



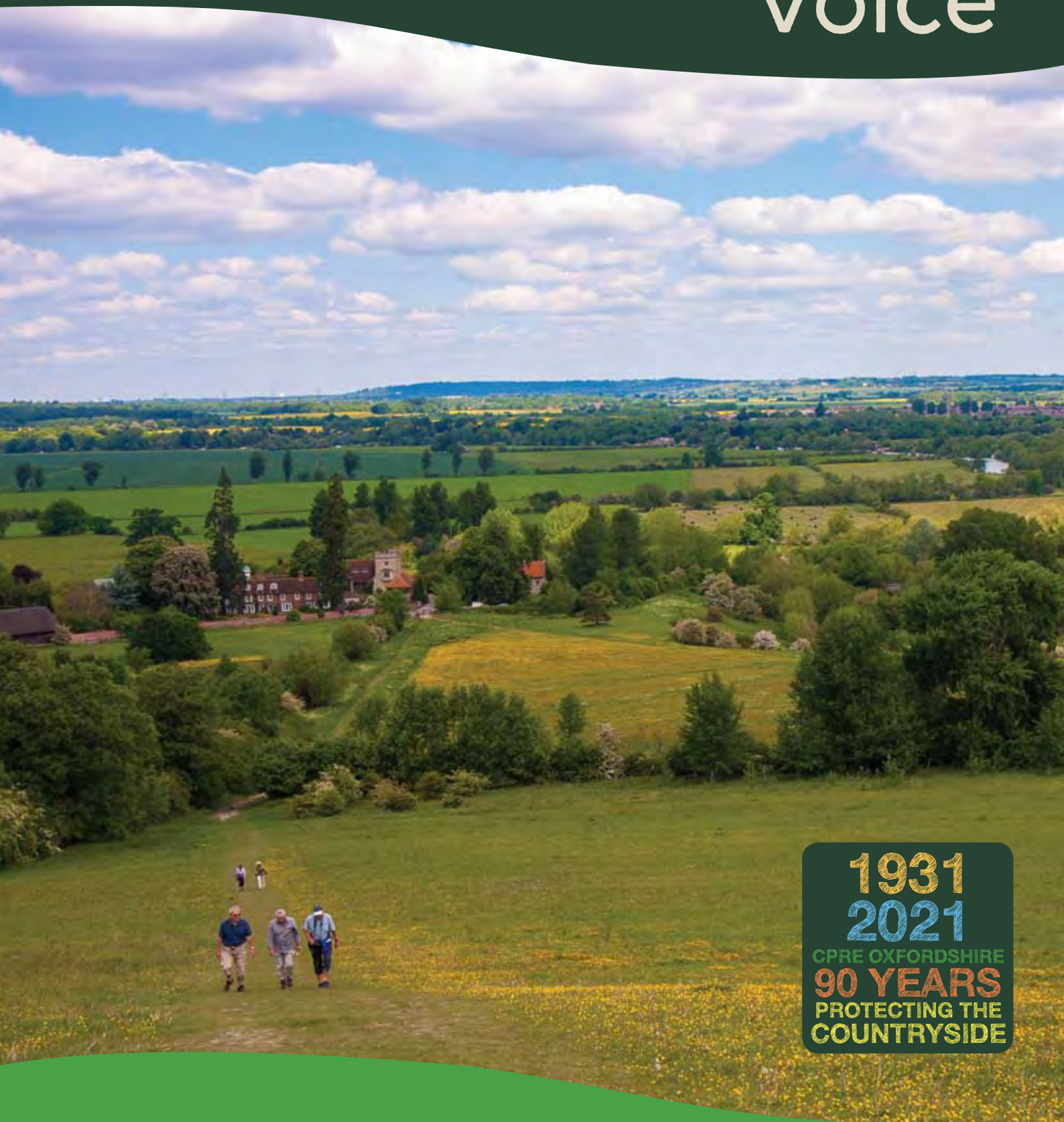
The countryside charity  
Oxfordshire

Campaigning to protect our rural county

[www.cpreoxon.org.uk](http://www.cpreoxon.org.uk)

Spring 2021

# Oxfordshire Voice



**1931  
2021**  
CPRE OXFORDSHIRE  
**90 YEARS**  
PROTECTING THE  
COUNTRYSIDE

We celebrate CPRE Oxfordshire's  
90th anniversary  
p.4-5

Oxford Green Belt  
development plans  
p.8-9

Calls for an independent  
housing assessment  
p.10

# Oxfordshire Voice

Spring 2021

## CONTENTS

- 2 Chairman's voice
- 4 CPRE Oxfordshire 1931-2021
- 6 Planning updates
- 8-9 Protecting the Oxford Green Belt
- 10 Independent Housing Needs Assessment
- 11 District Updates

## DIRECTORY

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

Editor: Julia Benning

Cover: Little Wittenham/David Marsh

Articles, letters, comments and suggestions for articles are welcome.

Please contact the Branch Office below.  
Published April 2021

## BRANCH CHAIRMAN

CPRE Oxfordshire Branch

Peter Collins

[pjcoll@maths.ox.ac.uk](mailto:pjcoll@maths.ox.ac.uk)

## DISTRICT CHAIRS

Cherwell: David Gilmour

[gilmourdr@aol.com](mailto:gilmourdr@aol.com)

Oxford: Contact the Branch Office as below

South Oxfordshire:

Professor Richard Harding

01491 836425

[Prof.Richard.Harding@gmail.com](mailto:Prof.Richard.Harding@gmail.com)

Vale of White Horse:

Heneage Legge-Bourke

[heneagelb@gmail.com](mailto:heneagelb@gmail.com)

West Oxfordshire:

Philippa Phelan (Chair Elect)

[c/o administrator@cpreoxon.org.uk](mailto:c/o administrator@cpreoxon.org.uk)

## BRANCH OFFICE

CPRE Oxfordshire, First Floor, 20 High Street, Watlington, Oxfordshire OX49 5PY (Registered office)

T: 01491 612079

E: [administrator@cpreoxon.org.uk](mailto:administrator@cpreoxon.org.uk)

[www.cpreoxon.org.uk](http://www.cpreoxon.org.uk)

CPRE Oxfordshire is registered in England as Charity No.1093081 and Company No. 04443278.

# Chairman's voice



Should a valedictory Chairman's Voice be the usual 'tour d'horizon', a 'State of the Campaign' message, or do our members deserve something more, something different?

This Chairman, on the point of departure, has been fortunate to be able to announce two particular achievements of Branch during his watch and, though very much a joint effort, reflect well on CPRE Oxfordshire for its continuing work over the last four years.

One, known through the media to all, is the removal by the Government of the word and the future reality of an 'Expressway' from the vocabulary concerning the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, or now, 'Growth Corridor'. We can hardly be blamed for this success on our own – there are a number of Counties, let alone organisations across the Arc, which have also worked tirelessly to resist the building of this road which would have cut a swathe through our green and pleasant land. However, we can at least claim that our organisation's prestige has given us access to many important discussions along the way and can have done no harm to the cause. We thank those of you who have sent us congratulatory messages. There of course remain challenges in respect of excessive building and road 'improvements' along the Ox-Cam Corridor, some continuing to threaten Oxford's Green Belt, that will give my successor some employment.

A second Branch success has been an internal matter. The health of a long-term committee depends on a process of renewal matching the stability and experience commanded by continuity. However, in the modern world, charities up and down the Kingdom are finding the latter easier to maintain than the former. Not so CPRE Oxfordshire which has attracted and, at its March meeting, co-opted seven, yes seven, new Trustees – admittedly, two coming to us because of change in Chairmanship of two District Committees. With their considerable – and variety of – skills and experience, the new women and men are already making their presence felt and make a fine addition to our Executive Committee. You will find their names in the AGM papers, alongside those of other members nominated for election.

The Executive Committee loses, alas, three Trustees who have each given extraordinary service over many years. Both Gill Salway and Bruce Tremayne were not only noted Chairmen, Bruce even for two spells of duty, but were then and until this day, the first source of wisdom and knowledge sought by the CPRE Committees in the Districts where they live. They have contributed in so many different ways to our activities. Gordon Garraway has too, but his name, and hence our name, is known far and wide for one particular contribution: an expertise on the County's footpaths and by-ways, including the creation of the Oxford Green Belt Way for which he won a National CPRE medal. Future opportunities to gain advice from all three should not be lost, and you will find nominations as Vice-President in your AGM papers. We also much regret losing our Trustee and West Oxfordshire Chairman, John Histon, who has had to withdraw on health grounds. He is replaced by Philippa Phelan and the new Vale Chairman is Heneage Legge-Bourke. We welcome them both.

That the Executive Committee can speak with authority often depends



Follow us on Twitter  
[@CPREOxfordshire](https://twitter.com/CPREOxfordshire)



and like us on  
[www.facebook.com/CPREOxfordshire](https://www.facebook.com/CPREOxfordshire)



on expert advice. To a twenty-one year-old Lecturer at St Edmund Hall in 1966, my senior colleagues seemed to have some age about them. However, Ian Scargill was young then and maintained his youthful enthusiasm as longtime Chairman of the Oxford Green Belt Network. So, you will understand that it is with personal, as well as institutional, sadness that I have now to record his retirement as an Honorary Consultant. Legend in his lifetime, he has done immense good work for Oxfordshire. We welcome Martin Harris, another experienced Green Belter in his place, and also as Honorary Consultant, Lisa Cheung, a senior planner at another place, but maybe not a place you expect: Chelsea and Kensington.

Is longevity a success? That probably depends on what has been achieved along the way. I note that this year records ninety years of CPRE Oxfordshire's existence. Celebrations will take place later in the year when we hope to be able get together in person. This will give us the welcome opportunity to applaud our retiring Trustees and not forget my earlier anticipation concerning one long-serving member of the Executive Committee who continues as Trustee after his retirement as Treasurer. He is Brian Wood, my predecessor as Chairman, who has now received the accolade of a National CPRE award. However, none of our venerable figures are quite ninety yet! You need not watch this space for event information – we'll let you know!

Certainly a notable success is the receipt of a substantial grant to enable us to join with Wild Oxfordshire in delivering a community hedgerow project with the aim of reshaping and enhancing Oxfordshire's landscape. We hope this will become an exemplar, the influence of which will extend far beyond the County's boundaries. Please see an article elsewhere in this issue.

Our summer focus will be on discussions with the Oxfordshire Growth Board about the 'Oxfordshire 2050' plan. We construe that an early determination of what the plan may contain could help resist the

imposition of undesirable diktats from Whitehall, in particular concerning the Arc/Corridor.

We refuse to be submerged by the fast increasing number of planning consultations emanating from Whitehall, and are working closely with National CPRE in their response on behalf of the CPRE Network. Our main interest has been in demonstrating the importance of democratic involvement of local people in determining decisions that closely affect them. We are glad that, as a result of CPRE's intervention, the Government has withdrawn yet another of their unfortunate algorithms that would inter alia have doubled the currently proposed increase in housing in the Vale and Cherwell Districts.

In closing this sequence of messages to you, I want to express my thanks. I have clocked up quite a few committees over the years, but none have been so rewarding and worthwhile as the two I have chaired for CPRE in Oxfordshire, the District Committee in the Vale and then Branch. I am grateful for the many friendships I have made when pursuing our cause. It would be invidious to single out anyone in particular; so, I will – but not any of my fellow Trustees on the Executive Committee, nor the ever-helpful communications and administration friends in the Watlington Office. John Harwood has brought a special and very individual perspective to his rôle as President, as well as being great fun to work with! I was told when I was encouraged to allow my name to go forward for the post that it would take up perhaps eight hours of each week. My experience is that it is nearer eighty! That it is at all manageable is because of the assistance I have had from our Director, Helen Marshall. No request is ever too much trouble. Every reply has been properly considered – and we even agree on quite a lot!

I knew it was an honour when I took on the rôle, and that is how it will remain in my thoughts. Thank you.

**Peter Collins,**  
Chairman

## Heneage Legge-Bourke

### New chair of CPRE Vale of White Horse



Brought up on a small dairy farm in the heart of The Fens in the Isle of Ely, Heneage was educated in the UK, France and Switzerland. His working life as a banker and corporate treasurer was mostly in Brazil and France from where he retired to Portugal. Returning to the UK in 2012 to live in Norfolk he joined the Diss and Thetford branch of the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) as a Trustee and Honorary Treasurer. Moving to the Vale in 2017 he resigned from the CAB and became a Trustee and Honorary Treasurer of another small charity, the Association for Glycogen Storage Disease, from which he resigned in 2018. Impressed by what he had heard about CPRE and his appreciation of the importance of preserving the beautiful countryside of the Vale he became a member of the local district of CPRE in 2019 joining the committee soon thereafter. He was elected district chairman at the beginning of 2021. Father of two grown-up children who both live in Portugal, he lives in the pretty village of Woolstone in the shadow of the Uffington White Horse together with his other half and a very independent-minded and feisty Lakeland terrier.

# CPRE Oxfordshire 1931-2021 the story so far...



## 1930s

CPRE Oxfordshire was founded on 7th March 1931 at the County Hall, Oxford. John Buchan, the famous author, MP and statesman, lived at Elsfield Manor near Oxford from 1919 to 1935. A passionate advocate of preserving the English countryside, he became CPRE Oxfordshire's first Chairman.



Campaigns included warning of the dangers of unchecked ribbon development and urban sprawl to the countryside;  
calls for an effective national and local planning system to control development;  
pushing local authorities to use the initial planning powers that the Government had given them.  
Petrol filling stations and garages had started appearing alongside Oxfordshire country roads and were a particular concern, along with electricity pylons and roadside advertising.



## 1940s

By 1942 Oxford city was discussing plans for major growth in response to the Government wishing to expand the country's economy. CPRE advocated a restrained approach for the ancient city of Oxford and its surrounding villages and the creation of the Oxford Green Belt, advocating protection of unspoilt villages and countryside around Oxford. It also proposed that new satellite towns were unnecessary, and that new industry and jobs could be accommodated in the market towns.

## 1950s

CPRE Oxfordshire warned of the dangers of engineer-led road and re-development schemes.  
Green Belts were introduced across the country in the 1950s, CPRE was instrumental in the Oxford Green Belt proposal, submitted in 1956 (finally approved in 1975).

## 1960s

In 1960 CPRE Oxfordshire played a key role in the rejection of a huge 5,000-acre mineral extraction site near Deddington.  
The existence of many of the rights of way in the Oxfordshire countryside owes a great deal to the work of a small, dedicated band of CPRE volunteers during the 1960s and 70s. This work began with their input into public inquiries into the Definitive Maps of Public Rights of Way.

## 1970s

Throughout the 1970s CPRE Oxfordshire was successful in saving historic buildings that would otherwise have been lost in a time of recession: Tithe Barn at Merton, Witney Corn Exchange and Conservation Area, Wallingford Castle. CPRE Oxfordshire also helped ensure Great Tew was declared a conservation area. The CPRE Oxfordshire Buildings Preservation Trust was created in 1972.

In 1972 CPRE, farmers and wildlife enthusiasts formed the Otmoor Defence Committee to protect Otmoor from plans to flood the entire 4,000-acre site to create a reservoir. The Oxfordshire Way was created in 1973 by CPRE Oxfordshire to provide a 65-mile link between the Cotswolds and the Chilterns. It was the first long-distance recreational walking route using rights of way created by the CPRE Oxfordshire's Rights of Way Committee, chaired by Colonel d'Arcy Dalton.



## 1980s

CPRE Oxfordshire played a large part in the successful campaign to prevent Otmoor becoming a reservoir, the plan was dropped in 1984. Celebrations were short-lived: Government plans to extend the M40 proposed cutting across Otmoor was an option.

CPRE District Groups combined forces with local villages to stop a new town 'Stone Bassett' near Great Haseley being built. The speculative planning application for 6,000 dwellings was rejected after Public Inquiry.

A long campaign to open a Forest Path through Wychwood finally saw fruition when it was declared a Public Footpath. The path, used for centuries, had been blocked and opened to the public one day a year.



## 1990s

CPRE Oxfordshire worked with local parishes and the District Council to create a sustainable plan for former Upper Heyford air base.

CPRE Oxfordshire fought vigorously against a scheme, nicknamed the “Tin Hat” because of its shape, to construct a new outer bypass above the Ring Road at North Oxford and Headington. It was withdrawn in 1995.



## 2000s

CPRE Oxfordshire created the Oxford Green Belt Way, a 50-mile circular walk around Oxford – one mile for each year since the designation of Oxford's Green Belt in 1956.



In 2008 CPRE Oxfordshire launched a successful legal challenge to the South East Plan and the prevention of more than 4,000 homes being built in the Oxford Green Belt, south of the city in 2010.

The Weston Otmoor Eco-town was proposed in 2008, a large new town of 15,000 dwellings near Weston-on-the-Green. CPRE Oxfordshire and The Weston Front waged a relentless campaign and in 2009 the proposal was dropped.

Other successes included protecting Radley Lakes, safeguarding Warneford Meadow and preventing development of Shipton-on-Cherwell quarry, to the north of Kidlington.

## 2010s

After 25 years of campaigning the Cogges Link Road was turned down by Justine Greening, Secretary of State. Gill Salway and the CPRE West Oxfordshire team received a national CPRE award for their campaign.

Need Not Greed Oxfordshire, a coalition of local campaign groups, was founded in 2016.

The Kingsmere Copse was planted to mark CPRE Oxfordshire's 80th anniversary in 2011.

An exhibition of Alun Jones' wonderful maps, most of which were drawn for CPRE Oxfordshire, was held at Lincoln College, Oxford, in 2015.

## 2020s

Most recently CPRE Oxfordshire has been heavily involved in campaigning against the OxCam Expressway, plans for which have now been dropped.

CPRE Cherwell District group were instrumental in ensuring Hornton Downs remain protected when a large fuel depot was refused planning permission.



## CURRENT IN 2021

CPRE Oxfordshire continues to campaign against plans which would cause damage to the countryside and rural communities. A constant theme is the destruction of the Oxford Green Belt which CPRE Oxfordshire continues to fight to protect for future generations. With your help we hope to influence the outcome of the Oxfordshire 2050 plan, and the OxCam Vision to ensure Oxfordshire remains the most rural county in the South East.

# Dates for your diary



©Carter Jonas-Oxford

## Anniversary picnic

Join us to celebrate the 90th Anniversary of CPRE Oxfordshire. On Saturday 11th September we will be hosting a walk and picnic in the grounds of Elsfield Manor, the home of Colonel John Buchan MP, founding member and first Chairman of CPRE Oxfordshire.

Details to be confirmed, please contact [administrator@cpreoxon.org.uk](mailto:administrator@cpreoxon.org.uk) to express your interest and receive an update nearer the time.

## Annual General Meeting

The CPRE Oxfordshire Annual General Meeting will take place virtually via ZOOM on Saturday, 19 June, from 10.30-11.30am.

To register your interest please email [administrator@cpreoxon.org.uk](mailto:administrator@cpreoxon.org.uk) by Monday 7 June. Please join us for a roundup of our activities past and future, hope to see you there!



# Planning updates

## Oxford to Cambridge Expressway – Cancelled!

The controversial road planned to link Oxford to Cambridge was scrapped by the Department of Transport in March. The result of much hard work and campaigning by many organisations and individuals, including CPRE and the No Expressway Group, but also many others.

For CPRE Oxfordshire this was tremendous news. Helen Marshall, Director of CPRE Oxfordshire said: “We are delighted the Government has listened to the concerns of campaigners and residents. Rest assured we shall be keeping an eye on any ‘targeted, localised road improvements’ planned for Oxfordshire!”

The Expressway was paused in March 2020, but it took a further year for the Government to cancel it officially on the grounds that it would not be cost effective.

The Department for Transport has said it will now look at more targeted road interventions to improve transport links and help create jobs across the Oxford-Cambridge region.

This was a hugely damaging and costly project, that was completely inappropriate in a climate emergency and likely unnecessary in a post-Covid world.

Thank you to all those who raised their voices on this issue – together, we have made a difference!

## OxCam Arc – Spatial Framework Announced.

In February, Government announced an Arc-wide plan, or spatial framework. Unlike Local Plans, it appears the Framework will not be subject to independent examination and scrutiny. However, it will have the status of national planning policy, which local authorities will have to follow when preparing their



own Local Plans, including the joint Oxfordshire 2050 Plan, and is likely to dictate future growth targets.

The Government has also announced that it will create an Arc-wide Growth Body, to drive and support economic growth, but there is no similar commitment to environmental investment. Instead, there is an apparent desire to improve the environment in certain areas at the expense of other, equally important areas of countryside. CPRE Oxfordshire would like to see a commitment to protect designated and wider, both undesignated countryside.

A draft Vision Statement is planned to be published for public consultation in summer 2021, with two further consultations in 2022.

## Oxfordshire 2050 – don't miss the chance to have your say!

Consultation on Spatial Growth Options is planned for summer 2021. This round of consultation on the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan promises finally to set out a range of growth options for the county. We want to make sure those options reflect the views and needs of the people of Oxfordshire, not Government-dictated targets.

As a result of the current Oxfordshire Housing & Growth Deal, the county is already delivering housing well above and beyond anticipated need. We need to make sure that this is taken into account when looking ahead, not used to extrapolate those exaggerated figures going forward.

We also need to make sure that Oxfordshire's rural character is at the heart of decision-making. For example, villages thrive on organic growth, not vast housing estates dumped on the outskirts.

## Take Action

This is our best, and possibly only, opportunity to influence development in Oxfordshire over the next 30 years – don't miss it! Waiting until actual planning applications come forward is too late – we will really need your help engaging now as policy is formed, so that we can give our countryside the best chance for the future.

Please – have your keyboards and pens at the ready to have your say.

Keep an eye on our website, social media and e-newsletter (subscribe at [tinyurl.com/ktrxufcw](https://tinyurl.com/ktrxufcw)) for details, including a quick guide on how to respond.

CPRE Oxfordshire's *Better Vision for Oxfordshire* can be downloaded from our website here:

[tinyurl.com/2fudw6f5](https://tinyurl.com/2fudw6f5)

## Planning Reform

After a massive public outcry, led by CPRE and its supporters, the Government radically altered its algorithm for calculating housing numbers to direct more development towards urban, brownfield areas. However, the Planning White Paper set out broader potential changes to the planning system that would dramatically reduce local democratic input. National CPRE joined with 18 other organisations in publishing a vision for the planning system that puts local people and the environment at its heart

[tinyurl.com/579u876w](https://tinyurl.com/579u876w)

The Government is now reviewing the consultation responses and we expect to hear about next steps over the summer. Thank you if you responded to either of these consultations – your contribution helped influence Government!

## Transport

England's Economic Heartland published its Transport Strategy for the region: *Connecting People, Transforming Journeys*. The plan covers the OxCam Arc area and stretches beyond to Swindon. CPRE Oxfordshire welcomes commitments to low carbon transport, reducing the need to travel and rural mobility hubs.

The Vision for the Oxfordshire Local Transport & Connectivity Plan 5 (LTCP5) was published in February. CPRE Oxfordshire supports a net-zero Oxfordshire Transport system but is keen to see a dedicated section pulling together the strategy for improving transport and connectivity in rural areas, including market towns.

# Footpath success at Great Western Park

Over the years pressure for housing development in South Oxfordshire has been gradually mounting but it would be wrong to think it is something new. In 2002 residents on the western side of Didcot were shocked when South Oxfordshire District Council received an outline application for a massive, proposed development on the sloping ground on the western edge of the town with wide views towards the Downs and Cotswolds. This had been given the name Great Western Park and residents had been walking there since post-war housing developments had taken place 50 years earlier.

Early in 2003 a local resident approached CPRE Oxfordshire, and we began to identify which unofficial footpaths existed in and around the proposed development site and drew up a map showing these paths. Local walkers were asked to give details of which paths they had used and over what periods. 80 evidence forms were completed, covering various periods and various paths, and we had sufficient evidence to submit a definitive map modification order application for an additional 14 footpaths to Oxfordshire County Council on 25 April 2003.

The developers made an undertaking to the County Council to dedicate all the claimed paths as public rights of way and seek to divert those which interfered with the development. The development was able to proceed, and regular meetings took place between the developers, the County Council and CPRE Oxfordshire to negotiate how to integrate the claimed and previously existing paths into the development.

Building delays meant that much of the area south of the B4493 (Wantage Road) still had not been developed by 2017. The County Council decided to determine the modification order application for the paths which had not yet been dedicated, including sections of the claimed paths which were outside the Great Western Park site. The evidence provided back in 2003 was found to be sufficient and, in 2020, 17 additional paths were added to the Definitive Map. The paths are regularly inspected to ensure any obstructions, such as building site security fences, are reported to the County Council and subsequently removed.

The Great Western Park path claims took over 17 years to complete and may not be fully open for at least another year. Sadly, most of the fine views available in 2003 have been lost but the development is now more walker-friendly than it might otherwise have been and some of the paths won on the outer edge of the development remain an attractive asset.

**Nick Moon**  
Honorary Consultant – Rights of Way

# Sustainable Water Survey

CPRE Oxfordshire is campaigning for the water-related impacts of new development to be properly considered, and an end to the practice of discharging untreated sewage into our rivers. Many Oxfordshire parishes are struggling with issues including flooding and water pollution, but no-one seems to have a complete picture of the problems. We have contacted all Oxfordshire Parish Councils, asking them to complete a survey, to help us map out the issues and plan our campaign strategy.

If you are concerned about sewage, flooding and sustainable water management in relation to Planning Applications take a look at CPRE Oxfordshire's Drainage Technical Bulletin on our website: [tinyurl.com/4c4d5yc](https://tinyurl.com/4c4d5yc)



# Cherwell Development Watch Alliance: fighting to protect Oxford's Green Belt

Oxford Green Belt Under Threat in Cherwell/Caroline Johnson

Cherwell Development Watch Alliance (CDWA) was inaugurated in 2018 to co-ordinate its Member Associations: the Begbroke & Yarnton Green Belt Campaign; the Harbord Road Area Residents' Association; Kidlington Development Watch; GreenWayOxon (golf course members); and the Woodstock Action Group.

Our primary objective was to oppose Cherwell District Council's Local Plan Partial Review (CLPPR) which proposed the building of a minimum of 4,400 houses on Green Belt land to the north of Oxford. We hoped that our full engagement in the local plan process would result in our views, and thus those of our members being heard. However this was not the case! We found the consultation process to be a 'box-ticking' exercise with unprecedented local opposition to the plans being ignored. The Examination in Public was similarly disappointing, as were our attempts to get Robert Jenrick, the Secretary of State for Housing, to intervene.

Fast forward to September 2020 and the CLPPR was adopted by Cherwell District Council meaning that CDWA was faced with the difficult decision of whether to raise a legal challenge against the plan. It is not generally understood but such a challenge

has to be based on points of law. Fortunately we were able to draw on our previous work and many written submissions, to identify what we believe to be errors in law and therefore to raise a legal challenge. The grounds for the challenge are: The claimed level of housing need and re-provision of the North Oxford Golf Course.

CDWA's Member Associations had already been generous in their financial support and funds raised had been used to commission high level legal advice and expert reports during the local plan process. A legal challenge meant going back to those same generous supporters and asking for further funding with a total of around £55,000 being required to cover the legal fees. This was a daunting prospect but we embarked on it and our loyal supporters rose to the challenge.

The encouraging news is that, at the time of writing, the Honourable Mrs Justice Lang DBE has recently said that CDWA **'has presented arguable grounds which require full consideration'**. A date for the hearing in the High Court of Justice (Planning Division) has been set for 23 & 24 June. Whilst success is by no means guaranteed we will be able to say that no stone was left unturned

in our endeavours to be heard. It is a poor reflection on the planning system that local residents have effectively had to pay in order to be listened to.

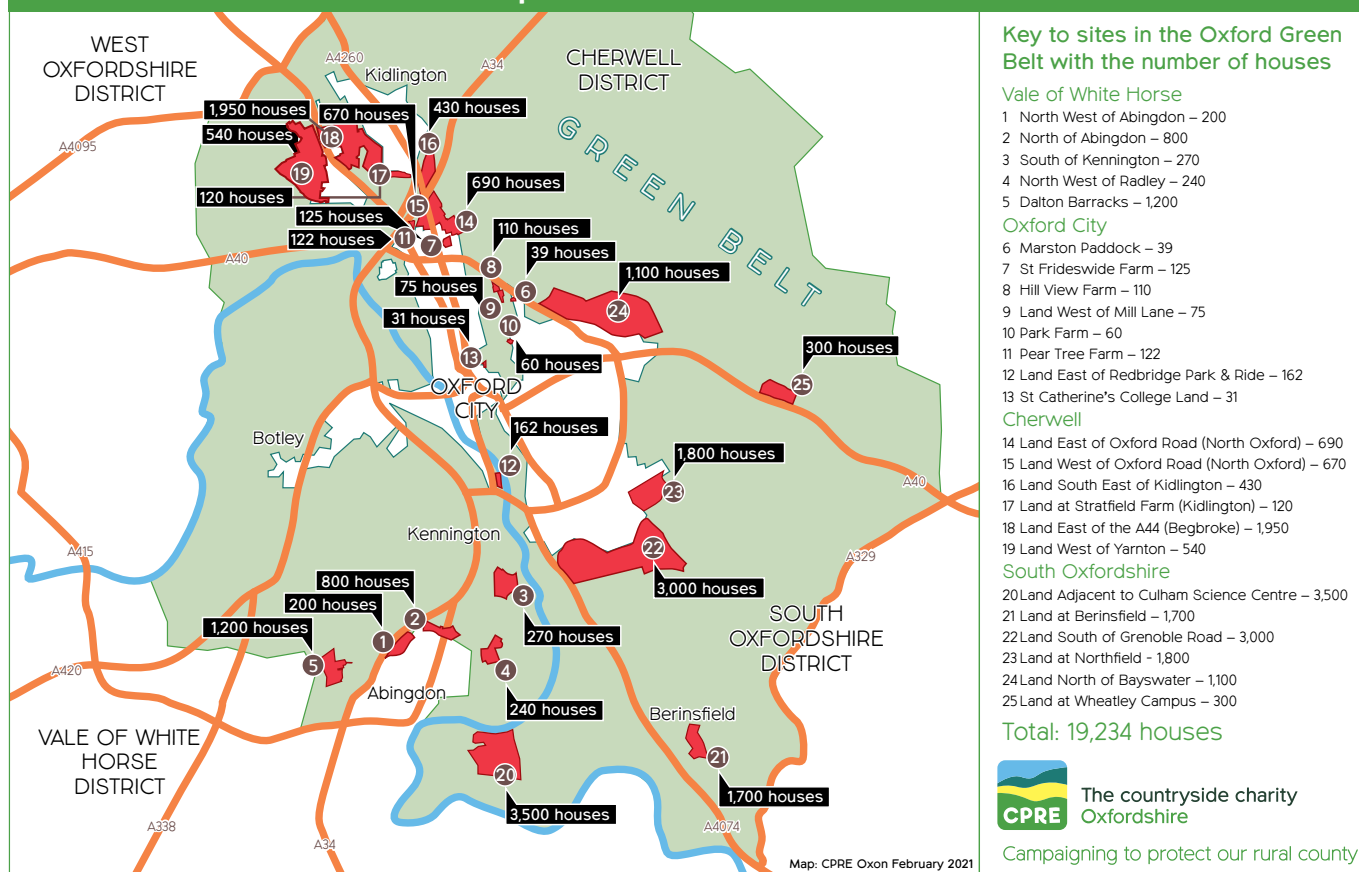
I would like to extend my gratitude to the CDWA Committee members who have worked so hard and made personal sacrifices over the past few years in order for us to get to this point.

CDWA is also very grateful to all its supporters and would like to acknowledge and thank them for their generosity without which this legal challenge would not have been possible. Sincere thanks also go to: CPRE Oxfordshire; our many generous supporters who are local residents of affected Parishes; everyone who responded to our fund raising initiatives; Parish and Town Councils (Kidlington PC; Gosford & Water Eaton PC; Woodstock TC; Yarnton PC; Begbroke PC and Garsington PC); Gresswell Environment Trust; and the Oxford Green Belt Network. We are particularly grateful to all at CPRE Oxfordshire for their generosity, ongoing support and administrative assistance.

**Suzanne McIvor,**  
Chair, CDWA



# Over 19,000 houses planned for the Oxford Green Belt



National CPRE's annual State of the Green Belt report has found that plans for housing on Green Belt land have quadrupled in the past eight years.

There are currently 0.25 million (257,944) homes proposed to be built on land removed from the Green Belt – over four times as many (475% increase) as in 2013. Only one in 10 of these houses is defined as 'affordable'.

A poll, conducted by Opinium on behalf of CPRE, shows a surge in appreciation for local green spaces since the first lockdown, many of which are located in our Green Belts. It found that:

- Over two thirds (67%) of adults think protecting and enhancing green spaces should be a higher priority after lockdown;
- Nearly half (46%) reported visiting green spaces more since the start of lockdown – a dramatic 11 percentage point increase since April 2020;
- 59% reported they are more aware of the importance of these local green spaces for our mental health and wellbeing since lockdown.

## Oxford Green Belt development plans

The Oxford Green Belt faces multiple large-scale incursions:

- Vale of White Horse – 2,710 houses across 5 sites
- Oxford City – 724 houses across 8 sites
- Cherwell – 4,400 houses across 6 sites
- South Oxfordshire – 11,400 houses across 6 sites

This totals almost 20,000 new houses supposedly to meet Oxford's need but in fact equivalent to a new development one third of the existing size of Oxford.

There is no doubt many Green Belts all over England, like ours, are suffering death by degrees due to the ambivalence of Government policy on protecting Green Belts intended to be permanent.

CPRE Oxfordshire believes that an urgent revision of National Planning Policy is now the only chance to save the Green Belt. Any revision must make it explicit that Councils must not just 'examine' all other alternative options to building on Green Belt land and then do what they like, which is the present situation; Councils must be required to adopt one of the alternative options unless they can demonstrate that (a) the development is essential and (b) could not be accommodated anywhere else.

That is the clarification CPRE Oxfordshire is demanding from Government. Their response will tell us all we need to know about their actual commitment to protecting the Green Belt we all cherish.

# We need a new, independent assessment of Oxfordshire's future housing needs



We certainly live in uncertain times. Who would have predicted the events of the last 18 months? And what will be the impact on the population of Oxfordshire? So I don't envy the Office of National Statistics (ONS) which is tasked with projecting population changes for the next 25 years. These population projections (and the household projections which use them) underlie the estimates of housing need and water supply and health facilities for the coming decades.

The ONS makes its projections by extrapolating recent trends of births, deaths and immigration into the future. One trend we can be confident of is our falling birth rate, which has fallen from nearly three births per female during the post war baby boom to 1.66 in 2019, mirroring a wider trend across Europe and rest of the world. As a result the projections of population and household growth have been progressively downgraded in the ONS releases from 2014 through to 2018. So the 2014 based household projections (released in 2016) for Oxfordshire show a growth of 59,000 households between 2020 and 2036, whereas the 2018 based projections show only 39,000, a decrease of one third. At the start of the pandemic some commentators

were predicting a 'COVID baby boom' but this doesn't seem to have materialised. If anything the birth rate has dropped with the increasing economic uncertainty.

Life expectancy was increasing through the 20th century but has flattened out in recent years. The most recent projections show the 'natural' (births minus deaths) population growth reaching essentially zero in the 2030s for the UK, in Oxfordshire it goes negative in 2032. One hundred thousand excess Covid deaths during 2020 is significant, there are typically just over 600,000 deaths per year in the UK. The increase in deaths effectively reduces to zero the natural population growth in the UK for 2020, however the long-term impact is unlikely to be large.

The final component of these figures is net immigration into the UK. This becomes progressively more important, as the natural growth falls, and it varies a lot. It was essentially zero during the 1980s and 1990s, it rose to a peak of over 300,000 per year in the 2000s and then has reduced, to just over 250,000 per year, in the last few years. The ONS projections assume a continuing net immigration of 190,000 persons per year. Immigration depends on

economic and political factors and is clearly very uncertain going into the future. Interestingly a recent report by the research arm of the ONS has suggested there may have been an exodus of 1.3 million people from the UK in the last year. This is likely to be young people from Europe in the 'gig' economy returning home. This trend has yet to be confirmed in the official statistics.

It would be a brave person to predict what will happen to population growth in the coming decades. It is very likely that our 'natural' growth will remain low and decrease further, in common with most developed countries (and even developing countries have a rapidly declining fertility rate). The flows of people between countries depend very much on their relative economic performance so future immigration will depend on how quickly different countries come out of the current COVID induced recessions. For the UK (and Oxfordshire) the number of overseas students is a very significant factor, so whether students from populous countries, like India and China, will continue to be attracted to our universities will be influential. Equally whether the trend to work at home, possibly in the Oxfordshire countryside rather than commuting to London, will become a permanent feature is still anyone's guess.

The Oxfordshire 2050 vision and the Local Plans all assume continuing high population growth through 2030s and 2040s, but will this happen? What is clear is that Oxfordshire's housing needs and Local Plans will need to be revised and it would seem foolish to commit to major developments in these uncertain times.

**Richard Harding**  
Chairman  
CPRE South Oxfordshire District



# District updates

## Cherwell

For several years we have been contesting Cherwell District Council's ambition to build 4,400 houses in the Green Belt north of Oxford. Although the Inspector ruled in favour of the Council's scheme, a High Court ruling this week has given permission to the opposition, the Cherwell Development Watch Alliance (which has been supported actively and financially by CPRE), to launch a judicial review of the plan. This is excellent news.

At Chesterton near Bicester CPRE played a prominent role some time ago in the defeat of a proposal by Great Wolf Resorts to build a theme park with a massive 500-bedroom hotel in the countryside. Unfortunately, the American firm decided to appeal against the planning decision, and at the time of writing we do not know what the inspector will decide. Once again CPRE has been active in the opposition, and both the Branch and the District have made substantial donations to dispute the developer's exaggerated claims of biodiversity gains.

In December we took the lead in opposing the construction of a large fuel dump at Hornton Grounds Quarry, which is in the middle of some of the loveliest countryside in the district. The campaign received a good deal of local support, and we managed to defeat the application in planning committee by a margin of 17 to 0 with a single abstention. This week we heard that the fuel company (CERTAS) and the local owner of the quarry have ended their partnership, so there will be no appeal.

**David Gilmour, Chairman**

## South Oxfordshire

South Oxfordshire District Council's Local Plan, with its excessive housing, was finally approved, under duress from the Secretary of State, for adoption at a Council meeting in mid-December. Unfortunately, we are already seeing developers pushing the envelope of the plan – by proposing additional houses, for example at Bayswater Brook, and a multi-storey car park at Culham. So much for an adopted plan protecting against speculative development!

One group has decided to take the Local Plan to Statutory Review. The Bioabundance Community Interest

Company has applied to the High Court, challenging South Oxfordshire District Council, the Government and Christ Church College Oxford. Bioabundance argue that the Council adopted the plan not because it was considered sound but in fear of the consequences of not adopting it. Also insufficient attention was given to the climate consequences of building far more houses than are needed. This is the first time a Local Plan has been challenged on grounds of climate change.

There is a proposal for a Regional Nature Park to the East and North of Oxford. The proposal is for the area roughly bounded by the M40, A40 and the Oxford-Bicester railway to be recognised as a Nature Park in the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan. While it is a long shot that this area could become a National Park, the campaign makes a very positive case to nurture this important area and it might well chime with the Government's commitment to protect and improve 30% of UK land by 2030.

Finally, the committee has been working on a crop of planning applications, including an increasing number of holiday parks in the Chilterns. We held a successful virtual annual meeting in December and welcomed two new committee members, Geoff Botting and Stuart Silverman.

**Richard Harding, Chairman**

## Vale of White Horse

After a period of dormancy, a meeting was held in November 2020 at which a new chairman was designated and confirmed at the District AGM in February. We are also seeking a new Treasurer. This will bring the committee back up to strength so as to improve our monitoring of developments and therefore our timely intervention where considered appropriate. We supported the Woolstone Parish Meeting in their successful objection to the National Trust's proposal to site solar panels at the bottom of White Horse Hill – an AONB. The solar panels were subsequently re-sited. We are now actively monitoring the proposed Milton Hill re-development for warehousing, the proposed Chinese business school at Boar's Hill, the Abingdon cricket ground housing development, the Valley Park roundabout at Didcot, for which a decision has just been deferred, and the new housing development at Kingston Bagpuize has also just been refused planning permission. We will also be supporting North Wessex Downs on the Goring gap.

**Heneage Legge-Bourke, Chairman**

## West Oxfordshire

Our Chairman John Histon informed the committee in January that he felt obliged to resign through ill health and it was proposed Philippa Phelan take over as Chair (Elect) until the AGM when it can be officially endorsed. The committee expressed their regret and thanked John for all his excellent voluntary work over the years and he will continue as a valuable member for CPRE West Oxon.

Cleaner Rivers: there remains a continuing push to reduce river pollution and flooding, also backed by our local MP. A questionnaire has been distributed to all Parish Councils in our District to try to understand the full picture of pollution and flooding issues effecting so many. We hope to get a good response which will give us a bank of data that will help our campaigning.

Witney Oxford Transport (WOT) Group: we continue to engage with WOT over the proposed route for a light passenger railway from Oxford to Carterton and in principle support a feasibility study. We would hope that any proposed route would have a minimal impact on open countryside and the Green Belt.

Cotswold Natural Landscape: we have jointly endorsed Gloucestershire CPRE's response on the Cotswolds Natural Landscape for a landscape led approach to planning within the Cotswolds AONB.

Other: applications to upgrade the road past the Rollright Stones continue and we remain against any degradation of this important archaeological and Dark Skies site. Cotswolds Hotel & Spa has appealed WODC's decision for 73 new holiday homes and our objection remains in place due to the rural location and close proximity to the SSSI Glyme Valley, a secluded valley and rare remaining fragment of limestone grassland in the Oxfordshire Cotswolds. Finally, there has been some excellent work undertaken by the Witney Active Travel Group to improve cycle paths in Witney to provide a continuous east-west route for cyclists and pedestrians in the town.

**Philippa Phelan, Chair (Elect)**

During CPRE Oxfordshire's anniversary year why not show your support and use the back cover as a poster? Perhaps display on your village notice board? Copies are also downloadable from our website.

# STAND UP FOR OUR RURAL COUNTY



**CPRE OXFORDSHIRE 1931-2021**  
**90 YEARS PROTECTING THE COUNTRYSIDE**  
**JOIN US CPREOXON.ORG.UK**  
**@CPREOxfordshire**



The countryside charity  
Oxfordshire

Campaigning to protect our rural county

CPRE Oxfordshire, First Floor, 20 High Street, Watlington, Oxon OX49 5PY  
T: 01491 612079 E: administrator@cpreoxon.org.uk