's why we're calling on the government to urgently change course and put people and nature at the centre of the upcoming Planning Bill.'

● It is not too late to come up with reform which helps us deliver the homes we need; but with the consent and support of local communities ●

In the commons, former prime minister Theresa May continues to lead the backbench calls for improvements along the lines of CPRE's arguments, to avoid legislation that would 'reduce local democracy' and 'see the wrong homes being built in the wrong places'. Meanwhile, the former Conservative environment secretary Theresa Villiers wrote in The Times: 'It is not too late to come up with reform which helps us deliver the homes we need; but does so with the consent and support of local communities, not by imposition on them against their will. I will be working with colleagues, and campaign groups such as the CPRE, to try to deliver that.'

In an indication of the cross-party support for CPRE's campaigning, we welcomed an assessment on the white paper from the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee which included no fewer than 27 mentions of CPRE. Committee chair, Labour MP Clive Betts, concluded: 'Public engagement is critical in planning – and our report stresses the need for the government to really get to grips with how it can best involve local people in the planning process. This is essential if any changes to the planning system are to be a success.'

Break through

How volunteers are making a difference



© Rame Protection Group

Saving coastal tranquillity

CPRE Cornwall played a leading role in stopping an inappropriate development on a remote and protected coastal landscape (above). The High Court victory they supported also created an important legal precedent, with its ruling that permission for a large, luxurious house at Rame Head should be quashed. The area is part of the designated Cornwall Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, where building is normally only allowed for agricultural workers' dwellings.

The case went to judicial review after Cornwall Council robustly defended a close vote by the planning committee to grant consent for what was described as an 'agricultural worker's dwelling'. In fact, it was permission for a house with up to five bedrooms, 27 windows and a wraparound balcony. Councillors voted narrowly in favour, despite the authority's principal planning officer recommending refusal because of the detrimental impact it would have on the beauty spot.

More protected landscapes

CPRE Surrey were delighted by Natural England's June announcement that the review to extend the boundary of the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty was officially confirmed. CPRE Surrey will be able to constructively engage with the process once landscape consultants have been appointed, with volunteers in the five districts within the AONB – Mole Valley, Reigate & Banstead, Tandridge, Waverley and Guildford – eager to get involved in decisions over where the extended boundary should be drawn. Natural England will consult with the county council and those district councils

affected by proposed boundary variations, followed by a full public consultation.

Meanwhile, the same announcement confirmed that The Yorkshire Wolds is to be considered for AONB status. 'The announcement is fantastic news and something CPRE has locally campaigned for repeatedly over many decades,' said CPRE North Yorkshire chair Jan Arger. 'We are delighted that this outstanding landscape may finally get the recognition it deserves!' If successful, the Yorkshire Wolds would join the Howardian Hills, Forest of Bowland and Nidderdale AONBs in protecting North Yorkshire's beautiful landscapes.

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Challenging Green Belt loss

As we went to press, the outcome of a legal battle over whether homes should be built in the corridor of countryside north of Oxford was anticipated at some point before September. On June 23 and 24, the Cherwell Development Watch Alliance's (CDWA) lawyers led a judicial review in court against Cherwell District Council's plans to build 4,400 homes on Green Belt land north of Oxford. The council wants to build the homes to meet what has been described as the city's 'unmet need' for homes, which it cannot build within its own borders.

CPRE Oxfordshire has been contesting the council's ambition for several years, and an earlier High Court ruling giving permission for the CDWA (which has been supported actively and financially by CPRE) to launch a judicial review of the plan was a major success in its own right. CDWA chair Suzanne McIvor said: 'A legal challenge meant going back to generous supporters and asking for further funding with a total of around £55,000 being required to cover the legal fees. It is a poor reflection on the planning system that local residents have effectively had to pay in order to be listened to. We are particularly grateful to all at CPRE Oxfordshire for their generosity, ongoing support and administrative assistance.'

News round-up

Keeping you on top of the latest relevant issues

Defending Berkshire's wildlife

CPRE Berkshire hit the national headlines in May when councillors refused permission to build a Green Belt film set for hit Netflix series Bridgerton.

Producers for the period drama had identified a site on Crown Estate land in Sunninghill Park, for use over a five-year period, but The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead council rejected it as 'inappropriate development'. The set would have recreated a London Regency square with a car park and other temporary structures, but planning officers recommended refusal on the grounds that it would cause 'harm to the rural character of the area' and risk adversely affecting protected species.

Speaking at the public meeting at the Maidenhead Holiday Inn, Patrick Griffin of CPRE Berkshire said the set would be 'demonstrably out of character with the area' and be an 'encroachment into the countryside'. The applicants had argued that any changes to the site would be

temporary and have 'no lasting impact', while some councillor's said they would bring 'economic benefits'. CPRE Berkshire argued that this would not justify Green Belt development and 'distant' local business would be unlikely to benefit.

The set would have been near the ancient woodland of Swinley Forest at Buttersteep Rise in Ascot, which CPRE Berkshire's written objection had noted was 'in proximity to the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area, a network of heathland sites that provide habitat for important ground-nesting bird species, for which it was designated. Parts of Swinley Forest share common features with Thames Basin Heaths and are home to designated species and other species of conservation concern. For example, nightjar, woodlark and woodcock are regularly recorded in the forest.' Their objection concluded that 'the filming schedule could impact on nesting birds and young fledged birds, potentially reducing populations.'

A plot against the Green Belt

Some years ago, CPRE Hertfordshire began a campaign against sites in the Green Belt being misleadingly marketed as potential house building sites, despite not being allocated for development in any local plan.

The BBC did an undercover investigation and campaigners thought they had seen the last of the issue until it resurfaced in 2020. Following an attempt to auction speculative building plots on open Green Belt land at Vineyards Road in Northaw (pictured), CPRE Hertfordshire joined Northaw & Cuffley Parish Council in urging the borough council to issue an Article 4 Direction to remove permitted development rights. Campaigners are delighted that the council responded swiftly, meaning

that any minor or temporary building works or fencing will need planning permission, and alerting potential buyers that the land does not have planning permission for residential use.





© CPRE Devon

Quayside development rejected

CPRE Devon welcomed the June decision of North Devon District Council's planning committee to refuse an application for 250 luxury houses and apartments on the bank of The Taw Estuary at Yelland Quay.

The site, where a small coal-fired power station stood between the 1950s and the 1980s, is in a noted wildlife habitat. It is adjacent to a Site of Special Scientific Interest and the North Devon AONB, as well as nature reserves managed by the RSPB, Devon Wildlife Trust and Gaia Trust.

The committee voted by 11-2 to reject the proposals on the grounds that it provided no housing to meet local needs, and the benefits would not outweigh the harm to the coastal and estuary landscape.

CPRE Devon submitted a detailed policy analysis and were among the half-dozen objectors allowed to speak

at the socially-distanced meeting held at Barnstaple Rugby Club while residents demonstrated outside (above). CPRE Devon director Penny Mills said: 'This is an outstanding result, based on robust and detailed policy considerations, to preserve a significant part of the area's precious landscape from development. Just because a beauty spot once had a power station briefly imposed on it, it doesn't mean you have to build another great concrete mass on it 40 years later.'

Penny concluded: 'When there are 2,500 people looking for low-cost social and rented housing in the area, proposing to build 250 high-priced holiday homes with an average price of £425,000 while providing no affordable housing at all is adding economic insult to environmental injury.' Follow the latest campaigning news from Devon at cpredevon.org.uk

Positive progress in Suffolk

Suffolk Preservation Society (SPS), CPRE's representatives in the county, recently supported plans to redevelop the former Deben High School site in Felixstowe for 45 apartments and 16 houses with a high proportion of affordable housing in a highly sustainable location.

The brownfield development will retain the school's assembly hall as a community building while the high-quality contemporary design of the two and three storey blocks will create a distinct sense of place while incorporating community open spaces and a number of sustainable energy measures. Meanwhile, SPS also

backed plans, in principle, for a 49MW solar farm adjoining the existing solar farm on the former RAF airfield at Parham.

However, campaigners raised concerns about the northern most parcel of land, known as zone 1, which was located beyond the area which had been badly affected during the 1940s airfield development and post war period, on a surviving historic landscape close to heritage assets. They are calling for the northern portion of the site to be removed from the proposals, or alternatively the harmful impacts mitigated by reducing the extent of the panels and increasing levels of screening.

Sussex in the spotlight

After a decade of threatened oil extraction in the High Weald on the edge of Balcombe village, CPRE Sussex welcomed West Sussex County Council's unanimous refusal of Angus Energy's application to continue their exploration. It had been a looming fracking threat since 2013, when protests generated national publicity. CPRE's arguments, based primarily on climate change impacts and harm to the AONB, appeared to resonate with the planning committee, and unless Angus appeals the residents of Balcombe can at last enjoy unthreatened peace and quiet. CPRE Sussex was delighted to receive an email from the Chairman of Frack Free Balcombe Residents Association complementing them on their contribution to securing this significant win, though our campaigners believe that the residents must take the overwhelming credit.

Sussex was in the national spotlight again recently, when Crispin Truman joined the Wildlife Trusts, National Trust, Environment Agency and many others in signing up to a joint letter opposing a new housing development that would sever the Knepp Estate's connection to St Leonard's and Ashdown Forests. The letter appeared in the Times in April, arguing that the scheme would reduce the renowned rewilding project to 'a wildlife island in a sea of housing, allocated by central government.'

Standing up for Kent

The decision to refuse a revised planning application for 450 new houses on farmland at Margate has been warmly welcomed by CPRE Kent's Thanet committee. The scheme from Gladman Developments had first been refused by Thanet District Council's planning committee in April, with loss of farmland, flooding, challenging topography and impact on wildlife given as reasons. But the main concern was the proposed cut in affordable housing from 30%, as set out in the local plan, to 10%. Gladman came back with the level of affordable housing increased to 15%, claiming a higher level would not be financially viable – a rise described as pathetic by CPRE Thanet chair David Morrish.

Campaigners are delighted that Thanet council's planning committee is sticking to its guns and defending its policy to ensure that 30% of all major development is genuinely affordable. 'It has resisted attempts by a land promoter to chew into the countryside, resisting paying minimal costs to the community and placing profit above people,' said David Morrish. 'It is great that councillors have not been cowed by "advice" from planning officers threatening dire problems if the council turned down this application,' he continued, citing the trend of councils retreating from the threat of costly appeals. Find the latest news at cprekent.org.uk

letter from the field

Words from local campaigners



Tackling local air pollution

CPRE Rutland's vice chair Ron Simpson writes on the importance of clean air in CPRE's work in the county.

'Air quality in the county might reasonably be expected to be a key issue addressed in the proposed CPRE publication, Future Rutland, due later in the year. There are other local reasons why the basic human right of clean air has come to the top of my community agenda in Uppingham. These include the possibility of the emerging Uppingham Neighbourhood Plan adopting air quality policies for the future due to rising concern over the impact on future generations of increased traffic, housing and population.'

Every year, air pollution causes up to 36,000 deaths in the UK. The World Health Organisation and the UK Government recognise that air pollution is the largest environmental health risk we face today – particularly for children and older people. The impact on older residents can be significant too.

Clean Air Day is the UK's largest air pollution campaign, bringing together communities, businesses, schools and the health sector to improve public understanding of the problem. The government has supported the campaign since the first Clean Air Day in 2017. A large number of local authorities also support the campaign and I am hopeful that Rutland County Council will join them soon.

There is an assumption that living in a rural area such as Rutland, we escape such concerns. Yet creeping urbanisation of our beautiful county, and more sophisticated measurement

of the atmosphere in our towns and villages may be changing things. Perhaps it would be wise to listen to the calls for greater action to protect our environment.



Rutland countryside near Uppingham

© Dave Porter/Alamy Stock Photo

Here in Uppingham a particular threat has emerged which appears to be founded in a lack of corporate investment in protecting the environment. I speak of the Uppingham water treatment plant. The local water authority, Anglian Water, has confirmed in writing that that, due to improved measuring techniques, they are now aware that some of their plant may well have been causing a health threatening deterioration in air quality in one part of town for years. Furthermore, 'improvement works' are likely to lead to a measurable deterioration in local air quality but there is no intent to modify the site design to prevent such pollution.

The advice of the Environment Agency is to raise the matter with Rutland County Council, which has the legal powers to prevent such air pollution. Independent advisors have confirmed that the problem has been addressed elsewhere by plant design changes. Rutland environmental health officers have been invited to initiate an investigation. Let's hope it leads to the required improvements."

Good ideas

Learning from each other



Celebrating Cheshire

CPRE Cheshire were delighted with the wonderful photos of the Cheshire countryside that were entered into their 2021 photography competition! Judging was a difficult task with so many varied but lovely images, which can be enjoyed at cprecheshire.org.uk.

First prize in the Trustee Choice Award went to Joe Morris for his magnificent image 'Harry atop of Shutlingsloe' (above). The online gallery of entries is a must-see as a fantastic representation of the variety and tranquillity of this beautiful but often overlooked county.

© Joe Morris

Cleaning up Gloucestershire

Since CPRE Gloucestershire started their North Cotswolds Clean-up in March they've had a fantastic response with lots of residents volunteering to get out and clean up the local area. In some towns and villages they now have co-ordinators to organise regular litter picks and help identify particularly bad areas that need to be cleaned up more regularly. A recent clean-up in Moreton-in-Marsh attracted 15 community-spirited volunteers and cleared two parks, the train station and the high street.

The initiative has received excellent local press coverage and helped to highlight that litter is a danger to our wildlife after volunteers found a dead vole that had become trapped in a discarded bottle. Some volunteers

also found much larger items and clear examples of fly tipping which they have been reporting to Cotswold District Council. If you're interested in cleaning up the North Cotswolds or Berkeley Vale please get in touch via info@cpreglos.org.uk for more details.



CPRE's Moreton-in-Marsh litter pickers

Housing Needs Survey

Supported by CPRE's national Strategic Collaboration Fund, CPRE Rutland has produced a Housing Needs Survey to support local authorities, particularly at parish and district level, to generate area housing figures based on local needs rather than the top-level figures from the government. The survey was created in collaboration with Rutland County Council and is available as an A5 booklet and or in an online format. It's been successfully piloted in the market town of Uppingham in Rutland, and used to inform a small housing trust. The survey is available as a freestanding product or with a support and advice package. Further details are available from secretary@rutlandcpre.uk

Tracking North Yorkshire's litter

CPRE North Yorkshire's new Community Litter Tracker enables anyone with access to the internet to report areas with litter issues by taking a photograph of the offending rubbish. This will provide the group with an evidence base to engage with local councils, organisations and communities, allowing litter picks to be organised or existing groups to be informed. The tracker is very easy to use through either a QR code which automatically detects the location, or a short survey via littertracker.co.uk Find out more at cprenorthyorkshire.co.uk

Calls for more recycling in Wiltshire

CPRE Wiltshire have urged Wiltshire Council to build more recycling facilities rather than proceed with a major energy from waste development in Westbury. 18 town and parish councils, together with hundreds of local people, have also objected strongly to the council's approval of an incinerator, which they fear will increase air pollution and HGV traffic, damaging public health. Furthermore, local dairy company, Arla Foods UK, says it will have to suspend production if toxic fumes from the incinerator disrupt its manufacturing process, which relies on clean air. South West Wiltshire MP, Dr Andrew Murrison, has asked communities secretary Robert Jenrick to 'call in' the scheme, while campaigners are considering a judicial review of the decision.

Anne Henshaw, chair of CPRE Wiltshire, said: 'I am disappointed that the concerns and arguments put forward by all the objectors have been ignored. I believe a better way would be to improve and increase kerb-side recycling, particularly given the council's own notice to residents that the amount being recycled during the last year has increased by around a fifth. We need to increase recycling capacity and encourage people's climate friendly behaviours, rather than generating waste which will be burned and contribute towards the climate crisis we are facing.'

step by step

Creating a community litter initiative

CPRE Hampshire has always looked to work with communities, businesses and local government to find positive and lasting ways to help the countryside thrive. 2021 has seen them forge new partnerships to tackle the issue of litter, after CPRE's national polling revealed that over a third of adults in England (38%) are seeing more local litter since the start of the pandemic.

Inspired by local litter hero Tom Bristowe's pioneering work in the Winchester area, CPRE Hampshire trustee John Lauwerys thought that our group could make a valuable contribution to the cause. Here, we take a look at how John and his fellow volunteers have made a flying start in their efforts to create a litter free Hampshire.

1 Taking inspiration from others

As so often in the world of conservation campaigning, there is no need to 'reinvent the wheel' when there are so many great projects waiting to be replicated. Indeed, much inspiration came from over the county border, in the form of the Litter Free Dorset group which has worked closely with CPRE Dorset for a number of years – cleaning up the county's countryside and coasts while helping to promote CPRE's campaign for a Deposit Return Scheme for drinks containers.

However, the idea for CPRE Hampshire's litter picking project was prompted by the success of an existing grassroots initiative within the county. The Litter Partnership in Winchester brings together local people, councils, schools, businesses and military personnel to tackle the litter that blights local communities and green spaces. Founded by Tom Bristowe, a LitterHero Ambassador of Keep Britain Tidy, they are supported by Winchester City Council and Walking With The Wounded, as well as CPRE.

2 Finding the perfect partner

As part of the Litter Partnership's work, Tom had the great idea of collaborating with a local litter contractor and approached

Winchester's street scene contractor, idverde, for help. With idverde's professional support, the Litter Partnership has been able to arrange weekly one-hour litter-picks for volunteers from Upham and Owslebury, helping to keep the surrounding rural lanes and roads free of rubbish.

CPRE Hampshire were therefore hugely grateful that the Litter Partnership made an introduction to idverde, which meant it would be possible to organise similar events for local CPRE members. idverde's contribution includes a dedicated driver, van and the generous loan of the equipment necessary for the clean-up operation. As the majority of the litter picks take place on the roadside, the van is also crucial for alerting traffic to the volunteers' presence while safely screening them from approaching vehicles.

3 Holding the first event

With the support of local volunteers and idverde, CPRE Hampshire held their first community litter picks in April, cleaning up Brambridge near Eastleigh and the Badger Farm neighbourhood on the southern edge of Winchester. 'We are so pleased to be working in partnership with idverde and were extremely grateful to the handful of volunteers who supported us over the first weekend,' said CPRE Hampshire's Volunteer Coordinator Natalie Hargreaves. 'We gathered around eight bags full of items ranging from L plates and glass and plastic bottles to drinks cans and food wrappers.'



Litter pickers of all ages have taken part

© CPRE Hampshire



© CPRE Hampshire

idverde's professional support has been a great help to our volunteers

4 Promoting wider campaign aims

Excellent local press coverage of the first weekend's events helped CPRE Hampshire raise interest for their regular roadside litter picks, while highlighting their calls for political candidates to develop better policies on litter and waste ahead of May's local elections.

Furthermore, the publicity helped link the new project to CPRE's longstanding anti-litter work – notably the Stop the Drop campaign launched in 2008 by Hampshire resident and then CPRE President Bill Bryson. A number of outlets carried John Lauwerys' powerful quotes: 'CPRE has a long tradition of seeking to tackle the scourge of littering which has become an increasing problem over recent decades. Many parts of the countryside are disfigured by litter and fly tipping and this has grown worse since the covid pandemic.'

5 Harnessing local enthusiasm

As part of Keep Britain Tidy's 'Great British Spring Clean', and a break from their weekly roadside picks, CPRE Hampshire organised a June event at the local beauty spot of Farley Mount, west of Winchester. The day was a great opportunity to get more people from the local community involved, and as well as the usual idverde support they were joined by volunteer litter pickers (aged three and above!) from the nearby parish of Hursley.

The fresh air and beautiful surroundings were greatly appreciated by all, bearing out research from last year's Great British Spring Clean showing that 79% of people felt volunteering improved their mood. 'It

was a good turnout on a lovely day and the group achieved a great deal,' said Natalie. 'Normally, our roadside litter picks have to be carefully managed because of traffic, so this was an opportunity for us to open it up to families and younger volunteers we know are keen to be involved.'

The project's success so far means that CPRE Hampshire already has over 20 new litter picking volunteers on their books – all of whom are making a real difference to the local environment. For everyone involved with this excellent work, the long term goal is that litter will be eradicated as more people learn to care for their countryside. This will require a process of environmental education alongside encouragement for people to connect with their local green spaces – both of which are being provided by this initiative.

'CPRE Hampshire aims to greatly raise awareness of the problem caused by the thoughtless dropping of litter across our beautiful county,' says John. 'If we could persuade people visiting our open spaces or driving through our countryside to put waste into bins or take it home for disposal, we would all benefit and at the same time reduce the negative impact litter has on the natural environment.'

CPRE Hampshire is looking for more volunteers to help with the ongoing weekly litter picks, including a coordinator to help organise the sessions. If you would like to get involved, litter picks currently take place for 1 hour from 10.30am on a Saturday morning, and – depending on demand – there are plans to expand the programme. Find out more at cprehampshire.org.uk/get-involved/litter-picking.

A win for a valued landscape

CPRE Oxfordshire's Cherwell group helped local people defeat plans for an oil depot on a tranquil site that is part of the Ironstone Downs Area of High Landscape Value. The campaign received a good deal of local support, and helped ensure the application was unanimously voted down by the council planning committee. The fuel company and the local owner of the quarry have since ended their partnership, meaning there will be no appeal, to the relief of residents and visitors to the area.

The application came after Cherwell District Council's recent commitment, in its review of the local plan up to 2040, to protect 'valued landscapes' and 'areas of tranquillity' as well as identify areas 'where development would be inappropriate'. CPRE Oxfordshire also welcomed the suggestion that the council 'might protect those areas which are relatively undisturbed by noise and are valued for their recreational and amenity value'. Of only two such places specified by the review, one is the Ironstone Downs, in which the Hornton Quarry sits at the centre. Opponents of the scheme, which included all the neighbouring parish councils, argued that a fuel depot on the site would result in noise, traffic disturbance, light pollution and risked water pollution. Read the latest from the county at cpreoxon.org.uk

A Norfolk alliance

CPRE Norfolk's Parish Partnership Alliance now has 157 parish and town councils signed up to make the case for building existing housing allocations before any new allocations are made. This phased approach to the delivery of housing would tackle landbanking while ensuring that additional greenfield sites are not sacrificed to development. The Alliance liaises with the Norfolk Association of Local Councils and influences decision makers in other tiers of government. It is a simple and effective way for parishes to speak with a united and informed voice, with CPRE Norfolk sharing key correspondence, such as copies of its submissions to consultations. Find out more at cprenorfolk.org.uk

Supporting Oxfordshire's parishes

CPRE Oxfordshire's Vale of White Horse group supported the Woolstone Parish Meeting in their successful objection to the National Trust's proposal to site solar panels at the bottom of White Horse Hill – in an AONB – which have subsequently re-sited. Meanwhile, CPRE West Oxfordshire is pushing to reduce river pollution and flooding, and has distributed a questionnaire to all parish councils in the district to try to understand the local impact and provide data for their campaigning.

Parishbeat

Supporting
work to enhance
your parish

Protecting a valued village green

Over the past year CPRE Hertfordshire have been pleased to add their voice to that of local campaigners in the effort to protect and maintain Woodcock Hill Village Green as common land, for the benefit of the local community.

Woodcock Hill (pictured) is a 10 hectare open public space in Borehamwood, designated as a Village Green in 2008. The largely Green Belt site is actively managed as a nature reserve and community asset, with a volunteer group monitoring and recording the wide variety of wildlife species.

Developers Taylor Wimpey, part owners of the land, have applied for de-registration of the common so that they can build housing on the site. The original application was refused, and Taylor Wimpey has appealed the refusal. The Department for the Environment,

Food and Rural Affairs have agreed to hold a public inquiry on the matter, anticipated for later this summer. CPRE Hertfordshire has registered to appear at the inquiry in support of the local Woodcock Hill Village Green society, who have appointed counsel and launched a fundraising campaign. Find out more about the campaign at cpreherts.org.uk



© Elizabeth Hamilton

Defeating unsustainable development

CPRE Dorset joined residents in Charlton Marshall in celebrating the spring dismissal of an appeal to build 70 homes outside the village's settlement boundary (pictured).

An outline application was made in April 2019 but the developers Hallam Land Management appealed last year on grounds of 'non-determination' by Dorset Council, whose planning team had struggled to process decisions during coronavirus restrictions. The parish council and the Charlton Marshall Action Group fought a hard campaign to stop this development; they argued the retention of the northern settlement boundary was essential to retaining the village's distinct character and preventing its coalescence with Blandford St Mary.

CPRE Dorset had given active advice for two years and provided financial support for the action group's transport consultant

to appear at the appeal. The planning inspector concluded that the development 'would result in unsustainable travel patterns and a reliance on the use of the private car', and 'would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area, the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, and the setting of the Grade II listed Old Dairy Cottage'.



Volunteer

Curbar Edge in the Peak District National Park



© Cally Robbin/Alamy Stock Photo

Leading by example

Julie Parry is chair of CPRE Peak District and South Yorkshire (PDSY) and tells us about how she got involved, what she gets up to in her role and what's important to her about her volunteering:

"I became the chair of CPRE PDSY officially in October 2020. My role involves meeting with the Board of Trustees and also meeting regularly with the CEO of the charity, via Zoom and also in person – preferably outside in our lovely Peak District!

Prior to becoming chair, I also volunteered with the Haythornthwaite Archive project which was fascinating. This is an ongoing project to document and preserve the plethora of archive material left by Gerald and Ethel Haythornthwaite, the founders of CPRE PDSY and key figures in the national CPRE movement.

I volunteer with CPRE because I love the local countryside. I want to be able to enjoy it in the future and I want future generations to have the same experiences that I've had. The most enjoyable aspects of my role are helping people, learning new things and sharing experiences with a team. I'm currently undertaking an organisational review and this is one of the hardest challenges that someone in the position of chair has to do. It's not easy to be completely objective when you are dealing with people you know who have worked for CPRE for a long

time. There's a lot at stake for the charity and for its employees, but it must be done to help CPRE PDSY move forward.

Volunteering has made a huge difference to my life. I've got to know lots of new people from different backgrounds (I had not worked with planners and seasoned campaigners before!), and I've enjoyed taking part in the online training modules offered by national CPRE. I really appreciate the opportunities to talk to staff at the national charity. I especially like the monthly online Chair's Chat meetings where I can talk to people in the same role across the country who are facing similar challenges and we can support each other.

Our countryside deserves to be treated with respect and it's important to me to spend my free time protecting it, for example by picking up litter in the lanes close to my home. I also volunteer in the Peak District National Park as a Patrol Ranger on the Eastern Moors, talking to people about keeping their dogs on leads, and the fire danger arising from BBQs which has had a huge impact this year already. I'm lucky enough to live in the countryside – it is special, precious and fragile and I want to help protect it. When I go for a walk in the countryside it's like a workout for my soul."

Find out more: look for the latest volunteering opportunities near you at cpre.org.uk/get-involved/volunteering

An evolving city

CPRE Cambridgeshire & Peterborough have supported two major planning applications in Peterborough. The first was the planning application to develop the Embankment, 90 acres of previously landfill site in the middle of Peterborough, into a new university with 12,500 students by 2030. There is also to be a new stadium for Peterborough United (Posh) adjacent to the university. This was a major part of the regeneration plans for the city centre and will provide a real thriving core to future development. The second was the Solar Farm in Stanground, again on a landfill site, which promised green energy and a net gain in biodiversity without using valuable farmland. Peterborough is central to the Fen basin and its evolution over the next few years could make it an important role model of how to incorporate development while allowing local countryside to play a leading role in tackling the climate change emergency.

Following their success in helping to defeat plans for a polluting and intrusive waste incinerator at Waterbeach last year, the group continues to support Wisbech residents resist plans for an incinerator there. Campaigners say the development, proposed on a flood plain just metres from schools and housing, will dominate the town, creating hundreds of daily lorry movements.

An AONB for Northamptonshire?

Because their beautiful county is almost uniquely bereft of any nationally protected landscapes such as National Parks, Green Belts and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, CPRE Northamptonshire were keen to engage their members and supporters in developing a case for an AONB. Their email invitation generated one of their largest responses ever, with lots of nominations of possible contenders for designation, as well as many replies simply supporting the idea and providing encouragement.

Many suggestions referenced the Northamptonshire Uplands, the Nene Valley, and the Welland Valley. The woods of Weekley and Fermyn received a mention, as did the forests of Salcey and Rockingham, and areas around Alderton, Aldwinckle, Badby and Kelmars. A process now needs to be followed, with Natural England the sole organisation that can designate an AONB and then only after local authority agreement has been secured as part of this process. CPRE Northants chairman Paul Parsons is now contacting the relevant officials at the new unitary authorities to share the enthusiasm for an AONB designation; to find out if any work on AONB status was currently happening within the county; and to also ascertain their appetite for collaboration with CPRE.

In review

Our perspective on environmental issues

Digging deep for peat's potential

The government's new Peat Action Plan says that 'peatlands should be nurtured, not mined'. Our agricultural lead, Graeme Willis, digs into the detail to see if this intention holds up.

"In recent years, CPRE has pushed for peat to be given the profile it deserves in tackling climate change. Peatlands are one of nature's heroes. They lock up huge amounts of carbon, stabilising our climate, and have done so for millennia. And there's a reason that they've earned themselves the nickname 'Britain's rainforests'. They support rare and beautiful wildlife, store and clean up our drinking water and cut the risk of floods. But peatlands need to be healthy to do all this hard work, and most are degraded.

In 2021, the UK's inventory on greenhouse gases shows fully – and shockingly – how degraded peatlands are adding 5% to our emissions of greenhouse gases each year. These sodden soils used to hold carbon in, keeping it safely out of the atmosphere. But through poor treatment and destruction, we've turned them from an ancient carbon sink into a carbon source.

The government's England Peat Action Plan, published in May 2021, puts down an important statement of intent to restore our peatlands. We're pleased to see that it recognises how important peatlands are for climate, nature and people. It's also reassuring to see the Environment Secretary, George Eustice, acknowledge in the plan's opening statement that '...for too long we have taken this valuable natural resource for granted.'

Promises for prospering peatlands

The plan also recognises the costs of damaging peat, and the economic rationale for restoring it – and of acting now, to prevent peat health worsening and more being lost. We see lots to celebrate here, including the proposed ban on peat in composts for amateur gardening by 2024.

We're also happy to see a plan to keep reviewing the burning of peat, and some important recognition that, once they're burned, we can't restore blanket bogs and protect their carbon stores. There were more great intentions in the plan, such as the commissioning of a detailed map of peatlands to use as a baseline for future measurements, and action on the Great North Bog project to restore great swathes of the Pennines, Lakes Districts and Northumberland.

Once they're burned, we can't restore blanket bogs and protect their carbon stores

But it's essential that the government properly define what 'sustainably managing peatlands' means, in order to protect and restore these soils. And we urgently need them to act on all fronts: on garden peat, peat burning, restoring uplands and lowlands, as well as on farming methods that protect peat soils for future use.

While the plan's commitment of £50million to restore 35,000 hectares of peatlands by 2025 is a positive sign, it is dwarfed by the billions being spent on new roads. For the plan to have teeth, we need funding for peat to have parity with trees (a pot of £500million for tree planting was announced in 2021) – and the level of ambition to stay high and unwavering."



A peat bog pool in the North Pennines AONB

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Q&A

The answers you need

Nests not nets

Q I've noticed that many hedgerows in my area are being covered in blue netting, presumably as a means of securing their removal for development or intensive farming by claiming a lack of biodiversity. Is there anything that can be done about this.

A CPRE Staffordshire have recently raised this issue, noting that under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, it's illegal to do any work or damage that might harm nesting birds or destroy their nests. As the bird nesting season officially lasts from 1 March to 31 August, some developers who want to remove hedges and trees during the spring and summer have taken to covering them with netting to keep out birds. Although this is legal, the professional body for ecologists, the Chartered Institute of Ecology and

Environmental Management, as well as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, have expressed considerable concern about the practice and advise against it

The sight of hedgerows shrouded in netting in Staffordshire has caused widespread anger. In February, Miller Homes installed netting on hedges on a development on former Green Belt land at Keepers Lane in Codsall, but removed it after a public outcry. In 2020, protestors forced the University of Cambridge to apologise and remove nets it had put over 20 trees beside its expanding Whittle Laboratory. Earlier this year, Cambridge Water were forced to remove bird netting from hedgerows in Landbeach, which were in the way of a new mains pipeline, after social media complaints about the harmful impact on wildlife.

Reviewing protected species

Q I've heard that there are plans for a review of legislation that protects threatened species from development. Is anything being done to challenge this?

A CPRE Kent is supporting an open letter from 30 conservation charities, including Froglife and the RSPB, opposing a review of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 that could undermine decades of work to restore and protect threatened species. Every five years, species listed in Schedules 5 and 8 of the Act are reviewed through a process called the Quinquennial Review (QQR), coordinated by the UK Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC). Many species are listed because conservation experts have recommended their inclusion due to either persecution, population decline or other threats.

This year, in a change to the normal process, the Review Group (including JNCC and Natural England) has changed the eligibility criteria of species listed and afforded protection by the Act.

This means that an animal or plant species will only be protected when it is in imminent danger of extinction as defined by the highest categories in the IUCN Red Listing process, or those identified as European Protected Species. This decision has been made without due consultation and, to date, has not considered concerns raised by conservation groups.

Many endangered species could be at serious risk if the proposed changes are granted. Froglife's Jenny Tse-Leon said: 'Our research has shown that common toad numbers have plummeted by 68 per cent in the last 30 years, but these plans mean they no longer qualify for protection.' Building developments could take place with no consideration of the impacts on formerly protected species such as hedgehogs, water voles, slow worms and grass snakes. In their letter to the Review Group, the wildlife NGOs are calling for a public consultation on the decision to change the eligibility criteria.

Brownfield homes underway

CPRE Derbyshire have been pleased to see the brownfield development at Cawdor Quarry in Matlock starting to take shape after many years of planning. Their campaigning helped prevent green fields at the far end of the site being added to the plans, but they fully supported this town centre development of over 400 homes coming to fruition on previously developed land. They praised the local action group, Save Snitterton Fields, for playing a leading role in reducing the original greenfield allocation of the development from 95 homes to just five. Community campaigners continue to work hard to make sure the planning conditions are observed for the whole site, including the retention of trees and other wildlife areas.

Early this year CPRE Derbyshire's committee developed a new strategy for the group, underpinned by the following vision: 'To value, and encourage others to value, the unique and varied Landscape Character of Derbyshire, focusing on those often overlooked parts of our beautiful county outside the Peak District National Park. Working to promote people's love of the countryside and their ability to access it.' Find out more about their current work at cprederbysire.org.uk.

Securing Goring's green gap

CPRE Sussex congratulated Worthing Council on their recent decision to refuse planning permission for Persimmon's applications for 475 homes on 74 acres at Chatsmore Farm, west of Goring. The proposals for this green site between Goring and Ferring totally contravened the council's spatial policy to protect this green gap in the current and emerging local plans. The major development would have had substantial impacts on landscape views into and out of the South Downs National Park and the National Trust's Highdown Estate, both of which lie immediately north of the site. Campaigners also felt that the effects of coalescence of the two communities of Goring and Ferring would be significant.

Our volunteers have been working for some months with the local conservation groups in Goring and Ferring and Worthing's Civic Society, submitting objections to support the local community concerns for the loss of this publicly accessible space which is fundamental to the quality of life of local residents. CPRE Sussex highlighted that there are 1,007 acres of previously developed land suitable for housing in the county's brownfield registers. That is enough to build at least 23,000 new homes on land that could be prioritised for development instead of building on the countryside.

Campaign spotlight

Restoring our hedgerow network

The UK hedgerow network, in its expanse, is our largest nature reserve. It is a vital piece of the puzzle when it comes to addressing both the climate emergency and biodiversity loss.

That is why we are asking the government to act on the Climate Change Committee's recommendation and commit to the hedgerow planting and restoration required to increase the extent of UK's hedgerows by 40% – equivalent to 120,000 miles. Planting vastly more hedgerows must be a part of the government's plan to achieve net zero, supporting the delivery of their plans for a Nature Recovery Network and forming a vital part of their emerging Nature Strategy.

Across Britain, the Countryside Survey (2007) recorded 300,000 miles of 'managed' hedgerows, while two-thirds of England has had a continuously hedged landscape for a thousand years or more. Sadly, we have lost many of our hedgerows over the past century and, it is estimated, over 50% since WW2. By comparison, woodlands have increased by 160% in the same period. Hedgerow losses are still occurring due to removal and lack of management.

Why hedgerows?

Hedgerows are the most versatile nature-based solution to climate change, able to integrate into existing landscapes and, in the Environmental Stewardship scheme, were recognised as providing a greater number of ecosystem services, 21 in all, than any other land use option, whether woodland, moorland or species-rich grassland.

Hedgerows sequester vast amounts of carbon dioxide both in above and below ground biomass. In Britain, they store up

to 13 million tonnes of carbon (47 million tonnes of carbon dioxide), which equates to 25% of farming's annual emissions. A 40% increase in hedgerow coverage by 2050 would create the potential to store an additional 18.8 million tonnes of carbon dioxide. Hedgerows also help to make urban and rural environments resilient to the impacts of climate change – being incredibly effective at holding carbon-storing soils together; slowing water flow during extreme weather; and screening air pollution.

The creation of at least 120,000 miles of 'climate hedges' would also slow, and potentially help reverse, biodiversity loss. As well as being an important habitat in their own right, they act as wildlife corridors between isolated habitats. Over 600 plants, 1,500 insects, 65 birds and 20 mammal species depend on UK hedgerow habitats. 130 priority species for conservation are strongly linked to hedgerows, including their trees, banks, basal flora and immediate margins.

Time for action

To reach the goal of a 40% increase by 2050 we would have to see over 4,000 miles of hedgerow planted and restored a year. This could be achieved through the



CPRE Oxfordshire volunteers restoring hedgerows at Hogacre Common



© Johan Siebke/Alamy Stock Photo

Hedgerows like these in East Sussex provide a wildlife-rich backdrop for country walks, as well as being great for the environment

expansion of the Nature for Climate Fund to incorporate hedgerows. The current fund prioritises restoring 86,000 acres of peatland and planting 74,000 acres of trees a year in the UK by 2025. When the government announced its peat and tree strategies in May, CPRE chief executive Crispin Truman said: ‘Hedgerows also have a vital role to play and we’d like to see the government going further to include them in their target. Today is a big day for nature and the role of the countryside in tackling climate change, but hedgerows seem to have been left out. They should be right up there, alongside trees, as nature and climate heroes.’

The government should also ensure that as their Environmental Land Management scheme develops, the planting, management and restoration of hedgerows are viable and attractive options available to all farmers and land managers at local and landscape scales. With a 40% increase in hedgerows requiring 62,000 acres of land, it could play a vital role in achieving the government’s target of protecting and managing 30% of the UK’s land for nature by 2030.

Hedgerow heroes

Thanks to a generous corporate donation, we are funding five of our county groups (Gloucestershire, Shropshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire and Suffolk) in a project

to plant and restore almost 10 miles of hedgerow before May 2022, working with local landowners and engaging 600 volunteers, 15 schools and two colleges. Work is now underway, with a May 2022 completion date, and we hope to secure funding to roll out the initiative to other local CPREs.

CPRE Gloucestershire is partnering with Friends of the Cotswolds to recruit two apprentices who will be able to learn the hedgelaying trade alongside the business management, marketing and accounting skills they’ll need to make a successful career of it. CPRE Oxfordshire and the charity Wild Oxfordshire will work with community groups and Watlington Parish Council ‘to get people really engaged in what’s going on in their landscape and able to do practical work to plant new hedgerows and look after existing ones’. Meanwhile, CPRE Shropshire has identified the enhancement and restoration of older, depleted hedgerows as an important consideration in the south west of the county. Volunteers have visited and assessed around 30 sites over the spring and will be filling gaps where needed, while planting over a mile of new hedgerow this coming planting season.

Find out more about the practical hedgerow projects of our county groups and follow the latest on our national campaign at cpre.org.uk

Norwich link road concerns

CPRE Norfolk recently wrote to Norfolk County Council to outline concerns regarding the Norwich Western Link road. They pointed out that major environmental concerns about the whole project made it unlikely the road would be permitted, calling on the council to avoid wasting taxpayers’ money and focus on climate change mitigation and environmental protection. The cost of the project is currently estimated at £198m while the council’s own scoping study for the Western Link notes the road would have an environmental impact on the rare and protected habitat of the river Wensum. The study even noted the Wensum is ‘the only river designated as an SAC [Special Area of Conservation] in the East of England’ and ‘in comparative terms has the importance of a Grade One listed building, of similar importance to Norwich cathedral.’

The study goes on to say that ‘the strength of international protection for the river corridor SAC would be an important factor to be considered at an inquiry. An NNDR [Norwich Western Link] scheme, which included a new crossing of the River Wensum SAC, would face a high risk of failure, unless the county council could prove beyond doubt that the scheme would have no adverse impact on the integrity of the site.’ Read the letter and the latest on the road at cprenorfolk.org.uk/news

Matter of fact

Support for your case

AONB beauty still being betrayed

New analysis by CPRE has found that local authorities are increasingly planning major developments in AONBs, largely consisting of executive-style housing – with only 16% classed as affordable. We've found government pressure to increase housing numbers is forcing local authorities to prioritise new building over landscape protection.

Beginning with the designation of the Quantocks AONB in 1956, 34 AONBs (covering 15% of England) have put natural beauty within 30 minutes of two-thirds of the population. Thanks to previous CPRE lobbying, government planning guidance recommends that 'major development' on AONB land should only happen under exceptional circumstances, and only when it can be demonstrated that it is in the public interest. But our new research has found that local authorities are increasingly allowing development in AONBs.

Government pressure to increase housing numbers is completely undermining AONBs' legal purpose to 'conserve and enhance natural beauty'. Every year since 2017/2018, we've seen an average of 1,670 housing units approved in AONBs – representing an annual loss of 294 acres of supposedly protected landscape.

Targeting green fields

While these housing numbers constitute a 27% increase on the previous five year period (from 2012-17), the amount of countryside they are being built on has more than doubled (up by 129%), indicating an increasingly wasteful use of land. In fact, our research found that greenfield developments in AONBs

are using up twice as much land as the national average in providing just 16 dwellings per hectare.

Despite their inherent unsustainability, we found that 80% of planning applications on greenfield AONB land are given permission, flying in the face of planning guidelines. This success rate is encouraging further speculative applications: 967 were submitted in the first five months of 2020/21, putting it on course for the highest annual total since 2017/18. High housing pressure is also having a major impact on the landscape 'setting' of AONBs, with 27,857 housing units approved for building within 500 metres of their boundaries in the past five years – an increase of 135% on 2012-17.

We identified a particularly intense pressure on these landscapes in the south east and south west of England, which are accommodating 85% of the national total of homes planned for AONBs. The Dorset and Chilterns AONBs – both recommended for National Park status by the government's independent Glover Review of landscapes – have both seen 771 housing units on greenfield land approved since 2017. Meanwhile, the Cotswolds AONB, which was also recommended for National Park status, saw a tripling in new housing.

The Glover Review's recommendations, published at the end of 2019, endorsed CPRE's longstanding calls for AONBs to be given a stronger voice in planning decisions, noting the 'particular development pressure' on the High Weald and the Kent Downs AONBs. Indeed, our research found that the High Weald has seen 932 homes



The Slad Valley in the Cotswolds AONB

approved on greenfield sites since 2017, while the Kent Downs has experienced a ten-fold increase in development.

Planning for people and nature

We are calling on the government to use the upcoming Planning Bill to strengthen protections for AONBs and ensure that any development meets the needs of local people. This should include clear guidance that AONBs' role in conserving and enhancing natural beauty must take priority over housing targets. Furthermore, planning policy must also ensure that development is not permitted in the setting of an AONB if it would have an adverse impact on the experience and appreciation of the landscape within.

But while giving local authorities the power to reject inappropriate developments, we'd also like to see policies that encourage the smaller, community-led schemes that are much more likely to provide affordable and social homes for local people. And because the people who manage these landscapes are best placed to advise on their future, we want to see AONB partnerships fully consulted on any major developments that affect them, with their advice given the utmost consideration in decision-making.