

OXFORDSHIRE VOICE

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**Imposed Growth
Strategy for Oxfordshire**
Railroading development
at Oxfordshire's cost?

**Cherwell's Cart Before
Oxford's Horses?**
Inspector agrees
housing figures

**National Parks for
Oxfordshire?**
CPRE Oxfordshire support
greater protection of our AONBs

OXFORDSHIRE VOICE

Autumn 2018

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DIRECTORY

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

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Articles, letters, comments and suggestions for articles are welcome. Please contact the Branch Office below. Published November 2018

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Chairman's voice



New as well as old challenges dressed up in old clothes continue to interest and engage.

The Oxford to Cambridge Growth Corridor, or 'Ox-Cam Arc' as it is now known, continues to haunt us, in particular because Highways England have chosen Corridor 'B' to include the Oxfordshire section of the proposed Expressway. The expectation for prospective routes across the County to be revealed has not been realised, and we are still in doubt as to whether the route will go west of Oxford, essentially along the line of the A34, but now more likely to include a loop westward, starting north of Abingdon and rejoining the A-road north of Botley – or – plough through the Green Belt on a new road south of Oxford, before joining the M40 and turning northward. Growth potential was meant to govern the work of Highways England, and Oxfordshire's share of the million houses to be built by 2050 along the Arc is a central consideration. As readers of this publication will know, CPRE roundly rejects the whole idea of building an Expressway but now has to decide what further representations should be made to Government in case mitigation is the only option.

Strongly related to the Arc in our considerations is the ongoing development of the Oxfordshire Growth Board, which includes representatives of the County Council, the City Council and the four District Councils, and its Joint Statutory Spatial Plan – JSSP for short. Whilst the Board will not be in a position to do much about the developing District Plans to 2031, it has been central in accepting a Growth Deal with Government and working towards a vision of what happens thereafter in respect of planning to 2050. CPRE favours such joined-up thinking, but only if there is full public engagement – something which has been woefully missing up to now. CPRE Oxfordshire has the ear of the Board, but just how far the Board will

accept our regular involvement with their plans is to be played for.

What has also been exercising our endeavours and patience are the proposals of National Office for a newly-minted view of CPRE. The work, under the auspices of the national Board of Trustees, is led by the recently appointed Chief Executive, Crispin Truman, and involves employing the Good Agency to put forward proposals to re-brand the organisation. Your Branch Executive Committee finds the documents sent to all Branches and containing decisions already made by the Board unsatisfactory and is playing a leading part in discussions with colleagues throughout England in trying to ensure, for example, that 'planning' continues to be at the core of CPRE's activities.

We report the recent death of Alun Jones, the longest serving Trustee for Oxfordshire. His maps which guided us in so many ways and also decorated our invitations to AGMs are legendary. An extended piece will appear in our next issue.

Wenda Reynolds became known to many of us during her long life. She has left us a generous legacy. Knowing of her predilection for planting trees, we have decided that part of the legacy should be used to do just that.

Julia Benning, our Communications Manager, has become a valuable member of Director Helen Marshall's wonderful team and makes us forget that she only joined us in April.

The Branch Executive Committee welcomes two new District Chairmen. Sir David Gilmour is Chairman of the newly amalgamated North and South Cherwell Committees, and Mark Barnett has taken on the Chairmanship of the Vale of White Horse Committee. We wish them well and look forward to working with them. May their fresh enthusiasm never dim!

Peter Collins

Chair CPRE Oxfordshire

New National Parks for Oxfordshire?



The Chilterns at Rotherfield Greys

Nearly 70 years after National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) were first established, a review launched by Environment Secretary Michael Gove in February 2018 will seek to ensure designated landscapes are fit for the future. The review, led by writer Julian Glover, will feedback to Government in autumn 2019.

National Parks and AONBs cover a quarter of England's land and are home to over 2.3 million people, with more than 66 per cent living within half an hour of a National Park or AONB. They also generate over £20 billion for the rural economy and support 75,000 jobs.

The review will look at:

- how National Parks and AONBs meet our needs in the 21st century.
- whether the current 34 AONBs and 10 National Parks could be extended or new areas designated.
- how to improve individual and collective governance of National Parks and AONBs.
- financing of National Parks and AONBs and their role in the rural economy.

- how to connect more people with the natural environment from all sections of society and improve health and wellbeing.
- how those who live and work in National Parks and AONBs can be better supported.

Expanding on work already underway, the review will also take advice from Natural England on the process of designating National Parks and AONBs and extending boundary areas, with a view to improving and speeding up the process.

The review poses no threat to the National Parks or AONB's, neither their protection or geographic scope is at risk. Rather, this could be an opportunity for some areas to receive more protection: with both the Chilterns and the Cotswolds AONBs have made a formal request for National Park status.

Natural England manages the decision process regarding designation requests, which involves public and stakeholder consultation. Any proposals made by Natural England for new designations are subject to confirmation by the Secretary of State, Defra.

In 2000 Government confirmed that AONBs have the same landscape quality and legal protection as National Parks. However, AONBs don't have their own authorities for planning control and other services. National Park authorities have a legal obligation to produce a 5-year management plan allowing a strategic view regarding development and conservation. It is usual for National Parks to assume some Local Authority responsibilities although it can be agreed that Local Authorities retain responsibilities in some areas, such as elements of planning or rights of way. The management plan ensures that all parties make decisions in line with an agreed and planned strategy.

At a recent CPRE West Oxon public meeting Martin Lane, Director, Cotswolds AONB spoke about its interest in acquiring National Park status. CPRE Oxfordshire sees that there are good environmental, social and economic reasons for National Park designation. However, we would also like to see much more robust enforcement of existing AONB protections, as well as a better understanding and appreciation of the value of 'ordinary' non-designated countryside.

Chilterns

The Chilterns covers 324 square miles, stretching from the River Thames in South Oxfordshire, through Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire, and up to Hitchin, Hertfordshire in the north. www.chilternsaonb.org

Cotswolds

The Cotswolds is the largest of Britain's 46 AONBs and the second largest protected landscape after the Lake District National Park. Covering 790 square miles the Cotswolds run from Bath and Wiltshire in the south, through Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire and up to Warwickshire and Worcestershire in the north. www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk

Julia Benning

Communications Manager

Cattle, crops and farmers face the challenge of nature



Rob Bowker

A baler bundles the straw after this summer's wheat harvest

Looking out of the office window at a very blustery Autumn Equinox day, shows another variation in meteorological phenomena. If nothing else 2018 will surely be remembered for its weather.

It should also be a reminder to us of how we can get caught up in the issues of the day, with sophisticated solutions to control problems we have likely created, only to find that nature is still top dog in our industry and intends to remain so.

It is amazing how our crops coped with the challenges of the year. Things began well with crops sown in the autumn of 2017 having a very average winter of rainfall at an average of 53.5mm per month. February was very dry at only 18.5mm, averaged out by March at 74.5mm and April a typical 59.3mm. This data of course hides the chill we had from the East, which delayed spring planting and getting cows out to graze.

May was warm and kind to us dairy farmers, with 30.2mm of rain in five wet days spaced through the first twenty-five days of the month. This

meant the grass finally grew giving us useful crops of grass both for grazing cows and youngstock. Importantly allowing us to make a good quantity of good quality first grass silage for the coming winters feedstock, before the month ended with 56.5mm in the last few days.

Things seemed quite normal at this stage of the year, apart from the prolonged end to winter. Crops were racing through their growth stages in the warm moist conditions, even late sown spring plantings were getting away well in the warming soil. June gave us 4.2mm on the first day and then only 1mm on the 17th, July only 14.8mm for the month, which quickly evaporated as it fell in the soaring temperatures.

The abundance of grass we had enjoyed in May very quickly gave way to a much more parched situation, the increasing temperatures flicking a physiological switch in the grass to develop a seed head, which does not give us the leafy feed of high nutritional value we require. So, the grass is cut again, in an attempt to stop this process, thus small and

smaller harvests of second and third cut grass quickly followed in June and July.

For all cattle we have had a heavy summer, still ongoing, of supplementary feeding to maintain body condition as we tried to make up the short fall in grass growth. Our grazing plan for the milking herd soon hit the buffers in June, a lack of grass, a burning sun and temperatures of over 30 degrees are not the stuff of bovine dreams! The compromise was to be in the shade of their shed during the day with silage to eat and out at night in the grazing paddocks to find a blade or two of grass.

We started our grain harvest with some trepidation – unsure how such a season would impact on crop yields.

We started our grain harvest with some trepidation – unsure how such a season would impact on crop yields. The Winter Barley was at best average and the Winter Oilseed Rape not great. However, our spirits were lifted as we moved into the Winter Wheat crops which surpassed our expectations for yield and quality, turning a mediocre harvest prospect into a good result!

Quite a lot of comparisons have been made with the summer of 1976. As a school boy at the time I can vividly recall discovering with a school pal that we could get into the Mill Brook (a local main river tributary of the Thames) at the bottom of the farm and could then ride our bikes along its dry bed. I had some difficulty in pin pointing our position as we moved along, navigating by counting the ends of the smaller farm ditches that periodically joined from our left side. This year I can report that such a feat of daring exploration would only be possible with a canoe!!

Angus Dart
Farming Advisor

Cherwell's Cart before Oxford's horses?



Helen Marshall

TAKE ACTION:

If you would like to find out more about the Oxford Green Belt and why we think it should be protected, visit <http://www.cpreoxon.org.uk/campaigns/oxford-green-belt-2>

- d) Given the above, the exceptional circumstances required to build on the Green Belt could not possibly exist and therefore the Plan should be rejected as unsound.

Fundamentally, it seems to us absurd that the District Councils around Oxford should be forced to adopt Local Plans that sacrifice valuable Green Belt land when Oxford's own needs have not been robustly examined by bringing forward its own Local Plan.

In other words, Cherwell's cart is being put well before Oxford's horses!

In the face of all this, the best argument that the massed lawyers were able to put forward appeared to be not about the merits of the case, but the fact that the Vale of White Horse and West Oxfordshire Districts have already gone through this pain in their own Local Plans, so Cherwell should also fall in line.

At the time of going to press, we are still waiting for the Inspector's findings and to learn whether the Plan will be dismissed as unsound, whether it may be suspended until the Oxford Local Plan is further developed, or whether the full hearing sessions will go ahead. We'll keep you posted.

Helen Marshall
Branch Director

The reality of campaigning life – our wonderful local group representatives make their case to an Inspector, in a room full of barristers and developers.

Cherwell District Council's proposals to build nearly 4,000 houses in the Oxford Green Belt came under the scrutiny of Inspector Paul Griffiths this autumn.

Cherwell argues the housing is needed to meet an overflow from Oxford City's requirements.

After reviewing the Plan and all the comments, the Inspector took the unusual (although not unprecedented) step of holding a one day 'pre-hearing session' to look at some of the fundamental issues raised and decide whether more detailed sessions could go ahead.

We were pleased that he identified the two key issues that CPRE Oxfordshire had raised in our earlier submissions, essentially:

- Are the overall housing numbers for Oxford correct and, if so, is the allocation to Cherwell appropriate?
- Assuming the figures are right, do the exceptional circumstances exist to justify building on the Green Belt?

Our trustee, Michael Tyce, did a fantastic job of presenting CPRE Oxfordshire's case. It was also great

to see representatives from so many community groups there, mostly under the banner of Cherwell Development Watch Alliance. It can be easy to feel intimidated by the process, especially when faced with a room full of developers and barristers, but CPRE Oxfordshire was able to work with the groups in advance to help them understand what is involved and give them the confidence to present their own evidence – which they did to outstanding effect.

Our arguments were that:

- a) The overall housing figures for Oxford are flawed (they are over double the need identified by the latest Government methodology)
- b) The Oxfordshire Growth Board's subsequent allocation of 4,400 of Oxford's houses to Cherwell was arbitrary and flawed.
- c) Oxford City has plenty of capacity to meet its own need by releasing employment land for housing instead and by building at a density appropriate to city living.

STOP PRESS – as we go to press the Inspector has agreed housing figures and stated Oxford's unmet housing need justifies developing the Green Belt. CPRE Oxfordshire are hugely disappointed and will be considering the implications and further action, including possible legal challenge.

Imposed Growth Strategy for Oxfordshire

Railroading development at Oxfordshire's cost?

BACKGROUND

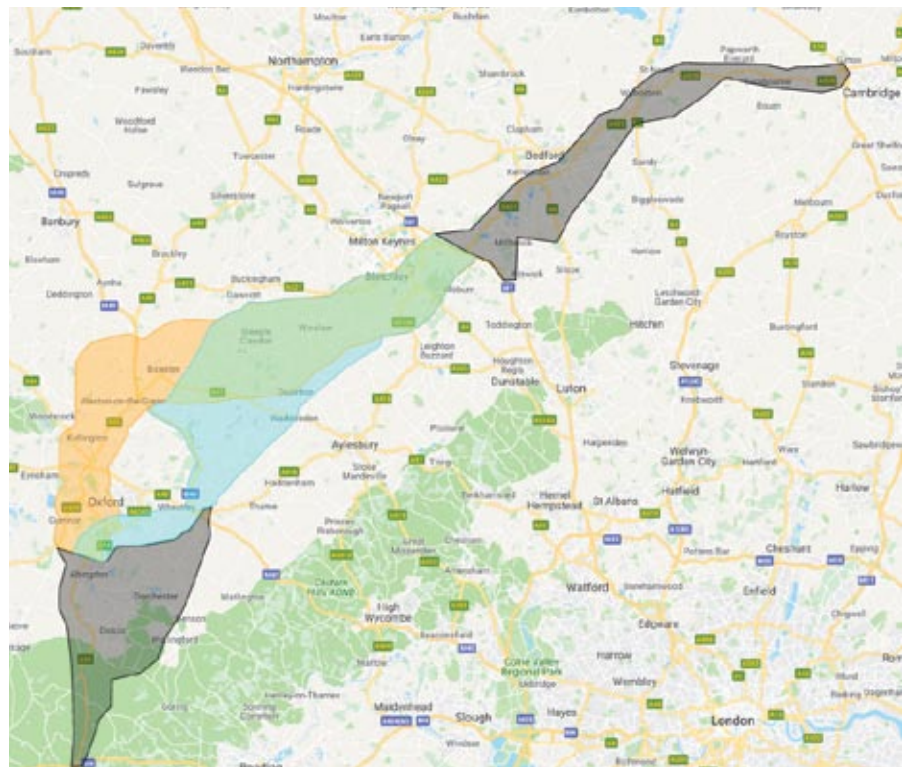
Last November, the Government endorsed the National Infrastructure Commission recommendation that the five counties forming the “Oxfordshire Cambridge Arc”, including Oxfordshire, should be targeted for exponential growth involving a doubling of both population and housing stock during the twenty years 2031-2050. In Oxfordshire's case this would be another 300,000 houses on top of the 100,000 in current Local Plans.

CPRE considers that growth on anything like this scale would be incompatible with preserving the presently rural nature of Oxfordshire.

The basic infrastructure skeleton on which this growth is intended to hang consists of new road and rail links.

New Rail will be East West Rail through the Growth Arc, and a number of new or enhanced South-North links from London. Rail is intended to facilitate commuting between the settlements in the Growth Arc and between the Arc and London although it may take some freight off the roads. CPRE accepts the East West Rail link but is concerned that South-North rail will swamp the area with commuters, changing its character in another way.

Road will be the new Expressway, a motorway in all but name. This is to facilitate long distance HGV haulage, an outer M25, although it will also facilitate car movements between settlements in the Arc and lorry movements serving new industrial sites. CPRE is in principle opposed to new roads through the countryside but accepts that there can be benefits in



upgrading existing ones.

EXPRESSWAY UPDATE

For the past year Highways England has been conducting “engagements” with “stakeholders” including CPRE on the routing of – not the justification for – an Expressway from Oxford to Cambridge, although it will actually run from Chieveley on the M4 to the M11.

There were three potential main corridors under consideration: C, the most northerly via Buckingham, but using existing roads extensively; B, via Bicester, paralleling East West Rail but involving new roads across open countryside; and A, via Aylesbury using largely existing roads.

Of particular relevance to Oxford, a number of sub-routes around the City were on the table. One main route was to the West of the City, based on the A34; the other was a new road driven through the Green Belt South of the City and then either continuing North East via Thame and Aylesbury, or turning North near Wheatley either to

the West of the M40 close to Otmoor or East of the M40.

The “engagement” with “stakeholders” has been opaque at best, and there has been neither the public consultation or Public Inquiry which CPRE demanded from the start and in which we were supported by a near unanimous vote of Oxfordshire County Council. We were told that the chosen corridor from end to end would be decided by last July.

Whilst expressing strong reservations about the Growth Strategy as a whole, and an Expressway in particular, CPRE advised Highways England that if the Expressway were to go ahead the least worst alternative would be the Western option round Oxford and main corridor C via Buckingham as this would mainly involve upgrading existing roads rather than building new ones across the countryside, especially Green Belt.

July came and went.

In mid-September it was announced that the main corridor would be B, but

although there is a welcome decision to rule out Otmoor, the fundamental question of the routing around Oxford was still undecided. It might still be either the A34 corridor to the West (B1) or a new road South of the City then North at, or close to, Junction 8a near Wheatley (B3). The coloured areas on the map below shows the “area of search”.

You can zoom in to see how your own village might be affected by visiting an unofficial inter-active version of the map at: <https://tinyurl.com/ycwtrf7y>.

The choice of routing around Oxford, where we had expected to know the worst by July, will now not be made for at least another year.

Highways England have issued a copious report which at the time of writing we are only just beginning to examine in detail.

First impressions are, however, that it appears the Expressway as a project is financially precarious and exposed to substantial potential cost inflation. B1 (the A34 corridor) is slightly less suspect as it costs less and yields almost equal “benefits”.

Against that B3 yields somewhat more connectivity for potential new jobs, which may or may not arise.

Corridor B1 (the A34) is suitable for a new Expressway (as indeed Highways have repeatedly confirmed in our discussions with them), and improvement work will have to be done on the A34 anyway.

Against that the environmental hazards on B1 are clear, although the A34 passes through or near them already, and as a survey in the Vale of the White Horse plan showed upgrading may not increase the blight

significantly. There are environmental hazards on B3 too, e.g. to ancient Radley Woods, and more are likely to be unearthed during the next phase (with our help). In any case it is a brand-new road through Green Belt from the A34 to North East of the M40.

CPRE will continue to express strong concerns about the Expressway in principle, and particularly about the scale of development it is intended to facilitate, and to campaign for any Expressway that might nevertheless be imposed to minimise environmental harm, use existing roads where possible (be “on-line” in Highways parlance) and particularly to avoid entirely new roads being driven through the Oxford Green Belt.

Michael Tyce
Trustee

Oxfordshire 2050: the Joint Statutory Spatial Plan

BACKGROUND

Whilst the new rail lines and the Expressway are the skeleton on which the Growth Arc hangs, the doubling of population, the new jobs it is imagined will be created to employ them, and the new housing which will need to be built for them to live in, are its sinews and flesh.

A doubling of Oxfordshire’s housing stock and workplaces by 2050, as the Government proposes, is a tall order by any standards and a huge planning problem to boot.

That is where the Joint Statutory Spatial Plan (JSSP) comes in.

JSSP UPDATE

One upon a time Oxfordshire had a Structure Plan. This laid out where development would take place

throughout the County, creating a template within which the individual Districts would prepare their own local development plans. From this arose the County Town Strategy, which limited the development of Oxford itself (because of the Green Belt and the medieval nature of the City) and directed it instead towards the larger towns throughout the County – sharing the proceeds of growth as it used to be put. A Structure Plan considering development as a whole across all of the County, and the strategy to direct it to the larger towns were near perfect for a County like ours with Green Belt around Oxford and a wealth of AONBs and other valuable countryside to protect.

Gordon Brown scrapped it in favour of Regional Plans which attempted to do a similar thing across a whole region, in our case the South East. A step too far, as there was too little in common across such a wide expanse of England.

Regional Plans were in turn scrapped by David Cameron, but the Structure Plans were not re-instated. Instead District Councils were given Duty



Cllr Barry Wood, Leader of Cherwell District Council and Helen Marshall, Branch Director

to Co-operate with each other on development, particularly where one District was not able to accommodate all the housing it felt it needed, but this was in fact only a duty to discuss –not to agree. At the same time Oxford City Council was unleashed to resume its old growth ambitions, creating more and more employment and dumping the housing consequences on its neighbours.

The Government has now negotiated a Growth Deal with Oxfordshire Councils under which the Councils between them agree to build 40% more houses than even the Government thinks

Oxfordshire needs, in return for £215 million (say £4,000 per unneeded house) of Government money. One of the conditions is that Oxfordshire Councils, through the Growth Board, also set up a Joint Statutory Spatial Plan – effectively the very Structure Plan Gordon Brown abolished three paragraphs ago.

This is now on a monstrously bigger scale however. The task before the JSSP is to find a way – if there is one – of accommodating the more than doubling of Oxfordshire’s current housing stock with the extra 300,000 homes envisaged in the National Infrastructure Commissions Oxford-Cambridge Growth Arc “Partnering for Prosperity” strategy, by 2050, without fatally damaging Oxfordshire’s presently rural character and landscape.

In fact, CPRE believe the JSSP is a good thing in principle. It is wise to look across the whole canvas of the County when considering how growth will be best managed, rather than having the decision making segmented between the Districts as it is now.

But CPRE also believe that the proposed level and rate of growth cannot be absorbed without unacceptable damage to Oxfordshire’s character and the amenity of its current residents. What is more we fear that the new road and, especially, rail links are more likely to result in a wave of new commuters than in a surge of new local jobs – and commuter land is not a desirable place to be for the cohesion of communities.

We are also very concerned that the Statement of Common Ground (Policy Statement) for the JSSP does not properly recognise the equal balance that needs to be struck between economic growth and the protection of Oxfordshire’s environment, which is in any case valuable not only for its own sake, but for the economic value it provides.

We were also concerned that there

was no provision for involving environmental organisations in the process of developing the Plan. Accordingly, at their meeting at the end of July, we addressed the Growth Board to support the broad principle of a Joint Spatial Plan, and to ask for a place at the table. As a result, we were promised involvement on the spot and have now been made official consultees.

This should give us the opportunity to be involved in guiding and shaping not only the location, but the amount and time scale of development.

Our guiding principles will be that brownfield land should be developed first; that Green Belt and AONB land should be avoided...

Our guiding principles will be that brownfield land should be developed first; that Green Belt and AONB land should be avoided; that high densities of development will be the norm to avoid losing more land than necessary; that we shall seek to protect communities from being severed from their services; that only sustainable communities will be created; and that the amount of development, and its time scale, will recognise the County’s capacity to absorb growth whilst preserving its rural character.

Against the strong forces for development, not least from the University as major landowners, and the Local Councils in need of money (the County Council has already said it would expect similar inducements to the £2000 per house in the Growth Deal), we hope to provide a counterweight so that the end result shows a proper balance between necessary economic growth and the vital need to Protect as much of Rural England as we can.

Michael Tyce
Trustee

David Gilmour,
new chair of
CPRE Cherwell,
on his move to
the Oxfordshire
countryside
and the fight to
protect it



Ten years ago my wife and I decided to move from Scotland to Oxfordshire. As a historian and biographer, I wanted to be near the libraries and archives of Oxford. As a parent and grandfather I wished to be closer to my children and grandchildren, most of whom live in London. And as a countryman by inclination who had spent too long in a city, I wanted to live in a landscape where I could watch the birds, lie in the grass and plant a few trees.

I had already spent two periods of my life in Oxford colleges, as an undergraduate and as a research fellow, and much as I loved –and love –the city, I liked to escape to the country, usually to the west near Burford or to the north-west around Wychwood. When my wife and I chose to come south, we thought we would be looking for a house in the valleys of the Windrush or the Evenlode.

Both of us were happy that the ‘right house’ turned out to be somewhere

else, in the hamlet of Alkerton next to Shenington, in the north of the county close to the Warwickshire border. I love the landscape up here. The fields are smaller and the valleys more secret than they are elsewhere; the buildings of local Hornton stone are of a deeper, richer colour than in the Cotswolds; and there are no coachloads of tourists.

My appreciation of the beauty of the Oxfordshire countryside grew simultaneously with an awareness of its vulnerability. When living in Edinburgh I spent as much time as I could in the Scottish countryside, especially in the south-west, Dumfries and Galloway, where my mother's family come from. But in Scotland the dangers to the landscape were not large, badly-planned housing schemes but coniferous tax-break forestry and environmentally insensitive golf courses.

I joined the CPRE as soon as I realized how threatened our Oxfordshire landscape was by housing pressures and insensate demands for economic growth at all costs. When I see the forces often allied against us – Westminster, business, Whitehall, local government, developers and alas too many farmers – it seems a miracle that so much has survived. But almost all of it is at risk. It is easy to despair when desk-bound planners seek to justify their existence by declaring that Oxford and Cambridge must be joined, that an 'arc' of growth must be created, that yet more of the southern countryside must be desecrated, tarmacked and suburbanized so that Britain doesn't get 'left behind' by its competitors. But we cannot allow them to go unchallenged.

We have to mobilise and fight for ourselves and for other people. We owe it to our ancestors who laboured to make the English countryside, and above all we owe it to our children, who will inherit the consequences of our actions.



The Need Not Greed Oxfordshire is a coalition of 35 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

National Planning Policy Framework

NNGO has long called for changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and therefore welcomed the Government's recent consultation on a revised approach. Sadly, there was no attempt to abandon the punitive 5 Year Housing Supply rules or increase pressure on developers to stick to their promises on affordable housing, but instead the potential for further penalties for councils if they fail to meet targets and further weakening of planning protections.

You can see the full consultation response on the 'News' page of the NNGO website.

3 Year Housing Land Supply

In recent years speculative developers have made hay across Oxfordshire when our local authorities have fallen foul of rules which say they have to be able to prove a 5-year supply of deliverable housing. In July 2018 the Oxfordshire Growth Board looked to negotiate with Government to reduce the rules for Oxfordshire to a 3-year housing supply.

On 12th September James Brokenshire, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, announced a temporary change to housing supply policies in Oxfordshire, confirming Oxfordshire would be subject to 3-year housing supply rules whilst the County writes the Joint Statutory Spatial Plan (JSSP).

This measure does not address the longer-term impacts or the fundamental unfairness of making local authorities release more land, to the cost of particular communities and greenfield sites, when developers fail to build what they promise. However, any measure that prevents speculative development is welcome and NNGO hope it delivers some breathing space to our local communities.

You can see the full consultation response on the 'News' page of the NNGO website.

Joint Statutory Spatial Plan (JSSP), Sue Haywood

NNGO welcome the JSSP in principle as a coordinated approach to planning across the county. There is also an essential need for the JSSP to deliver:

- A restoration of planning principles, with a proper balancing of economic, environmental and social considerations
- Local democracy, with planning control in the hands of locally elected and accountable representatives
- Environment and rural sustainability, ensuring that our landscape, nature and rural communities are at the heart of decision-making.

NNGO has talked constructively with Growth Board members and officers over the last few months, exploring opportunities for representation in JSSP decision-making processes and meaningful engagement for local communities. There has been a welcome evolution of rhetoric in the strategy, incorporating reference to placemaking and environmental concerns as considerations in decision making, and recognising the need for greater transparency and communication. Growth Board member Cllr Hudspeth kindly also joined NNGO at their annual public meeting to present information about the JSSP and answer questions from the audience. However, despite these positive developments, NNGO has concerns that the current definition for the scope of the project, challenging timescales and the need to integrate with other government strategies such as the Expressway, will make it difficult for the JSSP to deliver an outcome that is coherent and sustainable. NNGO will continue to look for opportunities to provide a voice for its coalition members as the strategy develops.

The Abingdon Reservoir: *back on the agenda for the 2030s*

In the last issue of the Oxfordshire Voice (Spring 2018) we reported on Thames Water's (TW) latest plans to supply water to the Thames valley in the 21st Century. A lot has happened in the last 6 months. TW's original plans projected a substantial shortfall in supply over demand, primarily driven by population increase. This shortfall was to be filled in the next 10 years by increased abstraction at Teddington Lock (with compensating release of treated waste water across Teddington weir) and by a modest reduction in leakage (TW has the highest leakage rates of any water company). The massive reservoir south of Abingdon was still required but not until the mid- 2040s. Following representations from CPRE, TW revised their long-term population forecasts downwards, putting the need for the reservoir back by five years. However, when the responses from the full consultation were presented at a Stakeholders' meeting in August, a very different picture emerged.

The Environment Agency voiced substantial worries about the environmental impact of increased extraction above Teddington, in particular the effect of the increased temperature of the waste water on spawning fish. In addition nearly all respondents to the consultation queried the modest reduction of leakage. As a result the Teddington project has been shelved and the shortfall made up by a more ambitious leakage reduction target – 15% by 2025 and 50% by 2050, plus development of some smaller water sources. The big change, however, is a 'new' requirement from Affinity Water for 100 million litres per day by the 2030s. Affinity Water supply a million and a half households to the west and north of London and are projecting a 17% increase in population by 2045. This new requirement brings the need for the Abingdon reservoir right forward to 2037. Given the, at least, 15-year lead time for the reservoir construction, planning will have to start very soon.

The updated plan is so radically different from that put out for consultation in the spring that GARD (Group Against Abingdon Reservoir), supported by CPRE, called for a new consultation and this has now been accepted. We expect to see the new draft published late September with a consultation for eight weeks. We have not seen the final details, but CPRE still has considerable reservations over TW's plans. TW have reviewed their population projections post 2045 (resulting in a reduction of 2 million people) but the population growth rates they present up to 2045 look exaggerated. We also feel there is more scope to reduce water demand – through greater leakage reduction, and through incentivising people to reduce their water use.

We all want a clean and secure water supply but many of TW's plans will result in permanent damage to our countryside and environment. CPRE will continue to scrutinise and critique these plans to ensure the best and most robust plan for the future.

Richard Harding

Chair of CPRE South Oxfordshire

In memory – Alun Jones

It is with great sadness that we report the death of Alun Jones on 16 October 2018.



Alun has been an amazing contributor to CPRE Oxfordshire, and the whole county, over many years and will be sadly missed. He leaves a fantastic legacy of maps, drawings and images of Oxfordshire and we will feature a tribute to Alun's support and contribution in the spring edition of Oxfordshire Voice.

In memory – Anne Kelaart OBE

We sadly have to report the death of Anne (Bessie) Kelaart, on 17 June 2018, aged 73. Anne was President of CPRE Oxfordshire 2010-2013.

Anne was an Oxfordshire farmer, landowner and tireless ambassador for the Oxfordshire countryside and rural communities. She brought a great deal of experience and knowledge to her role as CPRE Branch President. Amongst many roles she was the Chairman of the Trustees of the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG), served on the Executive Committee of the CLA and the Council of English Nature and was President of the Oxfordshire Country Land and Business Association. She



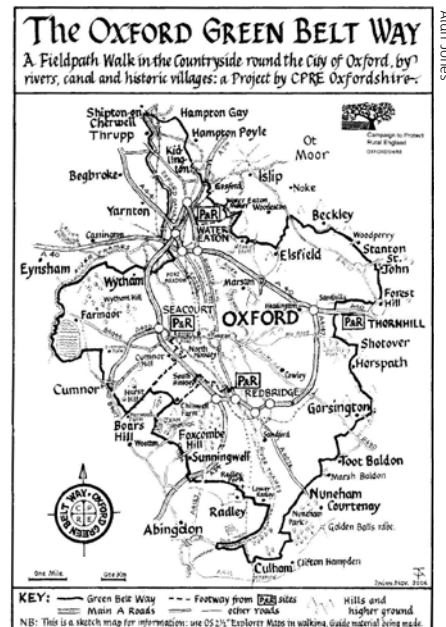
was High Sheriff of Oxfordshire from 2004 to 2005 and was appointed Deputy Lieutenant in 2007.

The Oxford Green Belt Way

It is now some eleven years since the Oxford Green Belt Way was created to mark the 75th anniversary of the Branch as well the 50th anniversary of the Oxford Green Belt. With a new edition of the guidebook about to be published by the Branch it is perhaps the moment to recall how it came about. At that time various ideas were suggested as how best to mark both anniversaries, one idea in particular being a walk on the lines of the CPRE series of sponsored Save The Countryside Walks which had been so strikingly successful in attracting young people to get to know better the importance of the countryside – in 1972 1174 children finished the route and raised nearly £5000. In the end, the importance of drawing attention to the Green Belt, since threats to it were already being felt, led to a permanent long-distance route being created to take in as much of the still unspoilt countryside of the Green Belt. Such a walk would follow the tradition of the Branch in creating other long-distance walks, in 1978 the Oxfordshire Way, and in 1986, with the Oxford Fieldpaths Society, the d'Arcy Dalton Way.

After much poring over of OS maps and the walking along of different stretches of paths by five enthusiastic volunteers, a 50-mile route was drawn up together with notes of the wild life that could be seen and historical notes of features that one would come across along the route. At the outset a guiding principle was that the Way should be accessible by public transport, easy to follow for all, whether experienced in reading maps and long-distance walking or for a family just wanting to enjoy a recognised walk in the countryside around Oxford. And so, the route was waymarked with CPRE discs and the first guidebook included detailed route directions to accompany a series of annotated OS maps showing the route. How much has the Oxford Green Belt Way been walked is difficult to assess since very few reports by users have been received but those that have were invariably complimentary, including from a group from the USA and two couples from Germany.

Although the County Council is responsible for maintaining rights of way, no special priority is given to the Way and it was therefore decided that each of the nine stages should be adopted by a CPRE volunteer so that its condition could be monitored to ensure it is maintained to an acceptable standard by the County Council and would continue to remain an enjoyable walk. As it happens, there is a need for two new volunteers as the present incumbents have recently retired. The stages now vacant are Stage 7 from Wolvercote to Hampton Poyle (6.2 miles) and Stage 9 Beckley to Thornhill (4.3 miles). Being a volunteer is not particularly onerous requiring only to walk the stage at least once a year, ensuring any missing waymarks are replaced and trimming back any overgrown vegetation, while at the same time noting any problems that should be



Alan Jones

reported. If anyone is interested to know more, please contact me:

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Rights of Way Advisor

Oxfordshire Local Plan round-up

Cherwell

See p.4 for an update on the Cherwell Local Plan Part 1 Review.

Oxford City

A public consultation on the final draft ('Pre-Submission' version) of Oxford's Local Plan will take place 1 November-13 December. Although identifying housing as a priority, the City plans to retain large areas of land for employment and will ask its neighbouring districts to take even more of its overflow. Please see our website for latest information.

South Oxfordshire

The Council is continuing to review its main strategic allocations, including looking at Grenoble Road and Wick Farm sites. A second Pre-Submission Consultation is expected in January 2019.

Vale of White Horse

Hearing sessions on Vale Local Plan Part 2 took place over the summer. CPRE Oxfordshire argued in favour of accommodating development at Dalton Barracks without using Green Belt land,

challenged the safeguarding of land for transport schemes around Sunningwell and strongly objected to the proposed 1,000 housing allocation in the North Wessex Downs AONB at Harwell. At the Inspector's request, we are now working with the Council to revisit the wording of its historic environment policy.

West Oxfordshire

The Inspector's report on the West Oxfordshire Local Plan has now been published, finding the Plan sound subject to Main Modifications.

CPRE Oxfordshire is disappointed that overall housing numbers have been increased, well beyond recognised need.

However, CPRE Oxfordshire and local campaigning groups were able to ensure that a more robust policy to protect the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) was introduced and the Inspector recommended the removal of four specific development sites in this area from the Plan.

A new policy has also been introduced advocating avoidance of pollution, including noise and light, maintaining/improving tranquillity and dark-sky quality. We believe this is now the strongest policy for AONBs across Oxfordshire.

Members' Events 2018 *by Judy Crocket and Gill Salway*

Benson, May

On a lovely May morning 17 CPRE members visited the Heritage Centre at RAF Benson. The Centre is a well-kept secret, a hidden gem containing fascinating documents, photos and items from the 80-year history of the base. Some of our members had close links with the base and were able to find evidence of their family ties. After a good pub lunch, we enjoyed a guided walk around the historic heart of Benson. After a visit to the church, our guide pointed out the old coaching route from London, now a quiet lane, the many coaching inns, the site of a water mill and Birmingham Yard the industrial centre of Benson in the early part of the 20th century. We can only hope that the large number of new houses planned for the



village do provide an 'edge' street to remove the traffic from the old centre of Benson and that the attractive

cottages and back streets can return to relative tranquillity –RAF helicopters permitting!

Gill Mill Quarry, June

On what proved to be one of the hottest days of the year 16 CPRE members braved the heat to tour the desert-like terrain of Gill Mill quarry, just outside Witney. This is Smiths of Bletchington's flagship quarry and they gave us an extremely interesting afternoon, transporting us round the site in an air-conditioned bus and allowing us close access to the machinery, including the plant for recycling aggregate. Martin Layer, our host for the afternoon, gave us an onsite lecture on the geology of the Lower Windrush valley and we wound up the afternoon by visiting the Rushy Common Nature reserves where Smiths, in partnership with the Windrush Valley Project, have created a series of lakes now managed for wildlife conservation.

Many CPRE members will have concerns about the effects of gravel extraction on the countryside and wish to minimise the amount of land taken to satisfy the demands of the

construction industries. However, we have to accept that there will always be a certain level of extraction and it was reassuring to meet representatives of the industry who are actively engaged with their local community and enthusiastic about the opportunities offered by restoration for the enhancement of biodiversity.



Kingston Bagpuize House, August




Des Blenkinsopp / CC BY-SA 2.0

This visit was a new evening event to enable those members who are working to come. This proved popular and 29 members enjoyed a tour of the lovely 18th-century house conducted by the current owner, Mrs Virginia Grant. We were shown over two floors of the building with plenty of entertaining anecdotes about previous owners, the objects they had assembled to furnish it, and the laying out of the gardens. We hope to find another location for a similar evening event in 2019.

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