



The
countryside
charity

Fieldwork



Wapping Wharf, Bristol – a recycled brownfield site

© Nicola Ferrari Alamy

More evidence that urban regeneration can save the countryside

CPRE's latest report on the state of brownfield in England has found that this previously developed land could accommodate over 1.3 million new homes – a 10% increase on 2020.

Recycling our land, our analysis of 330 local authority brownfield registers, revealed that the current identified capacity for homes on suitable brownfield (not including vacant sites that are important for wildlife, heritage or amenity) stands at 1,162,970. Analysis of sites that were removed from registers as building progressed found capacity for a further 152,403 homes, bringing the total to 1,315,373.

But with the proportion of brownfield plots with planning

permission currently the lowest since records began – down to 44% from 53% last year, it is clear that they are not being prioritised for development ahead of greenfield land. Indeed, our report highlights a long-term decline in brownfield 'recycling': back in 2007, 68% of land used for housing was brownfield – a proportion that more than halved to 32% by 2017-18, the last year for which data is available. An accompanying trend has seen developers targeting more lucrative rural locations for homes that are both carbon-intensive and unaffordable, with official statistics showing that the amount of greenfield land used for housing in 2017-18 (3,689 hectares) was 144% higher than 2007 (1,510ha).

Continued on p2

Inside this issue

Protecting the
Lincolnshire Wolds p4

Citizen scientists caring for
the River Wye p6

Getting schoolchildren out
to the countryside p7

Engaging stakeholders in
local campaigns p8

Helping a parish defeat a
new town p10

Listening to rural youth p12

Beauty and design in
national planning policy p13

Fieldwork

Volume 18, Issue 3

Editor

Oliver Hilliam
fieldwork@cpre.org.uk

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)



CPRE The countryside charity
5-11 Lavington Street
London SE1 0NZ
T 020 7981 2800
F 020 7981 2899
info@cpre.org.uk
www.cpre.org.uk
@CPRE

Campaign to Protect Rural England is a company limited by guarantee, registered in England, number 4302973. Registered charity number 1089685.

All the articles and features within this publication are copyright of the CPRE and may not be reprinted or distributed without the prior written consent of the publishers.



More evidence that urban regeneration can save the countryside

Continued from p1

Back to brownfield first

Our report suggests these trends are the result of a combination of factors: a decline in public funding for brownfield remediation; planning policies allowing developers to claim these sites are 'unviable'; and pressure on councils to find a five-year supply of housing land. It cites the example of Trafford in Greater Manchester, where the council is proposing that 5,000 homes, warehousing and four new roads are developed on Carrington Moss – an area with significant amounts of Green Belt, peatland, woodland and Grade 2 agricultural land – despite plentiful supplies of brownfield land in the area.

● A firm 'brownfield first' policy must be introduced to prioritise previously used land for housing before greenfield is even considered ●

To halt this irreversible and unnecessary destruction of our countryside, CPRE is calling for firm 'brownfield first' guidelines to be introduced into the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), to prioritise the recycling of previously used land for housing before greenfield land is even considered. Local authorities should also have increased control of the order in which development land is built, so that suitable brownfield sites are developed first.

Such an approach could also help protect Green Belts like London's from urban sprawl, with enough brownfield in the capital to provide over 355,000 homes. Meanwhile, areas like the North West, Yorkshire and the Humber, and West Midlands would enjoy huge economic and social benefits from the transformation of their derelict sites into quality affordable homes – with space for over 375,000 in these three regions alone.

Signs of progress

The chancellor's October budget announcement of a £1.8bn to 'unlock' 160,000 new brownfield homes was a welcome start. But it must be swiftly followed by the sort of announcement

hinted at by the new housing secretary Michael Gove, in his recent evidence to the housing, communities and local government select committee. Mr Gove told MPs he is 'very keen ... to get a brownfield first policy that really works ... to provide people with the sort of housing that is welcomed and needed ... and, I hope, affordable in urban settings that we need to concentrate on.'

● We want to see the government's New Homes Bonus payments re-focused specifically on improving affordability in brownfield developments ●

We were particularly pleased to hear the secretary of state's emphasis on affordability, with our report showing that of the 3,143 brownfield sites on which development had begun since 2016, only 233 were described as providing affordable homes (albeit at an average proportion of 50%). The very low levels of affordable housing provision are likely to be a result of the higher costs involved in redeveloping brownfield land, highlighting the importance of government funding to overcome this. We also want to see the government's New Homes Bonus payments re-focused specifically on improving affordability in brownfield developments.

Most importantly, we want the government to ensure that local people have a say on what happens with brownfield sites in their neighbourhood – including through increased compulsory purchase powers to help communities bring forward land for development. CPRE continues to promote the role of communities in ensuring a constant supply of new sites are added to brownfield registers – particularly the smaller sites which previous CPRE research suggested are often omitted. September saw the online launch of our Brownfield Land Register Toolkit, first developed by CPRE Lancashire, to help local people tell their councils about suitable sites. You can find the toolkit, and our full State of Brownfield report, at cpre.org.uk/resources

Break through

How volunteers are making a difference



© Becca Nelson

Back to walking ways

Having had to pause their programme of walking events since February 2020, CPRE Lancashire have been delighted to resume these popular activities and introduce new people to CPRE and our campaigns. Preston's parks and Green Belt land provided the perfect backdrop for their first post-lockdown walk in June, taking in Georgian architecture, nature reserves and riverside paths in baking heat.

This was recently followed by an Autumn walk in the Wirral (pictured above), again led by Dr Andrew Read, which explored woodlands, fields, moorlands and the coast around West Kirby. A great turnout included CPRE regulars, Ramblers and members of the Manchester Weekend Walkers, along with a group of international students who have made their home in Liverpool for the year.

Government gets the message on planning

Local campaigners around the country were delighted to hear that the government is taking another look at its plans – vehemently opposed by CPRE – to deregulate the planning system and revoke the right of local people to have their say on new development. Conservative party chairman Oliver Dowden used his October conference speech to confirm that the government had heeded our message, and that revised proposals would ‘set out in law measures to protect our towns, villages and precious countryside from being despoiled by ugly development.’

We want to see a much greater role for communities enshrined in a new planning bill, along with stronger protections for landscapes and the

environment. We'll be making that case to the new Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Michael Gove, whose evidence to MPs on 8 November suggested that ‘net zero’ would be at the heart of planning policy, and that councils would be able to take account of protected land like AONBs and Green Belt in planning for more realistic housing numbers. Mr Gove said he had been listening to CPRE calls ‘for homes in the right places’, declaring: ‘We want a planning system where people can feel confident that beauty is taken seriously, that the environment is benefiting, that the money will be there to support their infrastructure, and that ultimately the community has a role in determining what is right.’

Fieldwork evolves – sign up for our new quarterly bulletin!

It's been great to be able share tips and stories on our campaigns, nationally and from around the CPRE network, through Fieldwork – but we'd like to be able to share them more often. To do so, we've decided to replace Fieldwork with a special email bulletin, exclusively for members, coming to you four times a year.

We'll be sending the first email in spring, featuring a similar mix of inspiring campaigns and projects from around the CPRE network, plus insights on our national work. If you'd like to receive the new bulletin and currently receive other emails from CPRE, you don't have to do anything right now. We will send you the new quarterly email automatically and you'll be able to unsubscribe at any time. If you don't currently receive CPRE emails, but would like to register to receive the new quarterly bulletin, please email supportercare@cpre.org.uk with ‘Fieldwork’ in the subject line.

A reprieve for Stonehenge?

CPRE continues to support the Stonehenge Alliance in their work to protect their monument and its historic landscape setting, and CPRE Wiltshire recently promoted their open letter to the prime minister asking for dualling of the A303 through Stonehenge World Heritage Site (WHS) to be abandoned. The letter follows the Government's decision not to appeal against the High Court's late July judgment quashing development consent for the scheme.

With the transport secretary Grant Shapps MP required to 're-determine' the application following the successful legal challenge, the letter warned that the 2021 World Heritage Committee meeting in July had suggested the WHS might be placed on the World Heritage in Danger List, should the scheme proceed unaltered. It also noted that with a cost estimated to be in the region of £2bn, the scheme does not stand up in terms of value for money, while the petition asking for the scheme to be reconsidered now has over 218,000 signatures. John Adams OBE, Alliance Chairman, called for 'a new approach that improves people's access to the South West without damaging the WHS or increasing carbon emissions' by 'investing in a better and fully integrated public transport network'. Find out more at stonehengealliance.org.uk

News round-up

Keeping you on top of the latest relevant issues

Oil drilling averted in Lincolnshire

National press coverage and a detailed planning objection helped CPRE support local people in defeating plans for oil drilling and extraction at Biscathorpe, in the Lincolnshire Wolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Fittingly, the decision by Lincolnshire County Council took place on 1 November – the first day of the COP26 climate summit. The council's planning committee voted to refuse plans for 15 years of oil extraction, citing harm to the AONB and the unacceptable noise likely to result from the works. In urging the council to reject the application, CPRE's Paul Miner had told the BBC: 'It's very clear that the protection of the landscape and scenic beauty should be given great weight in

AONBs – we see no justification for oil drilling in the Lincolnshire Wolds.'

More than 200 residents had objected to the drilling, while a petition gathered more than 1,200 signatures. Local MP Victoria Atkins had argued the development was 'completely at odds with the character and natural beauty of the area', citing the risk of contamination of the adjacent River Bain – a rare and nationally significant chalk stream – and the potential loss of income from tourism. Planning officers at Lincolnshire County Council had previously recommended the plans for approval, which serves to highlight the need for the planning system to take account of the full climate impact of developments and offer stronger protection for designated landscapes.

Getting to work on hedgerows

September saw us publish new research which found that the benefits of setting and achieving our target of a 40% increase in hedgerows by 2050 would not only benefit the climate and nature, but would result in the creation of over 25,000 jobs.

Furthermore, our Hedge Fund report found that if the right hedgerows are planted in the right place, for every £1 invested in hedgerow planting, as much as £3.92 of value is generated in the wider economy. Our report was launched at a parliamentary reception attended by MPs, local CPRE campaigners and environment secretary, George Eustice MP – who wrote in the Telegraph: 'I welcome CPRE's report today, highlighting the benefits of hedgerows and their ability to become champions of climate action and nature recovery ... and benefit the rural economy'.

Meanwhile, the unseasonably warm autumn may have delayed their planting work, but the five CPRE county groups

in our Hedgerow Heroes practical conservation project have been busy with surveying work and training events. CPRE Shropshire's second hedgelaying training event even saw the farm's Shire horses brought up to cart away some of the 'brash' – to be turned into a 'dead hedge' providing a habitat and shelter for insects and other wildlife. Find out more at cpre.org.uk/hedgerowheroes



Shropshire hedgerow training

© Sarah Jameson



Maintaining upland paths
above Haweswater

© Friends of the Lake District

10 years of Fell Care in the Lakes

CPRE Cumbria and Friends of the Lake District celebrated 10 years of their 'Fell Care Days' in stunning sunshine for their November event at Haweswater.

50 volunteers, task leaders and Friends of the Lake District (FLD) staff took part after an enforced break due to the pandemic. They succeeded in planting 150 juniper trees above Blea Water while Fix the Fells volunteers carried out maintenance on 10km of upland bridleways and footpaths. The team even found time to repair a dry stone wall and remove 1,000 tree guards for

recycling. To their delight, a great spotted woodpecker was later seen working its way round the base of the newly revealed tree trunks, picking off grubs exposed by the removal of the guards.

The first decade of Fell Care Days saw 20 events across Cumbria, with over 2,700 volunteers helping to manage 12 acres of woodland, 360km of paths, and 215 metres of dry stone wall. These incredible occasions have also seen 2,760 native trees planted, four bridges built and 19 litter picks – creating, as FLD's Jack Ellerby put it, 'a positive, collective legacy of landscape enhancement.'

Victory for the Loxley Valley

CPRE Peak District and South Yorkshire and the Friends of the Loxley Valley were pleased and relieved that the planning inspectorate refused planning permission for controversial new housing in the Loxley Valley.

The August decision ruled that the proposed development of up to 300 homes on an old factory site would substantially harm Green Belt countryside. Planning Inspector Martin Whitehead said: 'The site would change from largely abandoned buildings in a woodland setting to a well-used, domestic residential, suburban area. The proposal would be harmful to the special character of the Loxley Valley.'

Almost a thousand people objected

to the original planning application including local groups, the MPs for Sheffield Hallam and Hillsborough, and councillors in local wards. CPRE and the Friends took part in the planning inquiry, arguing that the proposed new suburb would dominate the beautiful valley and create an unsustainable, isolated enclave with residents dependent on their cars for their everyday needs.

Andy Tickle, head of campaigns at CPRE Peak District & South Yorkshire, maintained that 'the old factory site can be redeveloped to achieve outstanding environmental standards that Sheffield can be proud of.' Meanwhile, the campaign was praised by deputy council leader Julie Grocutt as 'a fine example of organisations working together.'

Saving Swanscombe Marshes

CPRE Kent were one of several charities celebrating after Swanscombe Marshes was confirmed as a Site of Special Scientific Interest in November. They are now stepping up their calls for the withdrawal of the 'London Resort' theme park planning application that would destroy this north Kent habitat. The SSSI designation by Natural England – the government's adviser for the natural environment in England – recognises that the marshes are of high conservation value due to the unique and biodiverse wildlife and plant species found there.

The RSPB, Buglife, Kent Wildlife Trust and Save Swanscombe Peninsula are all working with CPRE Kent to fight the development and say the site, which consists of a remarkable mosaic of grasslands, coastal habitats, scrub and wetlands, is home to a staggering amount of wildlife. This includes more than 2,000 species of invertebrate, including the critically endangered distinguished jumping spider, found at only one other site in the UK, as well as the sea aster, mining bee, brown-banded carder bee and saltmarsh shortspur beetle. Swanscombe also supports an outstanding number of breeding birds, comparable with the best sites in England, including marsh harrier, cuckoo, nightingale, black redstart and grasshopper warbler.

Caring for Dorset's AONB

The CPRE West Dorset group recently welcomed the refusal of an application to extend a quarry within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty at Westford Park Farm near Chard. They worked with a very effective local group, Stop the Quarry in Dorset AONB, to ensure a strong objection highlighting the destruction of hedgerows and trees, noise and dust pollution and additional HGV traffic that would have resulted.

Meanwhile, CPRE Dorset are supporting the Dorset AONB in helping local 'fingerpost champions' help restore these iconic rural signs, now that the local authority no longer has a remit to repair them. Our group is offering a small grants scheme for people wanting to restore fingerposts using the correct materials as set out by the Dorset AONB. Match funding is not required and there is no application form, but CPRE Dorset ask that requests come from a Parish Council representative (or similar), with a summary of the fingerposts that need repairing, their location(s) and payment details. The scheme covers the whole of the county and can award up to £200 per post. So far, they have allocated £15,352 on grants for 105 fingerposts; to find out if your parish could be next, get in touch via dorset-cpre.org.uk/contact-us

letter from the field

Words from local campaigners



Volunteers rally behind the River Wye

CPRE Herefordshire's Dilys Merry writes on their citizen science project to monitor the health of the River Wye.

'Hundreds of Herefordshire residents have shown they're just as concerned about the dreadful state of our River Wye as we are, by signing up to become citizen scientists. We've been delighted to welcome volunteers from all walks of life and experience – with an age range from 20 to 86 so far!

Last summer and this, we've seen the river turn into a green soup as phosphate pollution has boosted algal blooms. These slimy blooms go on to smother the beds of Water Crowfoot which support diverse populations of water life. They also carpet the gravel beds where fish normally lay their eggs, cutting off their oxygen supply.



© Bill Philpot Alamy

We've teamed up with scientists from Cardiff University and our citizen scientists will be providing them with weekly data from all over Herefordshire. This will pinpoint the sources of phosphate and other pollutants in the Wye. We'll be sampling both small streams and the larger rivers to get these important measurements. Cutbacks to the Environment Agency budget mean

they are unable to test as widely as is needed, which is why it's excellent news that so many local people want to step up to defend their river.

More than 420 volunteers have signed up and several parish councils are on board too! We've mapped the catchment to achieve the widest coverage we can, and training by Rod Hawnt (a retired hydrologist) and our very own Andrew McRobb has already started to get useful data coming in. We're delighted to announce sampling has started on the Rivers Frome, Arrow and Lugg, while Friends of the Upper Wye have been busy recording data further up the Wye catchment.

The campaign gathered speed in October with The Hereford Times launching its new environmental supplement, 'One Planet', by focusing on the state of the Wye. Meanwhile local MPs for Hereford, North Herefordshire and the Forest of Dean wrote to the Treasury calling for £10-15 million to set up an enforcement body with real power and accountability. We also welcome the signs that the poultry industry may be admitting their part in phosphate pollution. Avara foods attended a Nutrient Management Board meeting and for the first time accepted they are part of the problem and have a responsibility to find solutions.

CPRE Herefordshire is highlighting the problem by giving talks around the county. A recent talk to Hereford College of Art students formed part of their project 'The Contemporary Picturesque'. And we're busy talking to schools and parish councils.' Follow the latest on the campaign at cpreherefordshire.org.uk

Good ideas

Learning from each other



Discovering nature

Thanks to support from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, CPRE Lancashire have been raising awareness of the countryside, nature and local food in a joint project with Incredible Edible Knowsley.

Over the summer, pupils from six local primary schools and young adults with learning disabilities have attended

sessions both in school, and at Incredible Edible's base in historic Court Hey Park, where they planted seeds, explored the concept of mindfulness and learned about the importance of green spaces. Autumn brought trips to Croxteth Park for the chance to visit the Victorian working farm, try a spot of pond dipping and explore the Green Belt countryside of the Country Park.

The hedgelayers of the future

As part of CPRE's Hedgerow Heroes project, CPRE Hampshire has been working with Bransgore Primary School to educate the children on the importance of hedgerows in the county's landscape.

After CPRE Hampshire's Natalie Hargreaves attended an assembly with all Key Stage 2 children at the school, some of the pupils were invited to come along to the work taking place on the nearby Meyrick Estate. After learning about hedgerow management, they looked for evidence of habitats and wildlife, identifying several different species of plants including field maple and buckthorn.

Before departing, the children all signed the 'Hedge Pledge' to become Hedgerow Heroes within their own school, where

a new hedge is being planted in January. In the meantime, CPRE Hampshire's volunteer-led work on the Meyrick Estate continues, with a winter programme of hedge laying and planting. Find out the latest at cprehampshire.org.uk



© Boyd McCleary

The case for green space

Our London campaigners have been making the case that infill development on housing estates must not lead to loss of green space and play spaces. CPRE London argue that more social homes can be built while retaining these vital areas for play and relaxation. They advocate that infill blocks should be built on 'grey space' i.e. car parks, superfluous roads, hardstanding, garages or derelict or disused buildings; or, estates should be reconfigured to retain the same amount of green space where that is possible. The overall intention should be to retain the amount of green space while improving its quality.

As The Guardian reported in August, boroughs are now 'facing resistance ... as council residents fight the destruction of communal gardens in dense and polluted areas.' CPRE London has been asked to support a number of campaigns to save green spaces in housing estates, and have been glad to help raise the profile of such an important issue while highlighting alternative solutions. They continue to argue that green spaces must be protected and enhanced as essential resources, including through their work on the London Urban Forest Plan, and are proposing that any development of estate gardens, parks, trees and play areas must require a ballot of all residents.

Standing up for Somerset

CPRE Somerset recently celebrated the Planning Inspectorate's dismissal of an appeal to allow 100 houses on Windmill Hill in Wincanton. Our campaigners spoke at the appeal to argue that the proposal would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area, and would degrade the rural setting of Wincanton. The development was in conflict with policies in the local plan which seek to promote and protect local distinctiveness and protect local identity.

Meanwhile, our group also welcomed the news that an illegal motocross site near Burrow Mump on the Somerset Levels will have to cease operating. Local residents have had to deal with the noise and disturbance caused by motorbikes for many months now and it was becoming unbearable. CPRE Somerset responded to their pleas for help and, after a site visit, submitted their own objection. The noise of the motorbikes upset the peace and tranquillity of the flat, open landscape of the Levels and of Burrow Mump war memorial – a historic hill (a scheduled monument) with a grade II listed church ruin on top. Local people were delighted when the council refused to grant retrospective planning permission, meaning peace will be restored to this place of quiet reflection and protected wildlife habitat.

step by step

Our campaigning approach to protecting the Green Belt

More than half of the land in Hertfordshire is within the London Metropolitan Green Belt and its future is at a critical juncture. Seven of the ten borough councils in Hertfordshire have new local plans in various stages of development; influencing the outcome of these is critical, as once adopted they will define what development happens where for the next 15 to 20 years.

So far in 2021, three of these borough councils (Dacorum, Three Rivers and Hertsmeres) have run public consultations on their draft local plans. CPRE Hertfordshire has developed a campaigning approach to 'amplify our voice' in these consultations. We use the following these steps to engage with a much wider range of local stakeholders than ever before.

1 Identify stakeholders

The foundation for our campaign approach is identifying stakeholders in each of the districts/boroughs. Using publicly available contacts we have built a register of stakeholders including Residents' Associations, local campaign groups, environmental groups, parish councils, town and district councillors, MPs and local press outlets. Complying with GDPR guidelines, names, email addresses and Facebook page links are collected into an Excel database. We have 40 to 60 local stakeholders or groups per district, and we're constantly identifying and adding more with the help of a new volunteer recruited to keep this information up to date.

2 Develop communication plans

Well in advance of each local plan consultation we develop a communication plan for the relevant district. We identify existing volunteers or recruit new ones who live in the district and can provide 'on the ground' local knowledge and context. We also build a small library

of digital images showing some of the proposed development sites, for use in our communications – we always use images of the actual, threatened sites.

We focus primarily on Facebook, and use email for those without a social media presence. Key documents are loaded to our website and links provided in our Facebook posts and emails. A 'Get ready to have your say' message is sent a week or two prior to the start of the consultation. This is a rallying call and crucially, it allows us to test the tagging of various groups on our Facebook post and confirm their email addresses.

3 Share information

This is followed by an 'Initial analysis' message sharing our team's initial findings from their review of the consultation documents, and an analysis of the proposed development sites including location, size, land classification (AONB, Green Belt, greenfield, brownfield etc) and number of dwellings. This provides us with headline data on total area of Green Belt land impacted and dwellings per hectare – an indicator of executive versus affordable homes. We then share our full technical review covering all proposed policies, typically including biodiversity, climate change mitigation, water resources, transport and many other issues.

4 Encourage consultation responses

We post our own consultation submission on our website and share the link to it via Facebook and email to all stakeholders and CPRE members in the district. We also provide guidance on how individuals and groups can respond to the consultation. After the consultation has closed, we continue to provide periodic 'follow-up' updates.

We also try to meet with the head of planning and the councillor with responsibility for planning, to share



750 new dwellings are proposed for this Green Belt site in Bushey (Hertsmere borough)

our points of view and listen to their challenges and constraints. This two-way dialogue has been helpful in building relationships with key members of the council and can help make them more receptive to the consultation responses.

5 Conduct new research

Alongside the local plan consultations, earlier this year we completed a county-wide study of the impact of all Hertfordshire local plans on the Green Belt. Our research report found that 54,537 new homes are proposed on land in Hertfordshire's Green Belt, in addition to over 17,500 that have been approved or are already being built on land recently removed from the Green Belt as part of the local plan process.

We have shared our report widely on social media and in the press, using it to highlight the growing disconnect between recent government statements pledging to protect the Green Belt, and the application of planning policy at local level by councils and planning inspectors.

6 Engage local representatives

We sent our report to all local MPs and local council leaders, with a request of them to seek clarification from the government on how their recent statements pledging to protect the Green Belt are being translated into planning guidance for local authorities. We are pleased to see that so far one local MP and two council leaders have taken up our request and written to the Minister for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

To drive home the key messages, we have requested face-to-face meetings

with elected officials. We have so far met with 4 of the 11 local MPs in Hertfordshire and more meetings are being scheduled. We are also continuing to meet with the heads of planning for each borough as we seek to build closer working relationships.

7 Evaluate your impact

Our campaigning approach is making a positive difference. For example, in the recent local plan consultation in Dacorum, our campaigning led to over 4,000 responses, a nearly 50% increase over previous consultations. Dacorum Borough Council acknowledged CPRE Hertfordshire's concerns and have recently paused the local plan to issue a new call for urban and brownfield sites; the stated intention is to reduce impact on protected areas including the Chilterns AONB, the Green Belt and the Chilterns Beechwoods Special Areas of Conservation.

Crucially, we've learned how to improve our communications to the wider public. We try to keep our messaging to stakeholders as simple as possible. We avoid 'planning speak' and we try not to quote clauses from the National Planning Policy Framework, however relevant they may be. We're still learning how to harness the power of Facebook to reach very large audiences. With the right message and careful use of tagging, we can now reach upwards of 12,000 people with a single Facebook post. As a result of our increased stakeholder engagement we are now seeing new members joining CPRE from throughout the county.

Martin Varco

Chief executive, CPRE Hertfordshire

Solar success

CPRE Cornwall welcomed the September rejection of a solar farm proposal they described as an 'industrial development slap bang in the middle of open countryside'. Our campaigners congratulated Cornwall councillors for dismissing plans for the 6MW solar farm on good quality agricultural land at Tregorrick Farm near St Austell. Despite the proposed site being just 200 metres from an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, planning officers had recommended that development could go ahead, judging that the benefits of providing renewable energy outweighed any concerns.

Our campaigners believed the officers had understated the impact on the landscape setting of the AONB and were concerned that the county council had not required an Environmental Impact Assessment. Commenting on the decision, CPRE Cornwall Chair Richard Stubbs said: 'This was the wrong location for a solar farm. Why waste high-grade farmland that could be used to produce food? In the long term, it's far more sustainable to increase our self-sufficiency in food production and reduce unnecessary food miles that create CO₂ emissions. There are plenty of brownfield sites in Cornwall where ground-mounted solar panels could be installed, not in open countryside next to an AONB.'

Champion communities

Late September saw communities from the winning categories of this year's CPRE Wiltshire Best Kept Village Competition presented with their awards.

The 'winner of winners' village of Urchfont became the first to receive a celebration tree, presented by the award-winning soprano Carly Paoli who has become the charity's new countryside ambassador. Carly lauded its 'shining example of community spirit' and said 'I very much look forward to seeing this beautiful mountain ash flourish!' CPRE Wiltshire President and Lord Lieutenant of Wiltshire, Mrs Sarah Troughton, described Urchfont as 'one of the prettiest villages in Wiltshire' and told the assembled villagers they should be 'rightly proud of it. It had so many plaudits from the judges: the community spirit was remarkable, the Lamb Inn, the village hall and the scout hut were all mentioned. The telephone box used as a scarecrow exhibit was a masterpiece.'

Castle Eaton was judged not only the Best Kept Small Village but also – by a separate pair of judges – the Best Newcomer. Described as 'outstanding' and 'spotless' – not surprising since villagers had collected 125 bags of litter from roads into the village – it was also praised for its children's playground and community spirit.

Parishbeat

Supporting work to enhance your parish

Defeating a new town

CPRE Bedfordshire played a leading role in a successful campaign against the plans for the Greenwoods development – a proposed greenfield development of 3,850 dwellings and associated amenities.

Working with the 'Say No to Greenwoods New Town' local action group and seven parish councils adjacent to the proposed site (pictured), our expert volunteer and trustee John English advised on their approach to the campaign and planning matters. CPRE Bedfordshire also submitted their own objection to the plans – a significant proportion of which was within the Green Belt and the setting of the Chilterns AONB. The local residents soon gathered over 2,000 local supporters via their Facebook page, leading to 1,512 formal objections being registered – persuading the land promoter to withdraw the application, for now.

Gravenhurst Parish Council clerk, Alessandra Marabese, said: 'Working with CPRE Bedfordshire on this and other local planning applications is a huge benefit to us. Gravenhurst is a small parish with limited resources and the ability to seek advice and learn from the CPRE team is invaluable.'



Flooding fears in Oxfordshire

CPRE Oxfordshire has published a report identifying issues of flooding and water quality across the county, showing that at least 17% of towns & parishes in Oxfordshire experience flooding problems and at least 20% of towns & parishes experience issues with sewage or sewerage infrastructure.

Our group sent a survey to the 235 parish councils, 15 town councils and 68 parish meetings in Oxfordshire. Of the parish councils and meetings, 105 are being served by sewage treatment works with a record of spilling for many hours at a time. CPRE Oxfordshire is calling on Thames Water to set out clear measures to address the issues raised in this report, including targets and investment commitments. Local MPs supporting the Sewage (Inland Waters) Bill and the Environment Bill must also ensure water companies are legally bound to stop discharging raw sewage into the ocean

and rivers. Our campaigners would like to see the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 ensure all new developments demonstrate that their associated infrastructure will either maintain or improve water quality, not add to the risk of flooding, and be in place before the site is occupied. Find out more: read the full Flooding and Pollution report at cprexoxon.org.uk



Volunteers



© CPRE London

Our latest award winners

CPRE owes so much to our volunteers. We now have 45 different types of volunteering opportunities in place in CPRE across England, and 2021 has seen a record number of volunteers nominated by their local groups and the national charity – a testament to how many brilliant helping hands we are lucky to have. Here we celebrate just two of our 35 award-winning volunteers.

Lucy Farrell received a Special Contribution award for being an inspirational source of digital support for CPRE London. Trustee Danny Garvey and director Neil Sinden wanted Lucy's hard work on helping to launch the new CPRE London website to be recognised, saying: 'As part of the relaunch, we recruited some new volunteers with strong digital skills experience; we wanted to step-change our communications and web and social media presence. Over the last 18 months, Lucy has been central to the significant improvements we've made with our communications'.

'Lucy has revamped our monthly bulletins and quarterly newsletters to make them more visually engaging, punchier and clearer to read. She also led on a #PictureGreenLondon photography project we organised in last year's lockdown to highlight how Londoners were rediscovering their local green spaces. This project was the first of its kind for

CPRE London and Lucy coordinated a judging panel including the GLA deputy mayor for the environment, a leading London University academic and a member of the Royal Photographic Society.'

Pitch Wilson, a volunteer at CPRE Durham for many decades, was awarded for his special contribution to promoting rural life and empowering communities. Pitch was nominated by CPRE Durham's secretary Graeme Anderson, in recognition of his many years of service to the charity. Graeme explained: 'As well as acting as CPRE Durham chair for many years, Pitch has taken an active role in his specialism – opposing open-cast mining applications. He kept the Derwent Valley free of open cast mines for many years, helping win more than a dozen public inquiries. His last effort in this area saw him give evidence which helped stop a giant opencast mine on the edge of the beautiful and picturesque sands of Druridge Bay.'

'While we want to celebrate the protection Pitch has given to the north east countryside, what shouldn't be underestimated is his willingness to be there for the more mundane duties of CPRE membership. He's regularly chaired CPRE meetings across the region, ensuring he's there to lead and support.'

Thank you to Pitch, Lucy and all of our 2021 award-winning volunteers. If you want to be part of volunteering at CPRE, find out more at cpre.org.uk/volunteering

Devon's best churchyard

Devon's Moorland Team Ministry is celebrating its success after St Andrew's in Ashburton was named the winner of this year's 'Best Churchyard' award. Head judge and CPRE Devon trustee Ivan Buxton said: 'Ashburton stood out this year. It's amazing what they've done, and it was evident how hard everyone has worked. Arriving here, we were pleasantly surprised by the ingenuity and innovation employed to embrace the challenges posed by the pandemic and provide facilities for adults and children alike. Ashburton had taken the use of QR codes to a new and inventive level, with speciality trails and gentle challenges to encourage children.'

Representatives from Ashburton, runner-up Budleigh Salterton and the three highly commended churches have been presented with sustainable oak plaques to mark their achievements. The winning churchyard also received £200, which Ashburton has said it intends to spend on seeds and bulbs. Mark Rylands, team rector and assistant Bishop in the Diocese of Exeter, commented: 'Two and a half years ago, we talked about what this churchyard could be – an oasis, God's Acre, a space where people could come and unwind and unfurl, but also manage it properly.' See photos and a great film of the competition at cpredevon.org.uk

A living countryside

CPRE Bedfordshire's 2021 Living Countryside Awards have once again celebrated the best of the county's community initiatives and sustainable businesses. The Bedfordshire Choice Award was a new category this year and over 3,000 people voted for the winner, Treewell Community Farm. Treewell was a dilapidated chicken farm when Richard and Meghan bought it nearly two years ago. The 30 disused vegetable patches are now tended by over 30 volunteers who have transformed the land and grow their own vegetables for free. The project has provided an excellent opportunity for people struggling with mental health issues or for those who don't have gardens.

The Made in Bedfordshire award was won by Riverside Dairy, a family farm that sits along the banks of the meandering Great Ouse. They use the fresh milk from their free range, pasture fed herd of cross-bred Jerseys and Friesians to make artisan ice-creams. Customers not only love the taste, but love the fact they can see the cows and know that the ice cream has been made on-site. The judges loved this exemplar of sustainable farming that is promoting the idea of local food. Find out more about all of the entrants and watch four fantastic films on the winners at cprebeds.org.uk/discover/results2021

In review

Our perspective on rural issues

Outpriced and overlooked

Lousy public transport, loneliness and lack of affordable housing are pushing young people out of the countryside, a CPRE survey has revealed.

Our recent Outpriced and overlooked survey on why young people feel forced to leave found that only 43% of young people living in rural areas anticipate staying there over the next five years, with 72% saying genuinely affordable housing is their biggest concern. More than three-quarters (76%) of young people who do not want to stay in the countryside told us poor digital connectivity had influenced their desire to move – with weak broadband or phone coverage making it difficult to keep in touch with friends online. We also found that limited public transport (66%) was a factor, alongside loneliness and feelings of isolation (84%). Sadly, the online survey, commissioned by CPRE and conducted by YouGov, found that fewer than 1 in 5 (18%) think the future looks bright, with 84% feeling pushed out by a lack of housing opportunities.

Freya Davies, 18, from Northamptonshire, a Flore parish councillor and member of the Northamptonshire Youth Crime Commission, said: 'There is no way, when I eventually move out of my parents' place, that I'll be able to afford to stay in the village. I don't really want to move out but it's just not affordable for me. In developments, very often houses are labelled affordable when it isn't actually affordable. You don't find very many starter homes or rental homes. It's just really hurtful. I put quite a lot into the village and it sort of feels like I'm being pushed out. I don't want to go. I really like living here but there's just no option for me.'

A social housing backlog

A separate analysis by CPRE found the demand for social housing was growing nearly six times faster than the rate of supply in rural areas. At current rates, the backlog of low-income families needing accommodation would take 121 years to

clear. Figures show 8,898 households were added to social housing waiting lists in 88 rural local authority areas between 2019-20, the last year for which figures are available, with just 1,453 social homes delivered. In total 176,058 rural families were waiting for accommodation in 2020, up from 167,160 in 2019.

Commenting on the survey findings, CPRE chief executive Crispin Truman said: 'A thriving countryside depends on young people being able to study, work and start families in rural areas. But the sad reality is that the majority of young people born and raised in the countryside feel they can no longer afford to live there – despite the overwhelming majority saying they would like to. To really level up the countryside the government must, at a bare minimum, guarantee hourly flat fare bus services running from morning to midnight, seven days a week, for our rural towns and villages. And we're calling on the government to allocate £12.8 billion of funding a year to tackle the housing crisis, with a fair proportion allocated to rural areas to deliver genuinely affordable and well-designed homes for rural communities.'



Q&A

The answers you need

The battle for beauty

Q Spring's Fieldwork covered CPRE's input on the consultations for the National Model Design Code and the design revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework. Is there any evidence that any of the changes have had a positive impact so far?

A An article in the Autumn issue of Suffolk View, the magazine of the Suffolk Preservation Society – which represents CPRE in the county, welcomed the latest revision of the NPPF, published in July, as 'another step forward in the battle for "beauty".' The article continued: 'In a Written Ministerial Statement, the secretary of state explained that: "The new Framework is fundamental to ensuring local authorities and communities can shape and deliver beautiful places to live and work, with a greater emphasis on quality, design and the environment than ever before."' The latest version formally introduces the concept of "beauty" and considers how, through the mechanism of national and local Design Guides and Codes, such a concept might be objectively applied to subsequent planning applications.'

'Impressively, the new NPPF makes it clear that if there is no local guide or code, planning decisions are to be made in accordance with the National Guide and Code. Such a default ensures that the inability of some councils to put their plans in place in a timely fashion will no longer punish their poor residents. The new guidance expands on the ten characteristics of good design as set out in the National Design Guide. These characteristics include responding to the context of the surrounding area, having attractive and distinctive identities, enhanced and optimised nature and houses that are built to last for a very, very long time.'

The Suffolk View article continues: 'Another significant change to the NPPF is the greater emphasis to be placed on community involvement in design.

The role of neighbourhood planning groups, has been expanded beyond creating neighbourhood plans, to engaging in the production of design policy, guidance and codes by local planning authorities and developers. This is an important guarantee of meaningful local involvement, not least as other shifts in planning policy mean the principle of development will be established through the local plan, leaving design as the main outstanding issue to be determined at the individual application stage.'

Meanwhile, an MP who sits on a government advisory board on housing design has suggested that a recent planning case has set an important precedent – that poor design alone should be sufficient reason to refuse a planning application. South Holland and the Deepings MP Sir John Hayes is the only Member of Parliament appointed to the Office for Place, the first body of its kind, with a remit 'to support communities to turn their visions of beautiful design into local standards all new buildings will be required to meet ... empowering local authorities to demand beauty, design quality and placemaking through the principles outlined in the National Model Design Code.'

Following South Holland District Council's September rejection of a 150-home development on the edge of Weston in Lincolnshire, Sir John said the decision would 'draw a line in the sand' on badly-designed development. He added that the NPPF 'now stresses that planning applications should conform to stringent, high quality design standards. The new policy makes clear that anything that fails to meet this high standard, by statute, "should be refused".'

Sir John was referring to paragraph 134 of the revised NPPF, which states that 'development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design'.

Restoring Carbis Bay

Back in August, CPRE Cornwall submitted a formal objection to a planning application by Carbis Bay Hotel, for retrospective permission for three single-story 'pods' providing nine meeting rooms. Our group regarded the structures as highly damaging to the beauty of Carbis Bay and in breach of protections provided under the Cornwall Local Plan. In March this year, the hotel had commenced ground clearance work, including the felling of established trees, without planning permission – allegedly part of the G7 summit preparations.

Hundreds of local people protested over the unauthorised construction, while an August site visit by CPRE Cornwall concluded that the rooms, cut into the cliff and with newly landscaped gardens, were never intended to be temporary and were destined to become the lodges for which the hotel had been refused permission in 2018. Happily, September saw the council issue a notice ordering the buildings be removed and the site returned to its original state within six months. Unfortunately, the hotel is appealing the notice, leaving the future of the Bay in limbo and leading to hundreds of people protesting on the beach in early November, calling for the hotel to back down and restore 'this beautiful and natural environment'. Keep up with the latest developments at cprecornwall.org

The best of Norfolk

The prestigious CPRE Norfolk Awards have been refreshed for 2021 to reflect our group's major campaign focus, A Vision for Norfolk, which looks at the challenges Norfolk faces over the years ahead and proposes common-sense solutions which encourage sustainable growth to benefit all. This year, there were 27 entries with a fantastic awards evening held at Dereham Memorial Hall in September.

The winner of the Rural Living award was Wild with Nature – an off-grid glamping business that has helped Manor Farm near Attleborough to diversify and has been well-received by local people. Guests can enjoy the beauty of their natural surroundings – including the farm's flourishing wildflower meadows – while 'welcome hampers' use local produce.

Guests are encouraged to buy from local shops and there are plans for educational school visits. Meanwhile, Swaffham Town Council was awarded a certificate of good lighting practice, for its policy to reduce the light pollution and wasted energy associated with street lighting. The council is committed to the use of energy efficient LED lamps and has successfully negotiated a reduced lighting scheme on three new housing developments. Read more about all the inspirational winners at cprenorfolk.org.uk/awards-2021/

Campaign spotlight

Reimagining council farms

In 2019, our report, Reviving county farms, demonstrated the extent to which council-owned farms are under threat.

The known total area of council farm estates in England has more than halved over the past 40 years with the number of holdings let massively reduced. The report argued they are a key part of an ecosystem of farms – from family farms to large private and institutional estates. It added that, for them to continue to play an important role within that ecosystem, we need to 'set out a positive vision for county farms in the 21st century: one that recognises their value, rejuvenates their purpose, and puts in place the long-term protection, funding and support to make them flourish'. Our new report, Reimagining council farms, sets out that vision and includes a series of recommendations to start making it achievable.

Our vision for the future

In 2040 council-owned farmland is secured by a strong national narrative of taking the holistic best-value approach to municipal assets. It is managed in the public interest to deliver important global, national and local objectives, decided democratically. As a result, its value is fully recognised and councils no longer reduce their estates to tackle short-term budgetary pressures.

After 20 years of sustained investment, the national area of council farm estates has grown significantly and most farm estates are stable and expanding. Council farmland hosts a diverse mix of tenants – private and family business but also community enterprise models – working in partnership with their council to be local beacons of innovative sustainable climate and nature-friendly farming.

Councils are making the most of the potential of their farmland to provide

opportunities for people from all backgrounds to work the land in their own right, supporting them to develop sustainable businesses and livelihoods, which benefit the wider local community. This has helped revitalise the land-based sector, by supporting progressive farmers and bringing in new, diverse, resourceful people equipped to produce food sustainably, in tune with nature and delivering net zero and beyond.

Community benefits

In 2040, council farms are valued by local people as actively contributing to the UK's climate commitments and providing high-quality natural assets. They are secured and managed for the benefit of the whole community both now and in the future. Local people are meaningfully engaged as key stakeholders directly and through a range of community groups in developing estate management plans, in understanding and valuing the benefits that council farmland provides and engaging with the opportunities it brings.

Council farmland is recognised as special for generally giving citizens a stake and a sense of connection with their local farmed countryside and those working and stewarding the land.



© Jess Hurd

Council farms could get people closer to nature



© Jess Hurd

Investment in council farms could secure vital tenancies for future growers

This is strengthened by council farms which choose to make supplying food locally, educational and recreational access and other services a part of their approach. This renewed sense of community purpose has benefitted from sustained investment, with central and local government working together in recognition that council farms are an irreplaceable asset that should be protected, and enhanced for the wider benefit of generations to come.

Achieving the vision

To make real our compelling vision for council farms, we're calling for central government to build consensus around a new unifying purpose for the nation's council farm estate that frames a long-term national strategy and five year action plan. Alongside tools to recognise the immense value of public land, these should guide local authorities in optimising management of their farm assets for delivering greater public benefits.

The government should also reform reporting requirements on council farmland by updating information collected and reported locally and nationally to improve public understanding. This scrutiny should cover the nature and extent of holdings,

support for new and existing tenants and public value including delivery of public goods. Public funding must also ensure sustained investment in and enhancement of council farms for the medium to long term, building on the government's own New Entrants scheme financing for council estates.

Councils must be given a duty to involve local communities in setting goals for their council farm estate and how it is to be managed. They must also ensure local people are properly informed of land sales and that local not for profit models are considered as preferred buyers. Crucially, new legislation should give councils a duty to put in place a net gain policy to enable judicious sales and purchases of land which protect and enhance the extent and quality of their farm estates for the future.

With support from central government, local authorities should increase the access-routes and progression opportunities to work council farm land by developing new incubator and accelerator models to equip new entrants from all backgrounds. Councils must also help all those working their farmland to realise innovative local market opportunities, including supplying food to council-run facilities from schools to care homes.

Defending the High Weald

CPRE Kent worked alongside Natural England and the High Weald AONB Unit in September, at an 18-day public inquiry into a plan for 165 houses near Cranbrook in the High Weald AONB. Our campaigners presented evidence against the scheme and challenged the case for the proposed Berkley Homes development – originally a 36-home scheme approved in 2019 for Turnden, in the Crane Valley between Cranbrook and Hartley. The developer then expanded the scheme to add 165 more homes – which was also backed by the council. This proposal represents substantial development in the AONB on a greenfield site that has not been allocated for development within a local plan.

CPRE Kent has been vocal in its objection to the scheme from the start, while opposing the allocation of the site for development in Tunbridge Wells' new local plan. CPRE Kent chair, John Wotton, argued that it would 'destroy a piece of medieval farming landscape, obliterate historic settlement patterns and suburbanise the rural setting of Cranbrook'. Their request for the communities secretary to call in the decision was accepted in May, with the public inquiry a last chance to prevent Turnden setting a precedent that could lead to harm to protected areas throughout the country.

Matter of fact

Support for your case

Sewage pollution in North Yorkshire

CPRE North Yorkshire trustee Rosy Eaton writes on the state of river pollution in the county: 'You may have noticed a recent outcry about water companies dumping raw sewage in our rivers and seas – 400,000 times across England in 2020. The figures for North Yorkshire are equally shocking. In 2020 water companies dumped raw sewage 23,367 times into the rivers and sea of North Yorkshire, for a total of 195,084 hours.'

This extent of sewage pollution is a huge concern for nature, people and the local economy. Raw sewage carries nutrients and chemicals that kill wildlife and destroy river ecosystems, bacteria that make river users ill and large quantities of plastic pollution. And in an area like North Yorkshire, where much of our tourism is connected with enjoying our beautiful countryside and waterbodies, sewage pollution can damage local businesses and the economy.

Sadly, pollution of rivers and seas from sewage pollution is not a new thing, but it is getting worse due to climate change and increasing population and development. The data has been public for a while, shared since spring 2020 by the Rivers Trust through their brilliant 'Is my river fit to play in' map, and we shared figures for North Yorkshire in summer 2021.

Watered-down legislation

The topic has grabbed everyone's attention because of the huge public outcry in October when MPs voted, in line with the government whip and the minister's recommendation, to reject a legal requirement in the Environment Bill for water companies

to reduce sewage overflows. They voted again on Monday 8 November, passing a government amendment that replaced legal text proposed by the House of Lords (that would have dealt with the problem), with weaker text that appears good but in reality will let water companies off the hook.

The government has given statements saying that the legal requirement to reduce storm overflows would be too costly: they claimed it would require complete replacement of existing sewer network and cited figures of between £150 and £660 billion. Both the assumption and the figures have been widely challenged and, it seems, were vastly exaggerated.

To start with, it was disingenuous to claim the entire system would need to be dug up and replaced. In North Yorkshire alone 14% of treatment works/storm overflows had 0 spills in 2020; 42% had 10 or fewer and 28% of them spilled for less than 10 hours, in the whole year. This does not mean there's not a problem, for example 9% of sites had spills lasting for over 1,000 hours. But it means the costs and upheaval would be far less than claimed. The costs came from the government's Storm Overflows Taskforce, but of course the highest figures for the most daunting (and unnecessary) work were picked out. Perhaps most worryingly for MPs, the report included estimates for how much different options would add to water bills.

Keeping up the pressure

But, when water companies have paid out £57 billion in dividends over the past 30 years and paid their CEOs £65 million in the past 5 years, is it really fair for government to imply



© Hilary Fenton

Clean fun: catching tiddlers in the Ribble

and plan to allow water companies to charge bill payers for essential upgrades to the system? A lot of the work could have been paid for by water companies already if they hadn't chosen instead to extract that money for the benefit of staff and shareholders.

Some MPs have claimed that the Environment Bill already went far enough, with requirements for increased monitoring and plans to deal with storm overflows. But we know the scale and seriousness of the problem, and while more monitoring is all well and good, our rivers and seas need action. Now. They do not need another year of planning and monitoring followed by decades of creative excuses from water companies.

Keep up the pressure by following and supporting national and local campaigns such as Surfers Against Sewage, the Rivers Trust and Ilkley Clean River Campaign. If you see a water pollution incident – report it to the Environment Agency on 0800 80 70 60. And keep talking to your MP about this issue, until all our rivers and coast are free from sewage! Find more practical tips, and the latest on our campaigning for rivers, at cprenorthyorkshire.co.uk