

OXFORDSHIRE VOICE

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OXFORDSHIRE VOICE

Autumn 2019

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DIRECTORY

Views expressed in the *Voice* are not necessarily those of CPRE Oxfordshire, which welcomes independent comment.

Editor: Julia Benning

Cover: Looking South-East from the Mount towards Henley-On-Thames/Rob Bowker

Articles, letters, comments and suggestions for articles are welcome. Please contact the Branch Office below. Published November 2019

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Chairman's voice



CPRE is now at a crucial moment in its existence. Whilst still the outstanding English organisation fighting to protect all aspects of rural England, its countryside, villages and towns from inappropriate attack, we continue to be valued by Government and Local Councils for sage advice and hold regular meetings with Ministers and Council Leaders. However, the recent forays from Government agencies and developers, assisted by the recent ill-formulated planning rules, with minimal if any proper consultation with local people, are stretching our resources. Here are some up-to-the-minute examples.

CPRE Oxfordshire welcomes the extension of the timeframe for finalising the Growth Board's *Oxfordshire Plan 2050* and we are fortunate that our *Better Vision for Oxfordshire* has received plaudits from local councils. To press this advantage home, there must be a more realistic expert assessment of Oxfordshire's development needs and the County's capacity to absorb them than has been presented by the authorities to date. It is vital to get local people involved and to have the results at an early stage in the decision-making process - we need to engage with energy!

The consultation on the Oxfordshire routes for the OxCam Expressway will soon be upon us, and CPRE will be mobilising County residents to help us challenge the principle of building such a road, as well as commenting on specific routes. Please look out for the consultation – and respond!

The DEFRA *Landscapes Review* (the 'Glover Report') published in September has suggested possible National Park status for the Chilterns

and Cotswolds. We would welcome moves to bring greater protection to these areas, provided it is not at the expense of the broader landscape. For example, CPRE Oxfordshire would have difficulty supporting proposals resulting in a large 'compensating' increase in development on other greenfield sites in the County. Such proposals are likely to take a number of years to bear fruit, and CPRE will find itself involved in a complex web of activity.

I applaud the Editor's inclusion in this issue of the article entitled 'Beauty in planning'. The recent spate of housebuilding in the County has in general resulted in uniform and mediocre developments, despite the inclusion of Design Guides which accompany local plans. The new housing estates may well become known as the twenty-first century equivalents of the 'back-to-backs' of the nineteenth. And the problem with the Guides is that they only provide guidance and can largely be avoided in face of demands from Government to meet the housing 'crisis' (only a crisis for truly affordable housing) or to meet building targets. Following on the Government's Raynsford Review of 2018, we hope that their Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission will deliver a report demanding compulsion to ensure that new building is of some quality and sufficiently varied, interesting and well-sited so as to enhance the environment. CPRE is working towards that end.

Readers will understand that CPRE will need support, not only financial, to meet its objectives, and in particular we hope you can respond most generously to our fundraising appeal – details enclosed with this publication.

Peter Collins

Chairman

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Beauty in planning

Since its founding in 1926 CPRE has fought to protect the beauty of England from reckless development. Ninety years ago, Sir Patrick Abercrombie wrote CPRE's manifesto: **The Preservation of Rural England**. Calling attention to the aesthetic side of planning, Abercrombie wrote:

'It is necessary to consider ... the beauty of the landscape and the principles of design involved in its maintenance. ... We want to see if it is possible to put a great many more buildings ... into the countryside and yet preserve its beauty either substantially or in a changed form.'

Good planning can help slow the growth in road traffic, encourage urban regeneration, curb urban sprawl, protect the beauty and tranquillity of the countryside, and safeguard wildlife habitats. In many ways, beauty and design lies at the heart of CPRE campaigning to encourage rural life to be as sustainable as possible. New developments can be attractive and wholesome places to live, sitting alongside existing buildings and even enhancing the surrounding environment.

In November 2018 the Government launched the **Building Better Building Beautiful Commission** (BBBB Commission). Its main self-proclaimed area of responsibility was "developing practical measures that will help ensure new housing developments meet the needs and expectations of communities, making them more likely to be welcomed, rather than resisted..."

To achieve this, the Commission aims to promote better design and style of homes, villages, towns and high streets, to reflect what communities want, building on the knowledge and tradition of what they know works for their area.

It also seeks to explore how new settlements can be developed with greater community consent and finally to make the planning system work in support of better design and style, not against it.

An interim report – *Creating Space for Beauty* has been recently published. <https://tinyurl.com/bbcbeautiful>

A collective ambition

The Report states that beauty and place-making should be a 'collective ambition' and legitimate outcome for the planning system, embedded in the National Planning Framework. Local authorities should have explicit power to 'say no to ugliness' by turning down applications that fall short on design grounds. Interestingly, applications should be judged on locally created policies not centralised edicts.

The Report is important because it goes beyond the number crunching of annual housing delivery rates and considers the value of creating new developments which positively enhance local communities. This is a positive change of emphasis from the quantity to the quality of development.

What beauty means and how it relates to the locale needs to be defined by surveying local views on objective criteria. The Commissioners said that local authorities should feel no qualms about dismissing applications on design grounds and furthermore inspectors should back them up.

This report identifies beauty at three levels: individual buildings, places and broader areas.

The call that a new development should be beautiful is a high and tricky to define bar. The interim report makes little progress on the definition of beauty nor who the judges should be.

The Home Builders Federation were reported to say that whilst they welcomed the idea of local policies

Creating Space for Beauty



around placemaking, planners should not try and dictate the design of the homes themselves as this would create a "real problem for house builders".

Whilst planners have generally welcomed the interim Report, there are questions about the practicality of creating local 'beauty' policies. The Commission anticipates that both government and professional bodies would give guidance on what components might be included and how this policy could be applied locally. However leading social enterprise groups have commented that the problem is not the lack of appetite for good design within councils but the lack of resources. It is generally agreed that most local authorities no longer employ any designers or even have access to design advice. The resource of that knowledge has been lost.

The Commission's final report is due by the end of the year.

First Ever Housing Design Audit

CPRE has joined forces with the Place Alliance at University College London to complete the first ever housing design audit. This new audit will assess the external design quality of at least 100 large-scale developments across England and feed into the work of the BBBB Commission.

Are there any beautiful, well designed new developments in Oxfordshire? Let us know, send a picture to comms@cpreon.org.uk

OPINION: The warming climate

Oxfordshire: 25.07.2019: 36.5°C

Rob Bowker

Oxfordshire and much of England were scorched on 25 July when temperature records were broken in many places. A new highest temperature for England was observed in Cambridge when a figure of 38.7 was reached. At the Radcliffe Observatory in Oxford, the 36.5 degrees recorded was the maximum since observations started in 1815. This temperature was also recorded at the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology Wallingford. These and similar occurrences will contribute to the continuation of the current sequence of warm years identified by the Met Office in its recently published report *UK State of the Climate in 2018* – the top ten warmest years since 1884 have occurred since 2002. Similarly, the World Meteorological Organization reported that globally the years from 2015 to 2018 were the four warmest on record.

In the coming decades, more and longer spells with temperatures above 30 degrees are predicted, along with reduced water levels in rivers and streams leading to increased stresses for wildlife and lower agricultural production. Parched gardens and restrictions on water use will become more common.

Although there are some who still deny that human activities are currently causing the climate to change, science shows this to be a

fact. The increasing concentrations of carbon dioxide, methane and similar gases in the atmosphere are enhancing the greenhouse effect. Prior to the industrial revolution, the CO2 concentration in the atmosphere was about 270 parts per million (ppm). In May 2013 the 400ppm barrier was broken and by the summer of 2019 the level had reached 415, the highest in the last 800,000 years. This rise will continue until and after fossil fuel use stops and is replaced by energy from sustainable sources; such as wind, solar, tidal and geothermal. The UK government has fixed 2050 for a carbon free economy and its Committee on Climate Change has reported on the measures that can be instituted to reach this goal. However, some of the actions of government seem designed to subvert attaining this target. These include not continuing to support the installation of domestic solar panels, reducing grants to purchase electric cars and by promoting the building of the OxCam Expressway .

Much of central London was brought to a halt on several occasions by “Extinction Rebellion” demonstrations attempting to coerce the government to take meaningful and more immediate measures to combat climate change. Greta Thunberg, the 16-year old from Sweden has created more attention, highlighting the guilt

of government actions. Earlier there was the strike of schoolchildren in many parts of the country.

Powers for ameliorating and accommodating climate change are within the grasp of national, regional and local governments. They can promote sustainable energy schemes, energy storage, enforce building regulations which conserve energy, encourage electric vehicles and a range of other green measures. Individuals can reduce their carbon footprints in a variety of ways; walking, cycling and using public transport more often, as well as reducing home energy use. Should these measures fail, then one prediction is certain; our grandchildren and their successors will curse and castigate this generation and earlier ones for not taking action to reduce CO2 emissions and sequester the CO2 in the atmosphere.

John Rodda
CPRE Oxfordshire Member

It's clear the countryside will have a critical role to play in mitigating climate change and the planning system must be up to the job. CPRE is currently working on its climate policy and your views are welcome.

CPRE Oxfordshire welcomes articles from members, please email comms@cprexon.org.uk

Protecting the river Windrush

Windrush Against Sewage Pollution – WASP

Photos: Ashley Smith



A clear and healthy Windrush above Bourton on the Water



Coffee coloured Windrush joining and polluting the Thames

WASP are campaigning to restore the health of the River Windrush, which flows for about 35 miles through Gloucestershire and into Oxfordshire where it meets the Thames. In April 2018 WASP discovered untreated sewage was being discharged into the River Windrush. Five sewage treatment works are permitted to release untreated sewage into the river whenever there is significant rainfall.

If we as a community do not get a grip of the issues damaging and even destroying parts of our environment, no one will.

We thought we had the protection of government bodies like the Environment Agency (EA) and the Department for the Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs (Defra) but it turns out that has resulted in 97% of rivers in the Thames basin failing to achieve even 'good ecological status'. I say 'even' because there is a 'very good' status which the EA now says is only for something like Scottish hill streams – far from civilisation, but that was never the intention of the EU grading, it was just for very good rivers. We are being told we can't have any!

Lowering our expectations and telling us that bad is really good has been the insidious message that has been

exposed as a lie. Profit has been put before people and the planet – our planet, the only planet we have, do I need to go on?

The very specific issue that WASP battles against is sewage pollution and that is because on the Windrush there is no heavy industry, agriculture is mainly pasture and often organic and the urban influence really only kicks in at Witney which managed to live with a pretty clean river for many years.

WASP presents the truth about the relationship between the water industry monopolies, Ofwat (the Regulator), the Environment Agency, the supervisor and Defra, the real decision maker.

We use the law to get at information that has been buried from public view and we analyse data to present evidence of quite shocking abuse of our rivers. Many people are now waking up to the shocking truth that untreated sewage is dumped into our rivers far more frequently than was being portrayed and even the treated effluent often leaves a lot to be desired.

One of our key strengths is the analytical capability of one of our team members who is conducting cutting edge work to identify how often untreated sewage is dumped into our rivers.

Our media campaign is conducted via the usual social media platforms and conventional TV, radio and newspapers. That gives us the leverage to be able to engage with the main players in this scandalous situation and helps us to work with our local government and to put pressure on nationally.

What about all of the new development, won't this make things worse? The simple answer is yes it will. The Environment Agency and Thames Water have been involved as part of the planning process and they will speak about having 'headroom' but this means no more than that they can get by without breaching the permits which we say have already failed to protect our rivers.

More houses = more people = more human sewage and bodily fluids, chemicals, hormones, drugs and who knows what?

I recently gave a presentation about sewage treatment to a group of Chinese delegates from the waste industry including local government officers. They were very switched on to the risks of getting it wrong like we have but some other feedback I had was this; how could I be permitted to have a different opinion to the Environment Agency and government from whom I believe they had heard telling an entirely rosier tale.

We have the privilege of being able to shape our future and protect our environment and not to hand over a dismal landscape to the next generation. Let us not squander that.

Ashley Smith, WASP
www.windrushwasp.org

Ashley Smith recently spoke at the CPRE West Oxfordshire AGM. CPRE West Oxfordshire will be getting involved in the Save the Windrush campaign in terms of considering housing applications, looking to develop planning standards and comment on emerging waste water plans. If you would like to get involved please get in touch with John Histon, West Oxfordshire District Chairman, jhiston@icloud.com

Natural capital

Natural capital refers to natural resources (including biodiversity, water, soils, vegetation, etc.) that provide ecosystem services and benefits to humans (i.e. clean air, reducing flood risk and climate regulation).

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) 25-Year Environment Plan recognises the value of the ecosystem services and embeds the concept of natural capital as a way of quantifying this. Using a natural capital method could help provide a more holistic approach to environmental protection and improvements, give a new way to communicate the importance of the natural environment to communities and could lead to greater innovation e.g. increasing businesses involvement in emerging markets for carbon sequestration (capture and storage) and catchment protection..

BIODIVERSITY ACCOUNTING – A USEFUL TOOL BUT A BAD MASTER

Several years ago, DEFRA adopted a tool enabling developers to measure the damage to wildlife and then deliver an equivalent measure of biodiversity elsewhere. This was 'biodiversity offsetting'. Several schemes were piloted but it was never formally rolled out nationally. Despite this, it has been quietly and systematically adopted by many planning authorities especially

here in Oxfordshire, becoming the norm rather than the exception.

It has now assumed a different name or names – 'biodiversity accounting' or 'biodiversity impact assessment'. These names suggest a more measured or benign system but the essence of their role is exactly the same.

How does it work?

On an interactive spreadsheet a drop-down tab enables values to be given for different habitats and the quality of those habitats. Once completed a pre-development output figure is given. This figure is compared to the habitats and their quality post-development and a 'net loss', 'net gain' or 'no net loss' is calculated. If the result is a 'net loss' the developer knows how much biodiversity needs to be delivered elsewhere on the site. So far so good.

Clearly it has benefits, which is why it has been adopted so widely: simplicity, transparency, consistency, speed and accessibility for planning authorities. So – what are its drawbacks?

A blunt instrument

All these input calculations are based on the original DEFRA metrics, but they are simplistic and have fundamental flaws. One documented example suggested that an ancient grassland could be replaced with an identical equivalent within 5-10 years.

This ignores organisms within the soil (soil biota) acidity and aeration (edaphic conditions) and the symbiotic relationship between plants and fungi. It is a helicopter approach in a situation where a forensic view is needed.

Additionally, the output is only ever as good as the quality of the input data. Quantifying an ancient flood meadow grassland from 'unimproved' to 'semi-improved' almost led to its destruction (see below).

Biodiversity accountancy trusts that the input/output parameters are correct. Decision makers may not have detailed ecological knowledge or time to confirm if the input data of the site condition matches the reality and to know if mitigation measures will be as effective as promised. Objectors may find it difficult to challenge these figures even if local knowledge points to a different conclusion.

The tyranny of the laptop

Further concern flows from the difficulty of assessing and comprehending the meaning behind unexplained outputs and challenging the evidence which is drawn from complex spreadsheets. It is too easy for legitimate concerns and local knowledge to be overlooked when this apparent comprehensive report is delivered. What is needed is detailed survey information and expert judgement. There is a place for biodiversity accounting and in the right hands it is a useful tool in the assessment of environmental damage; but it does not provide a definitive answer.

Gavray Meadows Local Wildlife Site, Bicester

Oversimplification of biodiversity accounting: the developer used biodiversity calculations to claim that net gain could be achieved and the local planning authority (Cherwell) recommended approval. The planning application was refused and appeal dismissed, largely thanks to Dr Pat Clissold's exposure of the flaws in the developer's assertions.



Long-tailed tit, Gavray Meadows.

Patricia Clissold



Devil's Bit Scabious, Gavray Meadows.

The site is biodiverse, comprising medieval fields of unimproved floodplain meadow, not farmed with modern techniques, with ancient hedges dating back to Saxon times. It is one of very few sites which support all five species of hairstreak butterfly.

The site was allocated for development and biodiversity calculations submitted in support of a residential planning application. The biodiversity calculator appeared to show a net gain from the offsetting measures outlined, which were the creation of a floodplain wildflower meadow on adjacent arable land with high nutrient content.

On appeal, the biodiversity calculator was shown to have given a false picture of the benefits of the mitigation. Firstly, the baseline condition of the land which would be harmed by development had been downgraded to 'semi-improved' grassland whereas it was in fact 'unimproved'.

Secondly, the beneficial outcome of mitigation measures was inflated by assuming that a fully functional wildflower meadow could be created within 5-10 years on arable land which was also to function as recreation land.

Victoria Robinson
CPRE Oxfordshire Volunteer



Need Not Greed Oxfordshire (NNGO) is a coalition of 40 local groups and individuals that have come together to campaign for a future that respects the views of local people, plans for 'need not greed' and protects the environment. The secretariat for the group is provided by CPRE Oxfordshire. To find out more visit: www.neednotgreedoxon.org.uk

NNGO continue to hold meetings with OxLEP and address Growth Board meetings to get local community voice and environmental issues hard-wired into the planning process.

Meeting with Defra

As a result of correspondence earlier this year with then Minister Michael Gove, NNGO was invited to meet with Defra officials. 3 NNGO representatives attended and the meeting was also joined by several Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government officials working on planning and the OxCam Arc.

NNGO was able to share what we consider to be a more accurate picture of 'life on the ground', for example, pointing out that the Joint Declaration on the Arc was signed off by our local authority leaders without any endorsement from their councils as a whole, and that the OxLEP Environment Investment Strategy (described by Defra as 'Oxfordshire's environment strategy) is not considered fit for purpose by local environmental organisations. Whilst accepting that the responsibility for developing the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan should rest with our Local Authorities, we asked that Defra should exert what influence it could to ensure that environment is embedded into the process at all levels.

England's Economic Heartland Transport Strategy

England's Economic Heartland (EEH) is a 'Sub-national Transport Body', with a population of more than 5.1 million; 280,000 businesses.

Broadly, EEH covers a group of 11 transport authorities, including the OxCam Arc from Oxford to Cambridge – plus Swindon and Hertfordshire. Its Governing Body includes politicians, representatives of Local Enterprise Partnerships and others including the Oxfordshire Growth Board, Department for Transport, Highways England and Network Rail.

In July 2019 EEH launched a consultation on its *Outline Transport Strategy: Framework for Engagement*. NNGO has concerns that despite worthy statements



about the need for a zero-carbon transport system, this is a 'business as usual' document, looking to facilitate excessive growth targets and funnel public cash for major infrastructure projects to EEH's private sector delivery partners (Atkins, Jacobs, Kier and the like). It says little to nothing about reducing transport requirements, prioritising sustainable modes of transport or meeting community needs.

See the full NNGO response on the website. Look out for further consultation on the EEH Transport Strategy next year.

Cherwell

Cherwell Local Plan Part 1 Review took place in February 2019 and the Inspector has said 4,400 houses to deal with Oxford's 'unmet need' is acceptable, and that the majority of these can be located within the Oxford Green Belt (even though, as below, Oxford's needs have yet to be properly tested). However, the Inspector has removed the proposed allocation at Woodstock. There is a further round of consultation on main modifications due this autumn, with a view to formally submitting the modifications at the end of 2019. Another Hearing may be required; therefore, timing is uncertain.

Oxford City

The draft Local Plan was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in March 2019. The two joint Inspectors queried the evidence for the submitted Local Plan, questioning the aggressive housing numbers and the City's low targets for accommodating them. The City has responded to say the Growth Deal justifies the high numbers and hence offloading housing onto neighbouring districts.

The Plan claims Oxford needs 28,000 houses over the period to 2036 but that it can meet less than 9,000 of these within its own boundaries, creating a shortfall of over 19,000 houses that it is expecting its neighbouring Districts to pick up. CPRE's view is that the housing numbers are exaggerated, but that Oxford could meet most, if not all, of this need by releasing land held back for employment for housing instead, and by building at a density appropriate to city living.

The Inspectors have indicated informally that public hearing sessions will take place in December 2019.

South Oxfordshire

The draft Local Plan was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in March 2019. The submitted Plan includes proposals for over 28,000 new houses 2011-2034, representing over a 50% uplift on 2011 housing stock and a

build rate of 2.5 times that previously achieved.

Since the Local Plan submission there has been a change to the controlling party at the Council from Conservative to a Coalition of Liberal Democrats, Greens and Independents. In the summer, the Council resolved to review the submitted draft Local Plan and have agreed to explore what is possible with regards to protecting Government funding and work on a new Plan with climate considerations at its heart.

CPRE Oxfordshire has called on the Council to withdraw the submitted Plan and prepare a new Plan of its own, respecting the needs of local residents and taking proper account of Climate Change and the need for sustainability.

Vale of White Horse

Public hearings on the Vale of White Horse Local Plan Part 2 took place in front of a Planning Inspector in 2018, and there has been a subsequent consultation on main modifications. The Planning Inspector issued his report in June 2019 and found the Plan sound in principle, including release of Green Belt land (at Dalton Barracks and Shippon) to meet Oxford's so-called 'unmet need'. As we write, the Vale Council is considering its options, including whether to withdraw or adopt the Local Plan.

CPRE Oxfordshire has urged the Council to consider a new Plan that better reflects real housing need and the wishes of local residents. At the very least we believe it should defer adoption of the current Plan until after Oxford's own Local Plan has been properly assessed by the Planning Inspectorate over the next few months.

West Oxfordshire

The West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 is now adopted and in place. Work has started on a new Area Action Plan (AAP) for the Oxfordshire Cotswolds Garden Village. A consultation on preferred options ended in October 2019. The final pre-submission draft will be published late 2019/early 2020 with a view to adopt by summer 2020.

Oxfordshire Plan 2050 update

The Oxfordshire Growth Board has proposed an extension of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 timetable, with submission moving from March 2020 to March 2021, and adoption from March 2021 to March 2022. This change is subject to agreement with Government.

CPRE Oxfordshire is supportive of the new proposed timescale, which seems much more reasonable given the scale of the Plan and the context in which decisions will have to be made, such as the OxCam Expressway proposals.

This extra time must be used effectively to conduct a more realistic assessment of Oxfordshire's development needs and the county's capacity to absorb them. It is vital to get local people properly involved and CPRE remains keen to bring its expertise to the table at an early stage of the decision-making process.

OxCam Expressway

A public consultation on route options is planned for autumn 2019.

As you read this edition of Oxfordshire Voice we hope that details have emerged. CPRE Oxfordshire remains against the building of the Expressway and associated development. We'll be hoping that this consultation enables a challenge to the principle of the Expressway as well as the route specifics.

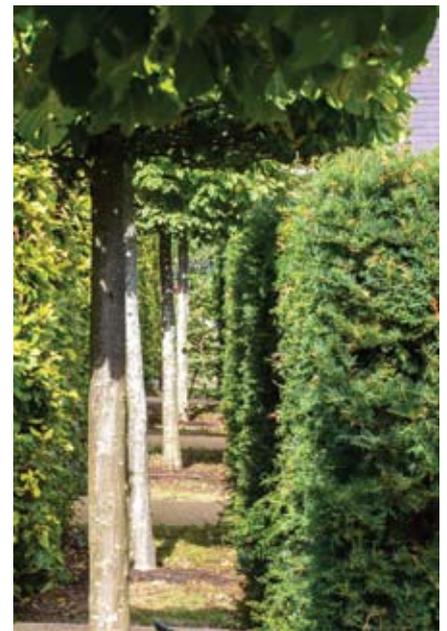
Once announced, details of the consultation will appear on our website, check for updates and find out how to respond.

Members visit to Crockmore House Gardens, September 2019



Members made a pleasant visit to the gardens of Crockmore House in September. The gardens are designed by Christopher Bradley-Hole. His innovative modern gardens at the Chelsea Flower Show in 1997, 2000, and 2003 broke new ground, the gardens won three Gold Medals and Best Garden Award.

Photos: David Marsh



Legacy appeal: *Will you help protect the Oxfordshire countryside for future generations?*

Jane Tomlinson

Our vision for Oxfordshire is of a county that continues to host thriving rural communities, surrounded by a wonderful landscape that benefits both people and wildlife.

With the increasing pressure of development CPRE Oxfordshire provides valuable advice and information for communities and individuals threatened by inappropriate development. CPRE Oxfordshire continues to be the leading voice speaking up for local countryside within the planning system.

By leaving a legacy to CPRE Oxfordshire you can help ensure that our precious landscapes are protected for generations to come.

To remember the countryside in your Will simply get in touch with your solicitor or see tinyurl.com/yystujag



Affordable housing

What is affordable housing?

The term affordable housing is bandied around, seeming to have the potential to offer a home for everyone in their location of choice. The initial vision for the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 promises affordable housing but is so far short on detail about how this would be achieved, despite more and more housing proposed across the Oxfordshire countryside.

affordable housing (small 'a', small 'h')

This definition reflects the assumption that affordable housing is just that – housing on the open market which people on average incomes can afford to rent or buy.

As a rough guide acceptable household expenditure on rent or a mortgage is seen as 35% of net income. Whether 35% is affordable depends on an individual's income and circumstances. To achieve this definition some would argue either house prices/rent must decrease, or incomes increase.

Affordable Housing (big 'A', big 'H')

For planning purposes the current definition of affordable housing is found in the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, Annex 2), see right.

Affordable housing: housing for sale or rent, for those whose needs are not met by the market (including housing that provides a subsidised route to home ownership and/or is essential for local workers).

The definition includes:

SOCIAL RENTED: low rent, around 50% of market rents;

AFFORDABLE RENTED: rent up to 80% of local market value;

STARTER HOMES: purchase limited by maximum level of household income;

DISCOUNTED MARKET SALES HOUSING: sold up to 80% of local market value;

INTERMEDIATE HOUSING: homes for sale or rent above social rent but below market value.

Other affordable routes include shared ownership, relevant equity loans, low cost homes to buy and rent to buy schemes.

The NPPF states that where major development includes the provision of housing, at least 10% of housing should be for affordable home ownership, subject to some exceptions, including designated rural areas where policies may set out a threshold of 5 dwellings or fewer. Some groups, such as the Local Government Association, have concerns that in some areas affordable homes could remain unsold and so revert to market sale homes.

However, simply building more houses will not bring prices down. The Letwin Review, June 2018, showed that developers buy land based on local property values and build at a rate to maintain demand and maximum sale prices for a premium new-build property. In April 2016 the Communities and Local Government Select Committee published a report on national policy 2015-16, and expressed similar concern: 'Home builders will understandably seek to build the products with the highest return...where the need exists, it is vital that homes for affordable rent are built to reflect local needs.'

Sir Michael Lyons said, in the foreword to *What more can be done to build the homes we need?*, IPPR report, June 2017 "...it is not just the number [of houses] built but also the balance of

tenures and affordability which need to be thought through for an effective housing strategy.”

What does this mean for Oxfordshire? What’s the need?

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) tracks affordability, comparing median house prices with median (full time) earnings. Across Oxfordshire median house prices range from £310,000 to £470,000, 10 to 13 times higher than median earnings (ONS, Housing affordability in England and Wales: 2018).

As of April 2018, nearly 8,393 applicants were registered on Oxfordshire Local Authority waiting lists. Unsurprisingly the greatest demand for affordable housing is in Oxford City, 21,055 applicants were registered on the Oxford City waiting list. These figures offer an indication of need, but caution should be applied: applicants can apply to several Local Authorities and members of the same household can apply individually.

Overcrowding is above the national average in Oxford City, with 6.2% of households classified as overcrowded. This is likely to reflect a number of factors: a younger population; volume of student multi-occupancy lettings in the City; greater number of smaller properties and higher housing costs (Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment, 2014).

There is concern that as a result of the Government Growth Deal, Oxfordshire Councils have agreed to build 40% more houses than Government figures state Oxfordshire needs, including affordable housing. The Oxford City Local Plan suggests that the city needs to build 1,400 affordable dwellings per annum. However, GL Hearn’s Oxford City Objectively Assessed Need Update, Oct 2018 concludes that 776 dwellings per annum is the figure required. Why build nearly double the number of dwellings required? Oxford City’s ‘need’ is being driven by the Oxfordshire Growth Board who admit

they are placing economic growth at the heart of a drive to provide more housing, significantly in excess of Local Housing Need figures.

These overstated figures are not without consequence with Oxford’s surrounding districts being forced to take the City’s overspill and putting the Green Belt at risk. CPRE’s State of the Green Belt Report 2019 showed that building on England’s Green Belt was not solving the affordable housing problem: only 10% of homes built within the Green Belt over the last 10 years were affordable.

The Affordable Housing Commission Report: Public Views on Unaffordable Housing, June 2019, states that the 4.8 million UK households struggling

on actual levels of income, rather than a discount on the market rate (mortgage or rental), and housing costs should generally not exceed 30% of household income.

Affordable houses should be subject to the same planning constraints as any other development. Local need should be strictly assessed to ensure affordable housing meets demand and is suitable for those households requiring it. All affordable housing should be affordable in perpetuity and available with a mix of tenures. New houses should be built at much higher densities which would not only make them more affordable for all house buyers but also waste less land and help climate change by reducing travel and creating compact communities.



with housing affordability want homes with close links to family for support, near work to avoid transport costs and availability of good schools. If moving to an affordable home simply adds costs in other areas, households choose to remain in unsuitable or below standard housing. And yet, the NPPF states that where vacant buildings are being redeveloped, i.e. brownfield sites within existing communities, the affordable housing contribution should be reduced!

CPRE Oxfordshire wants the right number of homes built in the right locations, whether these are affordable or open market properties. Affordability itself should be based

Affordable housing remains a confusing and confused subject with various interpretations and ambiguities. A Government rethink may provide a clear definition, but it will fall to Local Authorities to ensure that truly affordable homes are built according to local need.

Julia Benning
Communications Manager

This article draws on House of Commons Library briefing paper *What is affordable housing?* Published May 2019, Wendy Wilson and Cassie Barton, 20 May 2019, 07747.

The d'Arcy Dalton Way Dalton Way by Nick Moon

An updated guide to the long-distance path following the boundary of Oxfordshire with Warwickshire, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire.

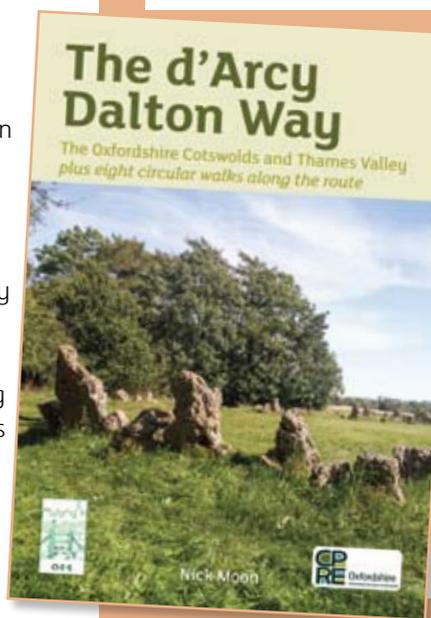
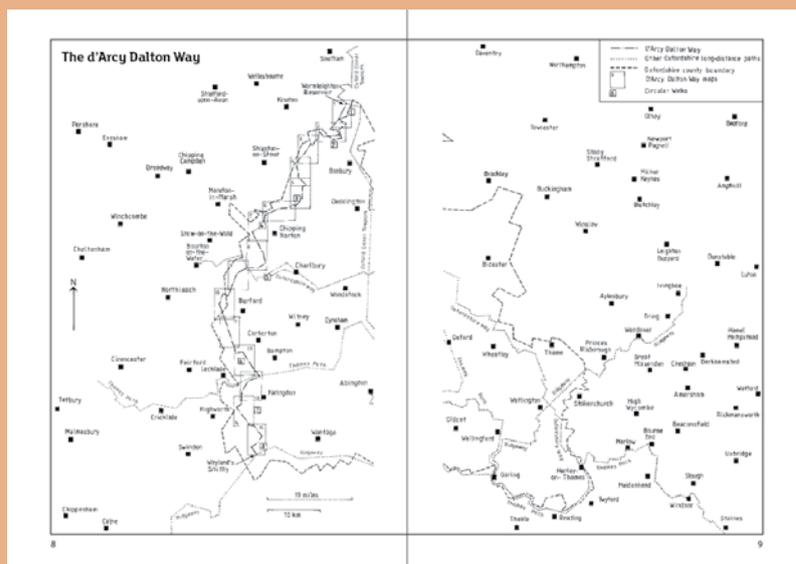
The d'Arcy Dalton Way is named after Col. W.P. d'Arcy Dalton, a notable defender of Oxfordshire's rights of way and the first chairman of CPRE's Rights of Way Group.

This newly revised edition is an essential companion to anyone walking the 66 miles, from Banbury in the north and Abingdon in the south. Passing through almost wholly unspoilt countryside, taking in tranquil and little-known villages and enjoying wildlife along the way. For those preferring a shorter walk the guide also includes eight circular routes off the main route.

This edition has been sponsored by CPRE Oxfordshire with support from the Oxford Fieldpaths Society.

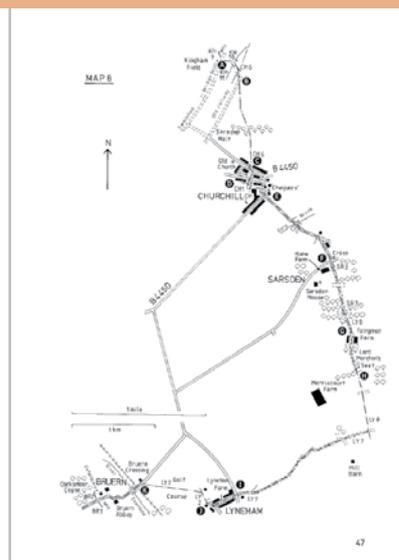
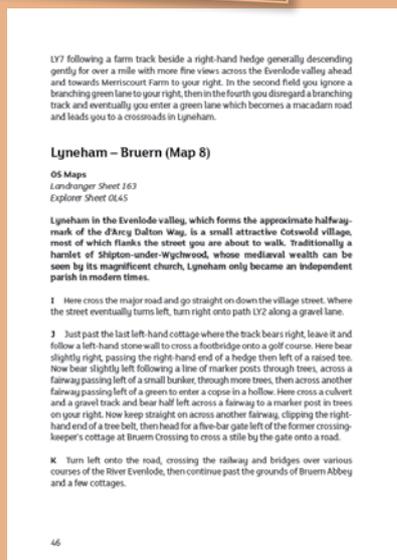
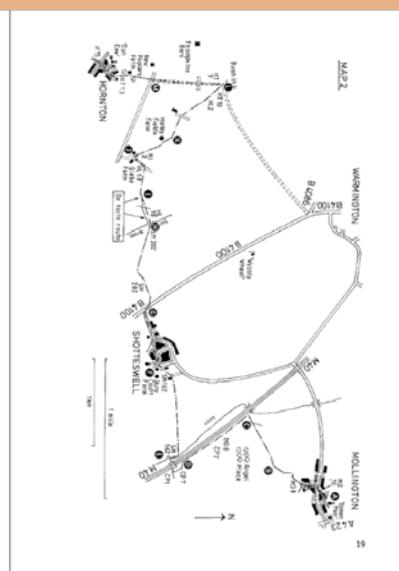
Copies are available direct from CPRE Oxfordshire and from selected bookshops, stationers and information centres in Oxfordshire and surrounding counties. The guide costs £9.99.

To buy a copy direct from CPRE Oxfordshire please send a cheque for £11.99 (includes £2 P&P) made payable to CPRE Oxfordshire to: The D'Arcy Dalton Way Guide, CPRE Oxfordshire, 20 High Street, Watlington, Oxon OX49 5PY



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Then, after spoils onto y bank then and stile in our 80 yards left across a of two farms y ahead and battle of the all left across a footbridge

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Oxfordshire Voice

Published biannually by the Oxfordshire Branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England.

Design: Rob Bowker T: 01491 825609

Print: Severnprint Ltd with vegetable inks on recycled paper using renewable energy.



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