



The countryside charity
Oxfordshire

Campaigning to protect our rural county

www.cpreoxon.org.uk

Autumn 2022

Oxfordshire Voice



Call to revoke permission
for Green Belt solar farm
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Gavray Meadows:
a local wildlife site exemplar
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Pipe dream to reality:
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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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Cover: Campaigners in Westminster presenting the 40by50 hedgerow petition @Jess Hurd

Articles, letters, comments and suggestions for articles are welcome. Please contact the Branch Office below. Published November 2022

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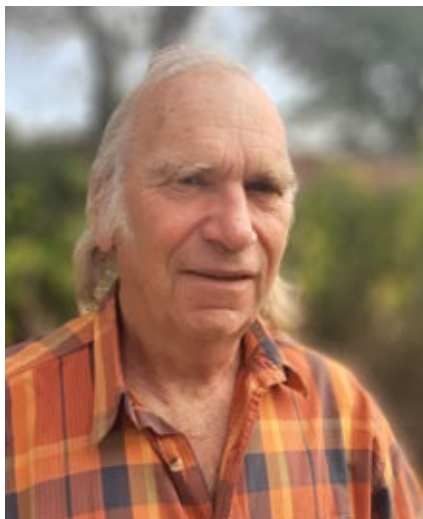
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Chairman's voice



I would first like to welcome our new Trustees: Robin Oliver, Susie Mather and Simon Warr. These new 'entrants' bring a wealth of expertise and enthusiasm to the Trustee group, and it is heartening to see the level of support CPRE attracts. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the outgoing Trustees, Brian, David and Colin, and hope we stay in touch and that CPRE will continue to benefit from their extensive experience.

The AGM in Enstone in June was a great success. It was wonderful to meet up in person and a relief to see so many old and new faces. Many thanks also to the West Oxfordshire District for organising the meeting and to the excellent speaker, Roselle Chapman, Community Ecologist at Wild Oxfordshire.

On the planning front it has been an interesting summer. Of course, the big news is the abandonment of the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan, following the disagreement between the District Councils over development plans and numbers. This is good and bad news. We have always advocated good spatial planning for Oxfordshire but some of the housing numbers in the proposed plan were eye-watering and something had to be done to change them. I suspect (and hope) we haven't seen the last of spatial planning for Oxfordshire and CPRE will need to be at the centre of any discussions.

A second area of concern across Oxfordshire is renewable energy, and in particular solar farms. For those of us who would like to see a rapid transition to zero carbon energy this is a difficult area. I feel, however, that our approach – which calls for a detailed plan balancing the land use needs for food, nature and energy is required, and not the random speculative proposals we are seeing.

I suspect (and hope) we haven't seen the last of spatial planning for Oxfordshire and CPRE will need to be at the centre of any discussions.

At CPRE nationally a lot is happening. At the national AGM in the summer, it was agreed to set up an Assembly, which would guide policy and activities of the National Office and provide a more formal forum. There is also talk of reforming financial and policy procedures and, you may have noticed, that the CEO, Crispin Truman, is leaving in the next month. The relationship between the Centre and the County Branches (which are individual charities) has been rocky in recent years but I am hopeful that a new, more collaborative, relationship is developing. It is a strength of CPRE that we can operate at all levels, from the Local to National.

Finally, I would like to thank our District committees and Helen and her staff for their sterling work. We continue to see many threats to our countryside – from inappropriate holiday parks to rail terminals to the problems of the 5-year housing land supply and it is enthusiasm coupled with local knowledge and technical expertise which enable us to fight these threats so effectively.

Richard Harding
Chairman



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Volunteer roles

CPRE Oxfordshire is passionate about making the countryside a better place for everyone to enjoy. We are fortunate to have volunteers around the county helping to find positive solutions for the issues facing the countryside and the environment.

We currently have a range of voluntary roles to fill. By applying your skills and experience you can make a real difference.

For an informal chat about the roles below or volunteering generally please get in touch with Helen Marshall, Director of CPRE Oxfordshire.

Call 07791 376365 or email director@cpreoxon.org.uk

For more information and full role descriptions visit the website <https://www.cpreoxon.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer/>

Honorary Advisors

CPRE Oxfordshire is supported by a volunteer network of honorary advisers that provide ad-hoc specialist input. The role of the adviser is to provide comment on matters within their specific area of expertise to the Trustees and staff of CPRE Oxfordshire. We would benefit from having advisors with professional qualifications and/or experience in the ecology sector and transport sector to help guide our overall vision on ecology / biodiversity and transport matters and advise us on relevant policy approaches.

District Chair – Oxford

Whilst CPRE has both members and volunteers within the City area, we have been without a formal City-based district committee for a number of years. We are now keen to re-establish this group and are looking for a dynamic chairperson, or co-chairs, to help us achieve this. There are others willing to participate, but we need the necessary leadership to guide and co-ordinate activity.

Planning Volunteers – Bicester and Surrounding Villages

This role involves being aware of factors affecting the countryside or green spaces in your local area and helping us to suggest solutions and improvements through the planning system. You'll keep an eye on local planning applications and developments and alert us to them. You'll also help to investigate them further to gather the facts so we can respond appropriately.

Treasurer – CPRE West Oxfordshire and CPRE South Oxfordshire (2 roles)

Although the sums involved may be small, two District Committees are in need of a Treasurer to help us count our pennies and make them work hard for us. If you can keep basic financial records and manage a bank account, have an interest in countryside matters and can spare just an hour or two a month, we'd really love to hear from you!

Secretary – CPRE Cherwell

Could you keep our District Committee organised? As district secretary you'll arrange meetings and carry out administration for the group. We're looking for someone who is computer literate and has a passion for environmental and countryside issues. We anticipate the role will take a few hours a month.

General Committee Members – CPRE South Oxfordshire

Could you discuss and help determine the priorities of our committee, which meets 4-5 times a year. Perhaps you could be a village representative or share your expertise? We welcome all, whether you are concerned about developments in your village/town or wish to influence the future of the district. Do you have knowledge about solar farms, transport, roads, wildlife? Are you concerned about the impact of development on our countryside, its landscape & wildlife? If so, we need you.

Susie Mather

New Trustee

Susie comes to CPRE as a result of a keen interest in preserving the British countryside for its climate benefits, for nature recovery, and for enjoyment by one and all. She has had a diverse 30-year career largely in central government and associated public bodies, including 16 years in the Diplomatic Service both at home and overseas, and eight years with the MOD's non-departmental nuclear organisation, where she was in charge of strategy, communications and sustainability.



Earlier this year Susie moved to her current role as Strategic Communications Director of the Crown Estate, which brings her closer to the interests of CPRE and the need to find the optimal balance between renewables, land use, biodiversity and the environment, and social regeneration. The marine environment is a current focus, with the need to harness offshore wind for its net zero and energy security benefits, while causing minimal impact to the environment and the many marine users.

Susie moved to South Oxfordshire in 2021, from not very far away (Pangbourne) and, as a devoted walker of her energetic hound Bean, has been able to explore and enjoy the surrounding countryside daily. Joining CPRE as a Trustee means an opportunity to put a little back, and she hopes to help by drawing on her experience of strategy, influence, governance and communications. She's looking forward to getting to know the other members of CPRE Oxfordshire and supporting its good work.

Campaign update

Hedgerows in trouble

Government climate advisors have said we need to increase hedgerows by 40% by 2050.

CPRE has been leading a national campaign calling on government to champion hedgerows, calling for '40 by 50' to become a government target. During National Hedgerows Week (10-17th October) CPRE handed a petition, with nearly 50,000 signatures, to Edward Barker, Defra's Director of Natural Environment, Trees and Landscapes.

In 2021 CPRE Oxfordshire began working with Wild Oxfordshire, engaging with local community groups and parish councils to plant new hedgerows and rejuvenate ancient ones. We also funded a hedge-laying course at Hogacre Common Eco Park, a Green Belt oasis one mile from Oxford city centre.

With less than half of the UK's hedges in good condition small steps can make a big difference. We hope we've created a template to inspire other communities to take action for hedgerows on their patch.

Green Belt

The Oxford Green Belt has safeguarded land from development for more than 50 years, preserving the unique setting and character of the historic city of Oxford and preventing uncontrolled urban sprawl into the surrounding Districts.

Despite the long-standing strategy for Oxfordshire's market towns to absorb growth within the county to relieve pressures in Oxford, the 21st century has seen the Green Belt under serious threats from development, as the city pushes for urban expansion and developers cast their covetous eyes on the open countryside.

However, the Green Belt is much more than a band of countryside protecting surrounding villages from the creeping expansion of the city.



Helen Marshall, Director, handing in the 40by50 petition to Defra

©FESS HURD

Many of us experience the benefits of this protected countryside, which not only encircles Oxford but provides important green space within the city itself.

We recently hosted a CPRE Planning Webinar for Parish Councils – Responding to Planning Applications in the Oxford Green Belt with Ben Arrowsmith, Planning Advisor. The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, and we hope to hold similar advisory events in the future.

Keep an eye on the website and social media for further updates.

Renewable Energy

We continue to call for a county-wide strategy for the location of renewable energy as Oxfordshire's countryside and Green Belt is targeted by solar companies.

Renewable energy is vital but mustn't jeopardise other critical factors such as food production, biodiversity, and landscape.

The Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire report, an expert guide on how Oxfordshire can achieve zero carbon, states that only 1% of the entire land surface of the County needs to be used for solar energy

which could easily be achieved by using existing roof space, brownfield, or derelict land.

We are heartened that South Oxfordshire District Council have recently refused permission for a 5-year extension to a mammoth 120-hectare solar farm in the Green Belt at Nuneham Courtenay. Read more on page 5.

Dark Skies

Urban development in the southeast of England, including Oxfordshire, continues to increase the brightness of the night sky with negative impacts on people, the surrounding landscape and sky, ecology and the climate.

We have produced a planning technical bulletin to help inform planning application responses. Within it we suggest that all new development should be required to include a lighting needs assessment and the design should demonstrate how light pollution would be minimised. The bulletin also offers a series of measures that could be implemented to achieve minimal light impact.

Download the bulletin from the Resources section of our website.



Star trails over Headington only visible through long exposure photography

©HOWARD STANBURY/FLICKR



Land under threat at Nineveh Farm

CPRE pulling the plug on Green Belt solar farm vandalism

Solar farms are industrial development that blights the countryside. They need to be somewhere, but they don't by any means need to be everywhere.

The *Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire* report forecasts at most 1% of Oxfordshire needing to be covered with solar panels. All of that could theoretically be on existing roofs.

That means we can be very selective about where solar farms are permitted. As for instance South Oxfordshire District Council's (SODC) core renewables policy states, whilst the need for renewable energy is clear, it should not be permitted where it would significantly harm the landscape, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the historic environment, the openness of the Green Belt and residential amenity.

So how could it be that the same council that wrote that policy permitted one of Britain's largest

industrial solar farms at Nineveh Farm, Nuneham Courtenay, on an open and undeveloped agricultural Green Belt hillside facing the city, previously famous only for the deer that roamed it, and in contravention of its own policy on which we are all entitled to rely?

The answer is that the Council's officers simply side-lined the Council's own policy when they advised the planning committee to approve the application which the planning committee then did, albeit by the narrowest possible margin of the Chairman's casting vote.

CPRE wrote immediately to SODC detailing exactly how policy had been unlawfully breached but the District Council made no attempt to address its error in granting permission. That decision has set a precedent, with other solar farm developers, including one in the middle of open Green Belt at Otmoor, using this case to support applications.

Six months later, the applicants who had been granted permission for 35 years, requested an extension of five years.

This time councillors had been properly briefed on National Policy by CPRE and – although the officers again recommended approval – dismissed the application unanimously quoting Council policy in doing so.

CPRE says that the latest decision invalidates the original permission and will take what steps we can to entreat the Council to revoke it. 75% of Oxfordshire residents believe that the Green Belt should remain open and undeveloped. What the Council has done is a flagrant abuse of the purpose of the Green Belt, of public opinion, and of their own policies on which we are all entitled to rely.

Michael Tyce, Advisor

Gavray Meadows: a future Local Wildlife Site exemplar?



Roe Deer trying to find a wildlife corridor at Gavray Meadows by Chiltern Rail Embankment

ALL PHOTOS: PATRICIA CLOSSOLD

The meadows were a paradise for wildlife, but long-term neglect has allowed wildlife and habitat to decline. Surrounding farms, which provided grazing animals, have disappeared; parts of the site are now flooded in winter and dry in summer; hedgerows are degraded and require rejuvenating; development to the north, east and west has cut off a wildlife corridor meaning wildlife is often trapped – can we mitigate the effects of bad planning?

It may be difficult, or in some cases impossible, to restore what has been lost over 20 years but Gavray Meadows is a special site, offering something of a haven for wildlife and humans in the midst of Bicester development.

The quintessence of Gavray Meadows is that it is a mosaic of different habitats: meadows, hedges, scrub, ponds, ditches, small woods, and lines of ancient trees all contributing to the nurture of a mix of species. There are still woodpeckers, both great spotted and green, nesting in holes in the old trees along with bat roosts in the split tree trunks. Red kites and

Gavray Meadows, 23 hectares of land in Bicester, was designated as a Local Wildlife Site by Thames Valley Environmental Record Centre (TVERC) almost 20 years ago for its protection, as requested by an Oxford ecologist Dominic Woodfield. People might think, that in view of the wildlife recorded there, such as rare bat species, great crested newts and grass-snakes that the meadows would be saved. Not so, just two years after its designation in 2002, the meadows were sold off to a developer. The land was allocated for development by Cherwell District Council in the Cherwell Local Plan 2031, with up to 300 houses planned for the site. Despite the campaigning of local residents this development will go ahead.

The land was a fantastic example of lowland damp meadow which had been grazed naturally by dairy cattle for over 200 years. As such, it was wildflower rich, but sheltered by hedgerows of sloe, providing fruit for many small birds, nesting places and shelter. Large trees have grown up in lines from old hedges which included oaks and ash, with willow along the banks of the small river which flows north-south along the west side of the meadow.

Good news

The site has been sold again to a far more sympathetic developer who is actively helping the original Save Gavray Meadows campaign group preserve the fields and woods for the local community. Development of 250 houses will still go ahead but the wildlife site and conservation area will be protected. The developer, L&Q, has paid for a Community Interest Company (CIC) to oversee the long-term management of the site: to protect the wildlife, habitat and increase the biodiversity of Gavray Meadows Local Wildlife Site.



Scabious dominates some parts of the meadow in the summer



The rare black hairstreak butterfly found at Gavray



A local sparrowhawk perching in one of the larger trees

buzzards fly over, while kestrels hover above the fields. Weasels hide in the brambles, with foxes watching. Deer are everywhere. Butterflies are present in abundance in the grazed meadows with lizards sun-bathing on patches of bare ground or logs. The original hedges shown in the 1885 Ordnance Survey map are still present to this day.

Anyone living in the area is welcome to become a member of the CIC and help manage the protection and improvement of the site. This successful campaign to save Gavray Meadows, should be celebrated – a fantastic result for everyone involved and an inspiration for similar campaign groups fighting development.

Gavray Meadows and its story of survival is already an exemplar for threatened Wildlife Sites.

Visit gavraymeadows.org for more information.

Patricia Clissold
Save Gavray Meadows

A hot harvest

Farmers obsess about the weather in a “normal” year so 2022 has rather stretched that. So far this year, to the end of September, our rainfall running total is 227mm, in theory we should be nearer to 450mm to achieve our 600mm annual average.

However, it is the distribution of the rain we have had which has been quite helpful. Prizes for the driest months go to April 9.2mm, July 2.3mm and August 9.5mm. Only three months have exceeded 50mm, February, June and September. With a dry end to last year and into January, this greatly assisted us in being able to plant spring cereals which were followed in April with forage maize. Timely rain in March and May helped with early season grass growth helping to insure adequate forage stocks for the coming winter.

Large amounts of rain in June at the start and end of the month was enough to enable winter planted cereals to reach their potential. The dry July and August meant that harvesting continued without the rain induced stops and starts we sometimes contend with. This year’s stress was due to the significantly raised risk of fires during harvesting. Even with regularly blowing off any accumulated dust, the combination of hot machines with some exceedingly hot components on very hot and sometimes breezy days posed a risk until the last pass in the last field.

The oppressive heat nearing 40 degrees was not welcomed by our cows who would prefer under 10 degrees if they controlled the thermostat. Regardless of being outside or inside with more shade and large fans moving air through the buildings cows struggle to consume sufficient intakes of their diet to maintain the energy levels they require. Rather like us hydration needs become more important than our food intake.

Conversely the young calves that have been born over the summer have grown really well, with a minimum need to use any energy to keep warm at night, their food intake seems to have been used purely to grow. The dry

conditions have meant that those still, damp days that can potentially cause pneumonia have been absent.

The heat has also made the soil surface in many fields very hard, to the extent that it has not been easy to generate a suitable tilth for small seeds to be planted without extra machine passes. This obviously adds considerable cost and slows progress. After planting we have often rolled fields twice with the aim of achieving a good soil to seed contact for germination and hopefully to remove clods so that any rain soaks the seed in rather than it being lost to the wind.

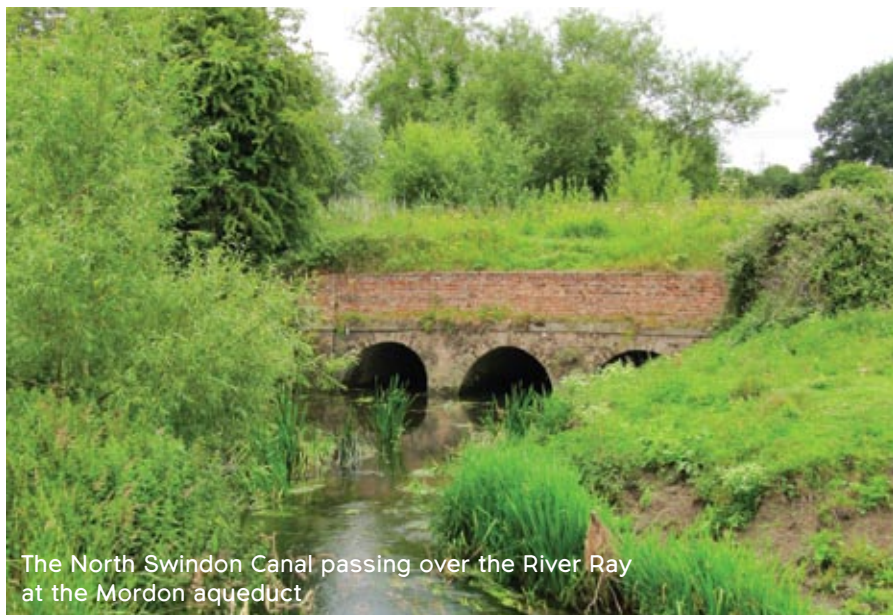
This week I was delighted to welcome Murray Maclean to the farm. He has supplied us for a long time with great quality nursery stock both for tree and hedge planting, some have been in the ground for thirty years while the youngest since last winter. Luckily many are thriving, and we felt rewarded seeing our efforts making an impact in the landscape with hedgerows and oak trees where none were previously. In other areas where we planted small areas of woodland things are less happy. There is significant grey squirrel damage, which will impact on the longevity of the effected oak trees. These areas also contain a substantial percentage of ash, which may well mean that the die back disease could give rise to large gaps in the future. This then leads to the dilemma of what to think of replanting if that becomes necessary. Trying to factor in consideration of known pests and diseases and the potential effects of climate change – what will survive if this summer becomes the norm? We also want to bear in mind that planted species need to benefit the broadest range of wildlife in terms of habitat and food supply either as pollen, fruit or seeds.

Today I have been further rolling three small fields which have been planted to grass leys, containing ryegrasses, timothy, white clover, plantain and chicory. Again, to help emergence and to deter any potential slug activity and damage. Each field has a ditch on at least one side, all are bone dry which is unusual for mid-October and signs of a continuing drought through winter.

Angus Dart, Farming Advisor

Pipe-dream to reality?

Could a Severn Thames Transfer be a better alternative to the Abingdon Reservoir?



The North Swindon Canal passing over the River Ray at the Mordon aqueduct

DAVID TYERS/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

The Severn Thames Transfer could be achieved more quickly than the Reservoir, coming online by 2033-34 compared to the latter not being completed and filled until 2039/40. Environmental issues are obviously a concern when mixing water from two different catchments, but provisional assessment has shown no major issues. Initial indications are that the Transfer would be considerably cheaper than the reservoir, both in terms of cost and carbon footprint. Early construction of the Transfer would also bring forward much needed relief to over-abstracted Chilterns chalk streams. In summary, there currently appears to be a strong case for bringing the Transfer Scheme forward first, which would enable any decision on the reservoir to be delayed until such time as it could be proven beyond doubt to be necessary.

The next stage will be two consultations, both due to launch in November:

- A draft Regional Plan to 2100 produced by Water Resources South East, a grouping of the water companies in the south-east.
- Thames Water's Draft Water Resources Management Plan 2025-2030.

These should include a full environmental assessment of the Severn Thames Transfer proposal, although there is little doubt that Thames Water will continue pushing the case for the reservoir as its first option, despite the huge environmental damage that it will cause.

CPRE Oxfordshire will be looking at these consultations, in liaison with both GARD and colleagues in the Cotswolds AONB and CPRE Gloucestershire. Please keep an eye on our website for details.

Helen Marshall, Director

With this year's prolonged drought, it might be tempting to think that Thames Water's proposed new mega-reservoir at Abingdon would be a good solution for the future. However, it would bring no new water into the region. The reservoir would be filled with water pumped from the Thames and in times of extended drought would be unable to refill due to low river flow rates. Just think how TV images of droughts always show empty reservoirs!

So, are there alternative solutions? One option now being investigated is the possibility of transferring water from the North West to the South East via the Severn Thames Transfer.

In fact, this idea has been around since at least the 1970s but Thames Water has been rather slow to take it forward, perhaps distracted by the obvious benefit a large reservoir scheme would bring to their asset sheet, although not to the environment or their customers. Indeed, the main reason the Abingdon Reservoir was turned down at the 2010 Inquiry was that the Planning Inspector felt Thames

Water had not adequately examined the alternatives.

Now, thanks in part to pressure from campaign group GARD, the Severn Thames Transfer is at last being given some serious consideration.

The options on the table are either making use of the Cotswold Canal (supported by the Cotswold Canal Trust) or installing a twin pipeline running from Deerhurst on the River Severn through to either Cricklade or further east to Culham on the River Thames. The pipes could each be about 1.8m wide and require a wayleave approximately 50m wide. However, once installed, the land above could be restored and enhanced. (A similar gas pipeline installed in the Cotswolds around 10 years ago appears to have been done with little long-term impact and considerable benefit to local communities in terms of compensatory funds for local environmental and community projects.)

The pipeline would have a larger capacity than the canal and be easier to manage, including the control of invasive species, but obviously would not offer the socio-economic benefits of canal restoration.

Planning update

Investment zones and Infrastructure schemes– what is the impact for us?

As part of the mini budget at the end of September, the Government announced plans to bring in investment zones across the country, where planning rules and environmental regulations will be relaxed or even abandoned to speed up development. Precise details are not available, and we await this follow up from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC). It is a huge concern to CPRE that important legal protections for landscape and wildlife that are currently contained within European Union directives may be foregone and no longer apply in these zones.

There are no locations within Oxfordshire in the 38 local authority areas currently being considered for investment zones. The County Council has currently ruled out participation, but indications are that both Oxford City and Cherwell may pursue this status.

We have been working with National CPRE and other Branches to raise concerns. MPs have been contacted and National CPRE is undertaking a series of face-to-face meetings with backbenchers. National CPRE is also working in collaboration with the Better Planning Coalition, (<https://betterplanningcoalition.com/>) a group of 18 housing, planning, transport, environmental, heritage and public health organisations to deliver a united message that deregulation of planning regulations will deliver poor housing and design to the detriment of people, the countryside and wildlife.

In addition to the threat of investment zones we also expect relaxation of the planning regulations which apply to major infrastructure schemes. Again, we await further detail, but initial information indicates that these schemes will be fast tracked with a reduced level of environmental assessments required. The proposals for Abingdon reservoir, enhancements on the A34 and the strategic rail freight

infrastructure proposals at Ardley are all likely to be classified as major infrastructure schemes so we will be closely monitoring as further details emerge.

Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Abandoned

All was very quiet over the spring and early summer but on 3 August we heard the news that the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 was to be abandoned, with the following statement appearing on District Councils' websites:

“The five Local Planning authorities in Oxfordshire have been working together on a joint plan for Oxfordshire to 2050. It is with regret that we were unable to reach agreement on the approach to planning for future housing needs within the framework of the Oxfordshire Plan.

Local Plans for the City and Districts will now provide the framework for the long term planning of Oxfordshire. The Oxfordshire Plan 2050 work programme will end and we will now transition to a process focused on Local Plans. The issues of housing needs will now be addressed through individual Local Plans for each of the City and Districts. The Councils will cooperate with each other and with other key bodies as they prepare their Local Plans.”

This is disappointing as we had put a lot of work into the Plan, with progress being made on many of our key policies. We have sought clarification and detail as to the reasons for the abandonment, but none have been forthcoming. It is probably safe to assume that Oxford City were pushing for “aspirational” levels of housing numbers, which it would be unable to accommodate within the boundaries of the city and would be looking to push out to the districts, once again threatening the Green Belt and countryside. Some districts, notably South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse, would have been strongly opposed to this and unwilling to accommodate further housing above the 15,000 homes they have already agreed to provide for the city in existing adopted Local Plans.

With this likely to be the scenario, better to have no plan than a bad plan that

inflicts yet more housing on the Green Belt!

We now focus on working with District Councils to ensure that our key policy needs are heard and incorporated within their plans. These are all at various stages:

Oxford City

The consultation on preferred options is live until 14 November and our major concerns are:

- The Green Belt must be protected. There should be no further review inevitably leading to further erosion and no argument that the need for 15- minute communities should trump the protection of the Green Belt.
- The actual housing numbers required should be based on actual need, using Office for National Statistics data as part of the standard methodology. No exception and inflation of these numbers should be made based on artificial economic growth targets, which could be unfounded and/ or better placed in another geographic location and fail to take account of the climate and biodiversity emergencies and the fact that Oxford is constrained by both the Oxford Green Belt and flood plains, all of which should justify a lower figure.

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse

The issues consultation which we contributed to with a comprehensive joint district response closed on 22 June. Preferred options are the next stage of consultation which we expect in spring 2023.

West Oxfordshire

We contributed to the “Your Voice counts” consultation which ran until 5 October and sought to capture early views on the most important and relevant issues for West Oxfordshire. Timescales beyond this are not yet clear.

Cherwell

Consultation on the draft Plan (Regulation 18) is due to launch mid-December and run until early February.

Lynda Moore, Planning Co-ordinator

District updates

Cherwell

Strategic Rail Freight Interchange – M40, J10.

The consultation closed on 4th July 2022 and CPRE responded. The next stage will be in the next few months. Information from the developers is currently too generalised and there is a significant amount of work required from them to push the application forward.

The Mid Cherwell Parish Forum, organised by Martin Lipson, has met on the subject and are opposed to the proposal. The committee thinks it is important for all parties to engage with Cherwell District and Oxfordshire County councillors. The idea of Graven Hill as a rail freight interchange has been raised but apparently it is not a suitable option due to housing. The developers have to prove that they will have a local workforce available and the environmental mitigations in place.

Bicester Green Belt

A meeting was held with Andrew Maxted of CDC on the subject of a potential Bicester Green Belt on 18th May. Previous initiatives involving green pockets around the town are a potential avenue to explore further.

Blenheim Estate Planning Application – Woodstock

The district has submitted an objection to this proposal which contemplates a significant development, of several hundred dwellings, on the outskirts of Woodstock. The Estate have proposed a number of developments which would significantly expand the size of the town. The proposal relates to a site which abuts the Roman Villa heritage site and a previous application was turned down by the Planning Inspectorate.

Elan Homes Planning Application – Shenington with Alkerton

An application for 49 homes has been objected to by a strong village action group and CPRE. The proposal has received a number of negative comments from compulsory consultees, including the County Archaeologist, Thames Water and Thames Valley Police.

Hanwell proposals

CPRE has been in touch with Hanwell Parish Council over the proposed development on the remaining fields that would fill the gap between Hanwell and Hanwell Fields (Banbury). The applicants have been required to carry out a full Environmental Impact Assessment so developments are awaited. A further application is in the pipeline involving a significant solar panel development immediately to the north of the village which raises the issue of CDC considering the comprehensive picture of development requests.

Noke Solar Farm

Michael Tyce spent time with the local parish councils and resident meetings and sent in an excellent response objecting to this. Islip Parish Council has also sent a strong objection to the proposal. It is also understood that Noke PC, after a meeting with the company proposing the solar farm at which they were offered £20,000 per year if it went ahead, also opposed it.

Robin Oliver

South Oxfordshire

Light pollution, and its impact on the countryside, remains a concern for the Committee and the district is now a member of the Dark Skies Matter movement and has drafted a short advisory note for Parish Councils to use when considering planning applications in the countryside.

The Committee's draft submission to the Government's (the Glover) Landscape Review formed the basis of the Branch submission.

As South and Vale begin the work on the new joint plan the district submitted a response to the joint South & Vale Design Guide consultation.

The Committee continues to be concerned about the impact of the northern spur of the ring road around Didcot, which would cross the Thames at Culham and then continue to the 'Golden Balls' roundabout on the A4074, on local villages and the Green Belt and is working with Branch on alternatives such as rail for local links, stronger public transport and routing M40 traffic to the A34.

The Committee continues to respond to significant planning applications noting the increase in applications for solar farms and holiday pods.

Finally, the committee regretfully said goodbye to Charles Cotgreave, our treasurer, who has resigned because of ill-health and recorded their gratitude for his contribution.

Geoff Botting

Vale of White Horse

We continued to monitor the various issues which we had identified previously. The Chairman (with another hat on), Secretary and Treasurer continue as members of what is now known as the WHAG (White Horse Action Group) formed in preparation for the developer submitting a planning application for installing static caravans at the base of the Uffington White Horse.

The proposed Chinese University's expansion at Boar's Hill in an amended application was approved by the Vale of White Horse District Council. In support of local groups,

Robin Oliver

New chair of CPRE Cherwell



Robin is a keen countryman and keen to ensure that the countryside is available for everyone to enjoy, he is committed to challenging the increasing incursions into green spaces proposed by developers and to ensure that local planners have a clear understanding of the impacts that their decisions have on local communities. Robin understands the need for new houses but questions local authorities' eagerness to allow building on green space. There are many brown field sites in the county that must be used first.

As Chair of CPRE's Cherwell District Committee, and Chair of Shenington with Alkerton Parish Council, he is very conscious of the impact Local Plans (both at district and county level) have on the countryside and local communities. Robin, together with local residents, has been very active in resisting a recent planning application which would overwhelm the local village and has supported a number of other local communities in their struggles against indiscriminate development.

we wrote to the Secretary of State asking him to call in this decision. We have received acknowledgement of our letter and await the Secretary of State's deliberation.

We continue to keep a weather-eye out on the Abingdon reservoir scheme, solar panel projects proposed on agricultural land and various housing developments. We were also glad to participate with other districts in a discussion of what should be CPRE Oxfordshire's priorities with the issues on which we should concentrate going forward.

In June we were pleased to organize an away-day at Kingston Bagpuize House, where the owner Virginia Grant gave us an informative guided tour of this splendid house with many an amusing anecdote, after which we were free to roam the lovely garden and admire the magnificent trees. The invitation to participate was county-wide and apart from a good turnout of Vale members we were happy to welcome members from other districts. Kingston Bagpuize has a connection with CPRE as it was there that lived Lord Tweedsmuir – the son of John Buchan (the 1st Baron Tweedsmuir) – the famous author of the 39 Steps who was CPRE Oxfordshire's first Chairman back in 1931.

Over the August Bank Holiday CPRE was happy to lend a hand (and a hammer) to the annual 'chalking' of the Uffington White Horse together with around one hundred volunteers who came from far and wide to ensure that the 3000-year-old and unique White Horse continues to look at its best until next year so as not to disappoint the some 70,000 visitors who come annually to admire this ancient site and the glorious view over the Vale.

In a gesture to thank Geoffrey Somerset for his continuing

membership of the Vale Committee since 1998, for his Chairmanship from 2000 for four years and to salute the impressive milestone of his 90th birthday, the committee was pleased to host a lunch for him at a local hostelry, which was much enjoyed by all. Happy Birthday Geoffrey.

Heneage Legge-Bourke

West Oxfordshire

In brief – a developer took West Oxfordshire District Council's (WODC) decision against its development in Burford to appeal but lost due to the fact the land was in the AONB and affected the setting of Burford church. However, the judge acknowledged that the developer argued and succeeded in proving WODC has not secured a five year housing land supply. This means that land outside of the AONB within West Oxfordshire is precariously unsafe as speculative developers, Blenheim and some of the Oxford colleges may look to chance their arm to fill WODC five year land supply. Currently there are applications in Long Hanborough and Woodstock that could be pushed through due to this and the unsustainable and environmentally damaging Salt Cross may become even bigger than previously envisaged if WODC cannot prove their land supply is secure.

WODC has yet to make a decision about which method it will use for the projected growth targets. If it pushes for the standard method that will still see an unsustainable pressure on resources, both public services, the natural environment and food production. But anything more than the standard would be catastrophic.

Philippa Phelan

MEMBERS' VISITS 2022

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Crossing the cornfields en route to Nettlebed Creamery.



At St Barnabas Church, Jericho.

CPRE Oxfordshire members enjoyed two visits this summer

In July we went to Nettlebed Creamery, an enterprise begun by the family-run farm in 2015 to diversify from simple organic milk production. The business has flourished and now produces three prize-winning cheeses. We were given an informative talk by the cheesemaker which explained all aspects of the business from organic cereal production for cattle feed to the processes involved in the making of the different cheeses. We then had the opportunity to taste the cheeses, all delicious. The Creamery has now opened the Cheese Shed where you can buy the farm's milk, ice-cream and cheese, and also purchase tasty light meals, coffee and cake. We certainly enjoyed the produce.

Two months later members met outside the Ashmolean Museum for a walk around Oxford which our guide, Isabella Underhill, said would concentrate on printing and architecture. Outside the Sheldonian Theatre she explained the development of the university library and the creation of the Oxford University Press. As we walked to St Barnabas Church in Jericho, she explained how changes in religious practice had influenced styles of architecture. This church had been founded in 1869 by Thomas Combe, Superintendent of Oxford University Press which by this time was located nearby. Thomas Combe was a prominent supporter of the Oxford Movement which disapproved of the influence of Classical architecture with its pagan connotations. (Ironically the OUP building is of Classical design.) So, St Barnabas was built in the style of a beautiful Romanesque Basilica and, with its clear connection between printing and architecture, was a most suitable place to end our walk.

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