



Campaign to Protect
Rural England

OXFORDSHIRE

THE FUTURE OF OXFORDSHIRE'S COUNTRYSIDE

THE CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT RURAL ENGLAND
(CPRE) OXFORDSHIRE

EXISTS TO PROMOTE THE BEAUTY, TRANQUILLITY AND DIVERSITY OF
RURAL OXFORDSHIRE BY ENCOURAGING THE ENVIRONMENTALLY
SUSTAINABLE USE OF LAND AND OTHER NATURAL RESOURCES IN THE
COUNTY'S TOWNS AND COUNTRYSIDE.

THE FUTURE OF OXFORDSHIRE'S COUNTRYSIDE

THE COUNTY TO-DAY - SOME FACTS AND FIGURES

- The South East of England's **most rural county**.
- Its **countryside is one of its greatest assets** in economic, social and environmental terms.
- **Great diversity of landscape** and communities over short distances.

Area: 260,800 hectares.

Land use: 80% agricultural. Half of this is down to crops.

- The 3 AONBs represent 40% of the county.
- The Oxford Green Belt covers 34,500 hectares or 13% of the county.
- Large estates are a feature (eg) Blenheim, Ditchley, Cornbury.
- Woodland cover 6%.

Access: Over 2,600 miles of paths, bridleways, and byways, but low percentage of accessible green space.

Biodiversity: 4 National Nature Reserves/ 109 SACs, SSSIs, 16 habitats identified in UK Biodiversity Action Plan/ Farmland bird index is below 1995 baseline.

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THE COUNTY TO-DAY - SOME FACTS AND FIGURES

Population: 632,000 (40% in rural areas, 36% in towns, 24% in Oxford City).

Households: 267,900 = average of only 2.3 people per household.

Transport: Number of cars per household 1.3.

- Traffic has increased by 12.5% over last 10 years.
- Rural Cherwell highest proportion of long distance commuters.(M40?)

Employment: Very high levels of employment dominated by knowledge industries.

- Agriculture, forestry, fishery has only 2,700 - below national average.

Oxford City: World heritage tourist destination.

- Large fluctuating student population.
- Its interests tend to dominate rest of county.
- Green spaces threatened by development.

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DRIVERS FOR CHANGE TO LANDSCAPE OVER NEXT 20 YEARS

- **A growing and increasingly affluent population.**
- **Globalisation and CAP reform altering how and what we farm.**
- **Pressure on resources for energy, water, waste and minerals.**
- **A changing climate.**

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EXPECTED PRESSURE POINTS TO 2026

- **Population:** To grow by 55% to nearly 1 million!
- **Housing:** + 47,200 (of which 17,000 “affordable”) - SE Plan.
 - + 15,000 “eco-town” at Weston on the Green.
 - + 4-5,000 in Green Belt south of Grenoble Rd.
 - Numerous plans on developers’ books.
 - Pressure to build in flood plains and Green Belt.
- **Transport:** Oxfordshire viewed as a corridor between Birmingham and Southampton.
 - Rural roads increasingly cluttered.
- **Agriculture:** Moving to larger commercially driven units.
 - Contract farming.
 - Environmental Stewardship schemes weaken.
 - Biofuel crops.
- **Water:** Quality and availability of water deteriorates.
 - Reservoir project to meet needs of London transforms landscape of south Oxon.
- **Minerals:** Gravel extraction continues to affect large tracts of Thames Basin.
- **Noise:** Overflying aircraft noise increases, exacerbated by expansions at Kidlington, Brize and Benson.
 - Traffic noise continues to increase throughout the county.
- **Light:** Spread of lighting for safety or leisure.

THE FUTURE OF OXFORDSHIRE'S COUNTRYSIDE

A VISION OF 2026

A productive working countryside, where there is space for people and wildlife to thrive and enjoy, with plenty of local identity and diversity reflecting the underlying geology and topography.

- **Oxford Green Belt:** Continues as is, but “greened” (eg) burying utility wires. A positive planning tool for managing the urban fringe for the enjoyment of all.
- **AONBs:** Continue to enjoy full protection.
- **Floodplains:** Are allowed to flood.
- **Farming:** Focuses on food production which is consumed locally, whilst at the same time maximising benefits for wildlife.
- **Forestry:** Expands to reduce timber imports and support local energy projects.
- **Housing:** Based on local need, not national wants/targets.
 - Growth through expansion of county towns.
 - Strict use of brownfield first.
 - More (up to half) “affordable” via CLT schemes (eg) Stonesfield.

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A VISION OF 2026

Housing (cont.):

- All new houses have tighter eco standards.
- All new houses sympathetically designed to local countryside character.
- Where high density appropriate, emphasis on quality of design from outset.
- **Transport:** Hydrogen/electric fuelled transport.
 - Reduction in rural speed limits.
 - Bottlenecks that divert traffic on to rural roads removed.
 - Public investment in interchange facilities.
- **Water:** Pipe water from areas of plenty rather than building concrete bowls.
- **Planning system:** Reflects short and long term environmental considerations (Owen), which also reflects a sense of place and history.
- **Pollution:** Artificial light, noise and advertising in rural areas is kept to an absolute minimum.
- **Urban Green Spaces:** Conserved, and joined up to create green corridors.

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WHAT IS NEEDED TO GET THERE

- **Stronger planning system** locally accountable through democratic decision making.
- **Better understanding of rural affairs** within local and regional Government.
- **“Plan Monitor Manage”** not “Predict and Provide”.
- **Acceptance by all key decision makers that the environment’s capacity is limited** and breached at our peril. This needs to be inculcated into SEEDA in its new planning role.
- **Environmental Education increased at all levels.**
- **Better financed Environment Agency.**
- **A fully functioning Natural England/Forestry Commission.**
- **High rate of population growth not necessarily accepted.**