



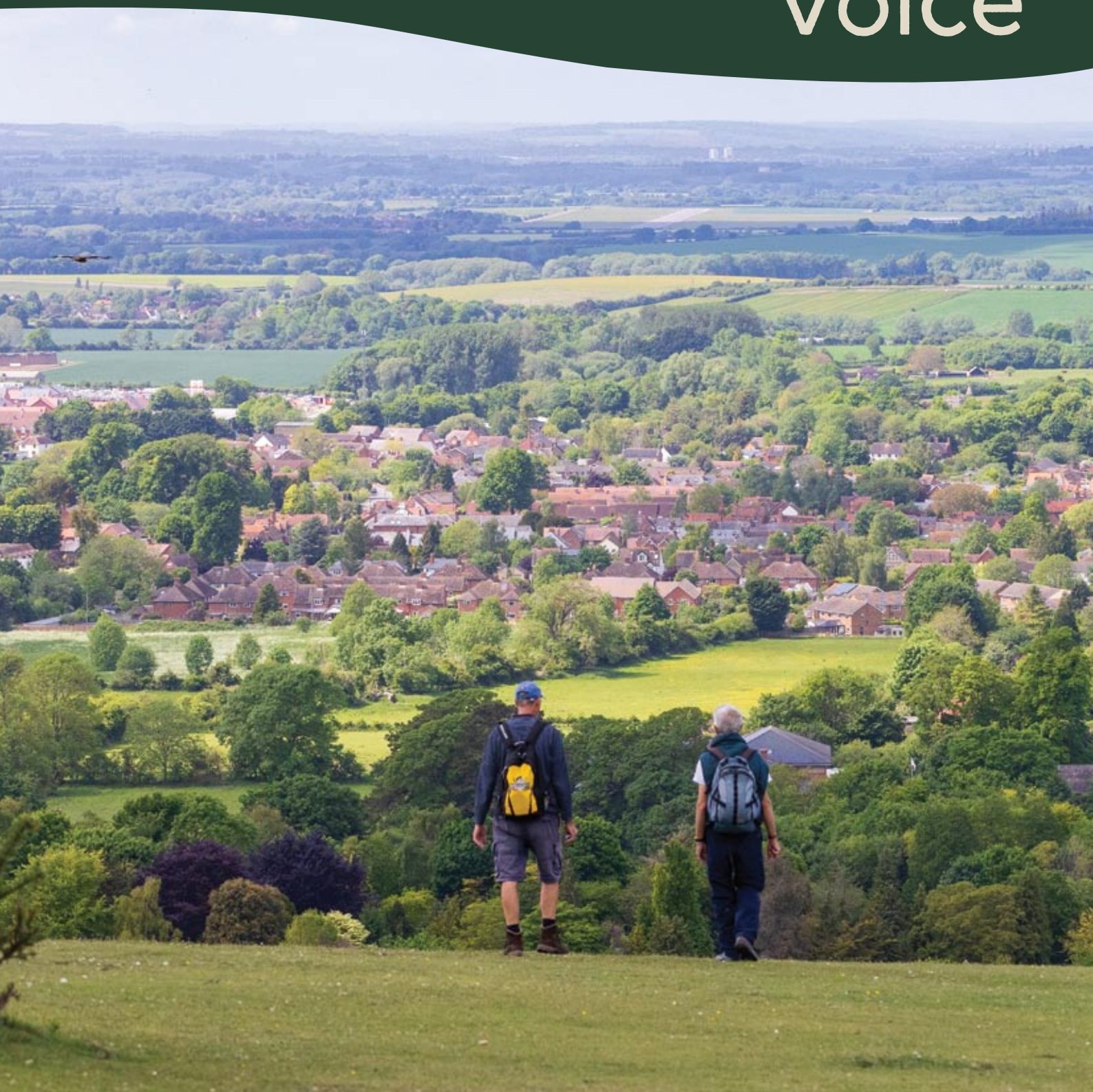
The countryside charity  
Oxfordshire

Campaigning to protect our rural county

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

Spring 2023

# Oxfordshire Voice



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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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Photo ©David Marsh

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

If you would be interested in placing an advert in a future Oxfordshire Voice please contact the Branch Office below.

Published April 2023

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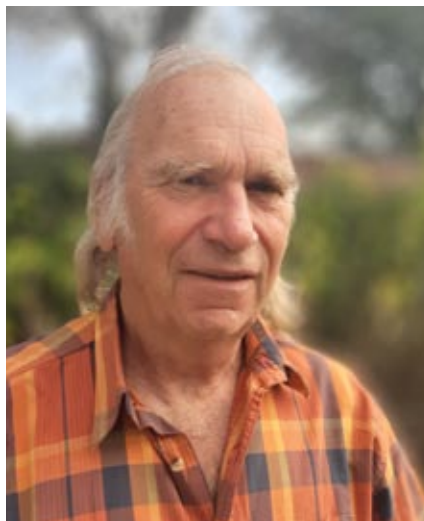
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## Chair's voice



Our countryside continues to face many challenges. In Oxfordshire, CPRE has been incredibly busy responding to threats from proposed solar farms, warehouse developments, a holiday park and the Abingdon reservoir to mention just a few. In addition, we have the development of the next round of Local Plans (with Oxford City and Cherwell leading the charge). I would like to acknowledge the incredible work the staff team has been doing and the dedication of the volunteers who respond to these issues. Prioritising our limited resources is a huge challenge.

We have had some successes in the last year, notably the proposed revisions to the NPPF (the National Planning Policy Framework), which include the dropping of the iniquitous 5-year housing land supply rule. Overall we were sad to see the abandoning of the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan but glad to see the back of the excessive housing growth forecasts it contained and are pleased to see a trend towards more realistic house building plans from some of the Districts (although Oxford City and Cherwell's ambitions remain worrying).

The proliferation of speculative solar farm applications continues, including the massive Botley West proposal. In January we approved our position paper on renewable energy which confirms our support for renewables but opposes the development of

large solar arrays on greenfield sites in landscape sensitive areas, such as Green Belt and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. We do support the development of solar on rooftops and believe this could provide the majority of the County's solar energy needs. We have seen success in the refusal of permission for a solar farm near Burcot, South Oxfordshire, on the grounds it was in the Green Belt, but, unfortunately, the permission was narrowly granted for a similar development up the road at Nineveh Farm. We continue to campaign against this development, which is clearly in contravention of SODC's Local Plan policy.

**We are calling for a strategic land use policy which balances the needs of energy production with the need to produce food and improve and protect nature**

We are calling for a strategic land use policy which balances the needs of energy production with the need to produce food and improve and protect nature. There are encouraging signs that the Future Oxfordshire Partnership (the old Growth Board) will be taking this on board. We will be pushing for genuine public engagement in the development of such a plan.

In March 2022 we hosted George Eustice (the then Environment Secretary) to a celebration of our hedgerow project in Watlington. National CPRE has been campaigning to extend and protect our hedgerows – which are an important refuge for wildlife and a potent carbon sink – culminating in a launch of a report in the House of Lords in the summer. Since then, the Government has announced a target of creating 30,000 miles of new and restored hedgerows by

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www.facebook.com/CPREOxfordshire

2037 and included hedgerows in the new ELMs funding scheme. This just shows the influence we can have.

## Many charities are struggling at present with the combined pressures of rising costs and falling income. CPRE is not immune

Our finances always need careful consideration. We are in the lucky position of having some reserves – a result of some past donations and some careful investments. We are currently spending more than our income and eating into our reserves. This is fine provided this resource is well spent but in the longer term we will have to cut our cloth accordingly or find new sources of income. Many charities are struggling at present with the combined pressures of rising costs and falling income. CPRE is not immune, thankfully in Oxfordshire our fall in membership has been limited but this remains a concern. Given the pressures on the countryside we need to increase our support base. I hope we can do this in the coming year with events and campaigns to help us all to continue to protect the countryside.

We will be seeing some changes in the coming year. Two trustees, Peter Emery and Dorian Grier, are leaving us (and many thanks to them) and we are actively recruiting replacements. Also, unfortunately, Judy Crockett is stepping down as our event organiser. Our events are not only really rewarding but are a good way of getting to know our supporters and encouraging new members. I hope the Districts will pick up the baton. I must finish by thanking our staff, Helen, Becky, Julia and Lynda, our Trustees, volunteers and many supporters for their unstinting work in the past year. Our countryside is changing and CPRE is having a strong voice in how it should look in the future.

**Richard Harding,**  
Chair CPRE Oxfordshire

## Volunteer roles

We are fortunate to have volunteers around the county helping to find positive solutions for the issues facing the countryside and the environment. 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](mailto:director@cpreoxon.org.uk)

For more information and full role descriptions visit the website. [tinyurl.com/4w4m8vd7](http://tinyurl.com/4w4m8vd7)

### Transport Adviser

We would benefit from having someone with specific professional qualifications and/or experience in the transport sector, to help guide our overall vision on transport matters and advise us

on relevant policy approaches.

From time to time there are also specific queries which arise where it would be extremely helpful to have access to a more informed source of advice, such as providing specialist input as appropriate to local policy consultations and regional and national transport developments by national government agencies.

### District Committee Members

Could you help discuss and determine the priorities of our district committees? 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. Our committees meet 4 or 5 times a year.

## Leave a gift in your will

Your gift can ensure that the countryside is rich in nature, accessible for all and protected for the future. A future where local communities get a say on what gets built where they live, brownfield sites are recycled, valuable Green Belt is saved, farmland protected, and dark skies are enjoyed by all.

Our promises to you:

- We'll always treat you and your wishes with respect and confidentiality.
- Your legacy will be in capable hands. We've been successfully enhancing, promoting and protecting our beautiful Oxfordshire countryside since 1931. We'll continue to work in your name for many more generations.
- We appreciate will gifts of any size, and we'll ensure your

legacy will make a lasting impact.

- If you choose to let us know about your gift we can stay in touch and keep you informed of our plans, events and the work we do.

If you have any queries about leaving a gift in your will to CPRE, we are always available to answer your questions honestly and openly.

If you would like to leave a gift to CPRE Oxfordshire, here is the essential information you will need for your solicitor:

**Name: Campaign to Protect Rural England, Oxfordshire**  
**Address: CPRE Oxfordshire, First Floor, 20 High Street, Watlington, Oxfordshire**  
**Charity Number: 1093081**

# Campaign updates

## Hedgerows

The government has announced an ambitious target to create or restore 30,000 miles of hedgerows a year by 2037, and 45,000-miles of hedgerows a year by 2050, under the new Environmental Improvement Plan 2023. In a landmark decision for hedgerows, the government target underpins aims to restore the UK's hedgerow network and puts farmers at the heart of plans to reconnect and re-establish the country's largest nature reserve. CPRE Oxfordshire hopes the county's hedgerows will benefit.

CPRE has been campaigning for government to restore hedgerows by 40% by 2050, #40by50, for two years. This target was initially recommended by the independent Climate Change Committee and is equivalent to about 120,000 miles in Britain – halfway to the moon!

CPRE Oxfordshire and Wild Oxfordshire launched Hedgerow Heroes in 2020 and have worked with community groups and parish councils in Kidlington, Watlington and Eynsham to plant new and rejuvenate existing hedgerows. In March 2022, George Eustice, the then Secretary of State visited a community planting project in Watlington. Our thanks to all those who have supported our hedgerow campaign, including Oxfordshire residents who signed our national petition and our two local MPs – Robert Courts MP and Layla Moran MP – who joined 80 other parliamentarians around the country as 'Hedgerow Heroes'.

CPRE Oxfordshire is looking to continue their Hedgerow Heroes project and would be pleased to hear from schools and community groups that have land available where they might want to plant or restore a hedgerow.

## Green Belt

The Oxford Green Belt is irreplaceable – once it is lost to

development, it is gone forever. Today the Oxford Green Belt is under heavy pressure: its boundaries are being eroded by city-related development and its identity is being re-branded as “a rural-urban fringe”. In the last round of local development plans, over 19,000 houses were allocated to the Oxford Green Belt – equivalent to a third of Oxford City.

Our Oxford Green Belt map has been updated to show the impact of these housing allocations. It particularly highlights the scale of land lost at Berinsfield and Culham. It also shows the lessening Green Belt Gap separating Kidlington and Oxford, in places now an A34 Gap.

Oxford City is currently consulting on a new round of high growth-based housing figures for Oxford as part of the developing Oxford Plan 2040. Brownfield sites are being prioritised for employment, meaning the pressure on housing supply in the city will increase with 'affordable' housing remaining out of reach for most households.

CPRE Oxfordshire believes these sites should instead be focused on high quality, high density, affordable housing – putting local need first. The graphic shows the discrepancy: current plans will create nearly 20 times more jobs than homes.

At the same time the maximised housing need figures mean it looks like the City Council will yet again be looking to our District Councils to absorb the overspill. Oxford City is looking to dictate the housing numbers and dispersal for the whole county, putting the Green Belt and surrounding open countryside at risk.

View the map and our Vision for the Green Belt on the website.

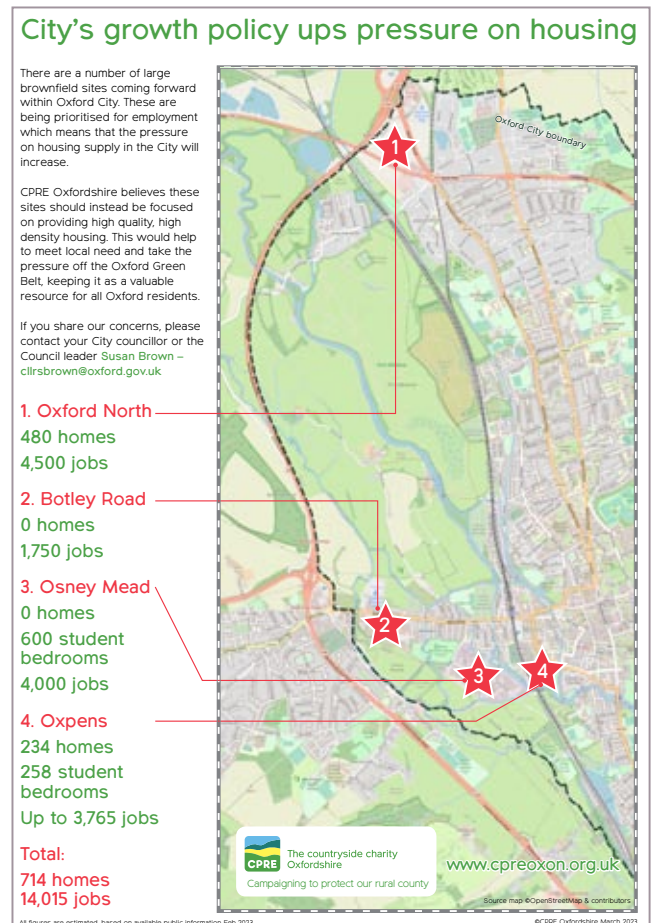
## Renewable Energy

There are scores of applications for solar farms in our countryside. Yet the Pathways to Zero Carbon Oxfordshire report, produced by Oxford University, says that even at the highest case only 1% of Oxfordshire's land would be needed for solar generation. Therefore, all the solar energy Oxfordshire needs could be accommodated on domestic and commercial roofs, and above car parks and other public buildings, without sacrificing agricultural land at all.

Our Solar Farm Map has been recently updated to reflect latest applications and planning decisions. View the map here: <https://www.cpreoxon.org.uk/news/solar-farm-map/>

See opposite for a full update on solar farm activity.

**Julia Benning,**  
Communications Manager



# Renewables: done well & done badly

## A campaign win

We're claiming a campaign win after our calls for a county-wide renewable energy strategy appear to have been acknowledged.

Our local authorities have now agreed to produce a Local Area Energy Plan, as part of the broader Pathways to Zero Carbon Oxfordshire (PaZCO) Action Plan.

Many thanks to all those who supported our campaign so far, including nearly 600 of you who signed our petition.

The PaZCO report sets out ambitious solar renewable energy targets for the county, but overall these would only require a small proportion of Oxfordshire's land. This confirms CPRE Oxfordshire's position that our local authorities can and must be selective about any greenfield allocations of solar, particularly avoiding Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Green Belt, wildlife sites and nature recovery areas, and good agricultural land.

Priority must go to rooftops and brownfield locations. For example, we support the proposed action in the Plan to "Develop a collective purchasing approach that supports the widespread deployment of rooftop solar on existing buildings".

Our land is a scarce resource and it has lots of essential uses beyond energy provision, such as providing food, enabling climate mitigation, and supporting the health and wellbeing of people and nature. We hope that the Local Area Energy Plan will be a first step towards assessing and balancing these needs and providing a full land use strategy for Oxfordshire.

## Renewables done badly... stop Botley West!

If you had plans to build Europe's largest solar farm, would you choose productive agricultural land, in the Green Belt, between a world heritage



View across proposed Botley West Solar Farm site in Church Hanborough.

site and a medieval city?

We wouldn't!

But that is exactly what developers PVDP are proposing, backed by the Blenheim Estate and Merton College.

The size of the development is almost impossible to comprehend. It covers around 10km<sup>2</sup> across three sites and would take up a vast swathe of West Oxfordshire, covering land between Wootton and Tackley, and between Bladon and Eynsham, as well as reaching into South Oxfordshire (Shipton-on-Cherwell) and the Vale of White Horse (Cumnor). Altogether, an estimated 15 settlements and more than 50,000 people would be directly impacted, not to mention the many more residents and visitors who love this area for its countryside and rural character.

Given its scale, this proposal will not be decided by our local authorities. It will be a nationally significant infrastructure project, with the ultimate decision resting with the Secretary of State for Energy Security & Net Zero (currently Grant Shapps).

A preliminary consultation was held at the end of 2022 and we are promised a second community consultation this Spring. This will be followed in due course by an examination by the Planning Inspectorate.

The Stop Botley West campaign group has been mobilised and CPRE is working closely with them to provide support. We are pleased that local MP Robert Courts has spoken against the proposal and hope our other local MPs will also lend their voice.

CPRE Oxfordshire's view is that this solar farm would represent inappropriate development because of its impact on the openness and

permanence of the Oxford Green Belt and the cumulative impact on the rural character of a huge area of Oxfordshire's countryside.

We do not believe that very special circumstances exist to justify the development, given that there are alternative approaches that would be much less harmful and yet could still deliver the pathway to a zero carbon Oxfordshire.

To echo the slogan from the Stop Botley West campaign group – we want Zero Carbon, not Zero Countryside!

## Nineveh Farm update

Developers behind the large solar development at Nineveh Farm, Nuneham Courtenay, have appealed South Oxfordshire District Council's decision to refuse a five year extension to the 35 year permission already granted. CPRE Oxfordshire has submitted evidence to the appeal arguing that not only should the extension be refused but the original decision should also be overturned. This is a major site on one of the most sensitive areas of the Oxford Green Belt and appears in clear contravention of SODC Local Plan policy. We'll keep you posted.

Meanwhile we are pleased that, following CPRE campaigning, SODC has turned down a further Green Belt solar farm at Burcot.

**Helen Marshall, Director**

## TAKE ACTION

Campaigning for rooftop renewables will be a key focus for CPRE Oxfordshire over the coming year. Could you help? Volunteer – read more on page 3 Donate – [www.cpreoxon.org.uk/get-involved/donate](http://www.cpreoxon.org.uk/get-involved/donate)

# Keeping The Ridgeway special

'Exciting' isn't a word often used to describe a piece of legislation but, in 1949, the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act was "the most exciting Act of the post-war Parliament" according to the Minister for Town and Country Planning of the time. It was certainly ambitious, laying the foundations for conserving and enjoying special features of the countryside which we now recognise as National Parks, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and more.



Celebrating the anniversary launch event in January 2023 at The Sanctuary in Wiltshire.

National Trails were introduced by the 1949 Act as 'long distance routes' and powers were given to planning authorities to ensure adequate provision of accommodation, ferries and refreshment (including 'intoxicating liquor!') along these routes. A few years later, a government map titled '1953 proposals' showed a number of routes across England and Wales were under consideration, including The Ridgeway extending to the Dorset coast (but not the Norfolk coast).

The Pennine Way was the first to be created in 1965 and today there is a 'family' of 16 National Trails in England and Wales, with the 'Coast-to-Coast' route set to be a new addition. Cycling and trail running has become part of the vision for National Trails alongside walking and horse riding. Most recently, the Glover Review in 2019 made a recommendation that the National Trails family shift up to a more equal footing with National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This requires National Trails to broaden their function beyond public access; they need to



This black and white photo is from a newspaper article covering the opening of the Ridgeway in 1973 on Coombe Hill in Bucks.

be managed to restore biodiversity, sequester carbon, provide wellbeing benefits and so on.

It is 50 years since The Ridgeway was formally opened as a National Trail in 1973 on Coombe Hill near Wendover in Buckinghamshire. Folders of papers in the National Archives in Kew evidence the hours of work by numerous people in the 1960s to survey the route and negotiate details. Records also show that today's concerns and debates

around topics such as motorised vehicle use or the need for low-cost accommodation have been rumbling along unresolved for decades. Whilst measures to tackle problems associated with vehicles have slowly made some headway, the maps of National Trails over the years have tracked a dramatic loss of youth hostels in the countryside.

The 50th anniversary year is a time for The Ridgeway National Trail to take centre stage and attract visitors, particularly new visitors. The anniversary strapline is 'Keeping The Ridgeway Special'. With help from Mary-Ann Ochota as The Ridgeway's anniversary patron, more people are hearing about the Trail through articles in The Guardian newspaper, Countryfile's Plodcast, BBC Radio Wiltshire and more. A new visitor leaflet has been published which provides a new illustrated map showing visitor attractions, pubs, car parks, train stations and other information to inspire people to visit (see opposite). The charity Friends of the Ridgeway have created the #RidgewaySpotter monthly challenges which can be done by



anyone at any location on the Trail throughout the year, from spotting yellow things in March to hunting for the oldest thing in June. New types of events are also taking place to entice new visitors onto the Trail including guided trail runs for beginners, a Bioblitz and art journaling workshops.

Through engaging as many people as possible and recognising the diversity of interests in The Ridgeway, it is hoped more support and resources will be attracted to shaping a compelling vision for the next 50 years and enabling bold steps forward.

The 'Ridgeway Future 50' vision must conserve and build on the Trail's incredible heritage. The 'Ridgeway Top 50' is cataloguing the heritage of the Trail as members of the public and organisations contribute thoughts and photos over the course of the year. Highlights so far include monuments dating back thousands of years, farmland bird hotspots, artists and writers of international renown and rare plants.

However, we cannot simply look back at 'what has been' as the future presents opportunities and some unavoidable challenges, such as climate change. The 'Ridgeway Future 50' could envisage The

Ridgeway as a 'landscape corridor' where the Trail's verges and adjacent field margins could be managed to support more wildflowers and wildlife; it's historic features could be better conserved to benefit landscape character; routes connecting the Trail to settlements could be improved to provide people with easy access to nature; and businesses along the Trail could lead the way in the rural economy's post-Covid recovery with new, sustainable holiday and recreation packages.... what do you want to see along The Ridgeway over the next 50 years?

CPRE members are invited to play a part in The Ridgeway's anniversary and future. Visit the anniversary

webpage to discover something new about The Ridgeway [https://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/en\\_GB/ridgeway\\_anniversary2023/](https://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/en_GB/ridgeway_anniversary2023/) and send an email to [ridgeway@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:ridgeway@oxfordshire.gov.uk) or comment on social media about what should be in the Ridgeway Top 50 and The Ridgeway Future 50 vision.

**Sarah Wright, National Trail Officer, Oxfordshire County Council**

We are delighted that Sarah Wright and Mary-Ann Ochota, TV presenter and Anniversary Patron, will be join us at our AGM this year, exploring the past, present and future of Britain's Oldest Road: The Ridgeway. See p12 for details.



Mary-Ann Ochota, The Ridgeway's anniversary patron, next to a finger post.

# Planning updates

## A busy summer of Local Plan consultations ahead

We are starting to see some of the District Local Plans moving forward and are expecting a busy summer of consultations. We'll be alerting you to these consultations as they appear on our website and via our social media, so do look out for them and make sure that you have your say.

### Oxford City housing consultation

Since our last issue we have responded to two consultations from Oxford City. In mid-November 2022 we replied to their Preferred options consultation; with our main messages being that the Oxford Green Belt should be protected from all development and that the housing numbers should be based on actual need using the standard methodology with no exception and inflation of these numbers.

Unfortunately, early this year we saw the same consultants were back with a new round of high-growth based housing figures for Oxford in a consultation which closed at the end of March. With brownfield sites in the City still being prioritised for jobs growth rather than housing, it looks like the City Council will yet again be looking to the surrounding districts **to offload most of this housing due to capacity constraints.** The Oxfordshire-wide housing is quantified at 4,406 dwellings per annum and the City's at 1,322 dwellings per annum. This trajectory would expect to see Oxfordshire's population growing by nearly 27% by 2040, compared to Office for National Statistics estimates of a UK population increase of less than 5% !

A small positive within the consultation is that there are no plans to develop any Green Belt sites within the city; although with most housing being pushed out of the city this gives no protection to the rest of our Green Belt and countryside.

CPRE Oxfordshire has submitted a robust response to this consultation which can be found on our website. We circulated our response widely to encourage others to respond and facilitated a webinar with Oxford Green Belt Parishes to share our views. We are encouraged that South Oxfordshire, West Oxfordshire

and the Vale of White horse District councils have also challenged these high housing numbers. Let's hope our views are listened to in advance of the next stage, timescales for which remain unclear.

### South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse

We responded to the Issues consultation in June 2022 with a comprehensive joint district submission. The results of this consultation have recently been published and we are encouraged to see that many of our comments have made it into the consultation report, several verbatim.

"Protecting our countryside", which we encouraged people to rate highly came out overwhelmingly as a top priority.

There were no definitive actions from this consultation report, but many positive comments so we will be carefully scrutinising the next stage of consultation in the hope these positive comments translate into enforceable policies. We expect the next stage, the Preferred options consultation in summer 2023.

### Cherwell

The timescales for the draft Local Plan have further slipped. It was originally due to go the Overview and Scrutiny committee at the end of November 2022, with an expected Reg 18 consultation running from mid-December to early February 2023. However, this timetable stalled with the draft plan being unavailable to go to committee. There was an attempt to still move ahead with the consultation but we, along with others, objected that due process was not being followed and it was unacceptable that councillors were not given opportunity to scrutinise the draft. The Executive committee recommended that the Plan was delayed until the

recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny committee could be included.

It is now our expectation that the draft plan will not go to consultation until after the elections in May. It is questionable if the delay was led by the recommendations of the committee or a desire to delay the large housing growth proposals until after the local elections .

### West Oxfordshire

We responded to the West Oxfordshire "Your Voice Counts" consultation in September 2022 but since then things have gone rather quiet. The expected further consultation (reg 18) in early 2023 has now slipped and is showing as taking place in August 2023 on their website. The target date for the formal publication of the draft Local Plan (reg 19) remains September 2023 on the website; although presumably this will be delayed if it is to take due account of the reg 18 consultation feedback.

### We need a plan for sustainable water – not a "Megavoir"

Consultations on both the Water Resources South East (WRSE) Plan and Thames Water's Management Plan (WRMP) have been running in the last few months. Together, these plans will determine Thames Water's investment plans for water supply in the coming decades, including the proposals for the Abingdon mega-reservoir.

Richard Harding, our chair has led a co-ordinated CPRE South East response to robustly challenge these plans. Our key messages were :

- Future demand for water has been exaggerated due to inflated projections; it should be halved.
- Given accepted demand uncertainty, new sources of water should give priority to schemes



which are adaptable, scalable and minimise environmental impact. New reservoirs, like the SESRO (South East Strategic Reservoir Option i.e., the Abingdon Reservoir), do not meet these criteria.

- Targets are unambitious for reduction in both water consumption and leakage.

## Didcot Garden Town Housing Infrastructure scheme (HIF 1) is pressing forward

Oxfordshire County Council continue to drive forward this infrastructure project. The scheme, over 20 kilometres of road, has four sections with 2 bridges, flyovers over the Appleford rail siding, the FCC landfill site-wetlands and 14 roundabouts/junctions. In January this year we, along with many others, responded to planning application R3.0138/21. We strongly oppose the impact this scheme will have on the countryside and rural villages, we believe it is not financially viable and not compliant

with the Oxfordshire Local Transport and Connectivity plan which seeks to develop a zero-carbon transport system which prioritises walking and cycling and reduces car journeys.

## The battle to protect our countryside from swathes of solar panels continues

Developers have put forward for consultation initial plans for a Botley West/ Blenheim Solar Farm. This is an enormous site, with most of the land being Green Belt; it is bigger than Heathrow airport site, spread across 11 miles, engulfing 15 villages. We strongly object to these plans and are working with and supporting the campaign group “ Stop Botley West” which has formed to fight these plans.

See <https://stopbotleywest.com/> for more details.

Read more on page 5

**Lynda Moore,**  
Planning Co-ordinator

## Parish Council Network

Over recent months CPRE Oxfordshire has facilitated discussion specifically for Parish Councils: Cherwell parishes held an initial networking meeting and Green Belt parishes met to discuss a response to the Oxford Local Plan 2040.

We are now looking to create a Parish Council Network, a forum for our Parish Council members to discuss planning concerns with CPRE and their peers and feel confident to respond effectively and on occasion, where appropriate, as a united voice.

If you represent a Parish Council and would like to know more, please get in touch with Lynda Moore, Planning Co-ordinator, via email: [lyndam@cprexon.org.uk](mailto:lyndam@cprexon.org.uk)



Need Not Greed Oxfordshire (NNGO) is a coalition of 37 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](http://www.neednotgreedoxon.org.uk)

### NPPF Consultation

The Government’s consultation on the existing National Planning Policy Framework and the content of the forthcoming Levelling Up & Regeneration Bill offered an opportunity to influence national planning policy.

NNGO supported some of the really good changes, including the removal of the 5 Year Housing Supply Rules which have caused so much damage across Oxfordshire by allowing through speculative and inappropriate development. However, there are also issues of concern, including removing the need for Local Plans to be ‘Justified’ and National Development

Management Policies that would override local policies and be at the sole discretion of the Secretary of State.

### Oxford Local Plan

Oxford City Council is consulting on its Local Plan through to 2040. In the first stage of consultation NNGO argued that:

- housing figures should be set at the minimum that it is possible to achieve whilst meeting genuine need.
- the City should constrain itself to what is deliverable within its own boundaries, maximising sites for housing rather than employment.

The second stage of consultation focused on Oxford’s Housing Need. NNGO challenged the Oxfordshire Housing and Economic Needs Assessment (HENA), prepared by Cambridge Econometrics and Icenii, the very same organisations that previously drew up the deeply flawed ‘OGNA’ (Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment, July 2021).

The HENA’s exaggerated projected growth figures support housing development well above that of local need: the HENA forecasts Oxfordshire’s population will increase by 27% to 2040 compared with ONS figures suggesting a 5% increase to the same period.

NNGO called on our Local Councils, who are expected to pick up the overspill of Oxford’s housing need, to immediately commission an independent review of the HENA and to set out their own alternative vision for sustainable housing growth in the county.

# District reports

## South Oxfordshire

The Committee is increasingly concerned about the push for renewable energy and the likelihood that the South Oxfordshire District Council's target of carbon neutrality by 2030 is encouraging substantial applications for solar farms on landscape that is both Green Belt and of high agricultural value, this latter being of increasing significance with food security becoming an important consideration. The Committee has been considering possible policies governing renewable energy in the district and looks forward to sharing these with the Renewables Working group and otherwise contributing to their work.

The Committee are pleased to note the recent decision by South Oxfordshire's Planning Committee to refuse permission for a solar farm at Burcot Farm as both harmful to the green belt and failing to demonstrate the 'very special circumstances' required by the NPPF.

Light pollution, and its impact on the countryside and the night sky remains a concern for the Committee and we continue to bring this to the attention of planning officers when responding to planning application.

The Committee, through the work of Nick Moon, continues to scrutinise and respond to applications that reduce access, or have a harmful effect, on the local countryside.

**Geoff Botting**

## Vale of White Horse

We have still not received a reply from the Secretary of State to our request several months ago that he call in the approval of the Chinese University at Boar's Hill.

Concerned about the proliferation of un-coordinated (and on agricultural land) solar farm projects across the Vale, we wrote to our local MPs to make them aware of this

problem and attended the public consultations of the Denchworth project and that of Cumnor.

We responded in the first week of February with our comments on the anaerobic digester project at Grove.

We were encouraged to learn that the appeal against the refusal of a warehouse development at Milton Heights was withdrawn by the developer shortly before the inspector was due to hear the appeal, so the refusal stands.

We note the delay to the Joint Vale and South Local Plan, in the context of government proposals for changes to the NPPF and the abandoning of the Oxfordshire 2050 plan.

We attended GARD's presentation in February of the proposed Abingdon reservoir and at the invitation of the Chairman expressed to the attendees our full support of GARD's efforts to stop this project.

We continue to keep up our vigilance concerning Britchcombe Farm at the base of the Uffington White Horse where a developer has declared his intent to install static caravans. To date there are no visible signs of any activity.

Heneage Legge-Bourke

## Cherwell Solar Farms

There have been increasing numbers of schemes being consulted upon or proposals coming forward for consideration by several of Oxfordshire's local authorities. In Cherwell, we have a proposal for Padbury Brook, on a cross border basis we also have the enormous proposal for Botley West (including a significant amount of Green Belt land) and there are further plans to the north of Hanwell. The common factor to all of these plans is the use of open countryside for their construction. CPRE is pushing for the use of industrial and housing rooftops and Brownfield sites ahead of Greenfield sites which frequently represent good quality agricultural land. We are aware, at the very early

stages, of another proposal near Stratton Audley.

## Strategic Rail Freight Interchange

There has been little movement recently in this planned development. It is anticipated that there will be further activity following the local elections. Meanwhile the Chiltern line continues to demonstrate its lack of strategic status when single train breakdowns can bring the line to a halt.

## Huscote Warehouse proposal

This proposal has been rejected with the Planning Inspectorate raising several issues with it, leading to the developer withdrawing their appeal.

## Cherwell District Local Plan

The review of the Local Plan has been drafted although due to significant comments by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee led to the deferment by the Executive and postponement of consideration by the following full Council meeting. It is anticipated that a further draft will be provided following the local elections that will then be issued for public consultation.

As part of the development of new plans, Oxford City and Cherwell commissioned a Housing and Economic Needs Assessment (HENA) from Cambridge Econometrics. The HENA has assumed far higher numbers in terms of population growth. Alongside the continuing development of the new plan, the previous plan's 5 year Land supply calculation has been recalculated by the Council's officers according to the Standard Methodology which has revealed that Cherwell has always had an excess of the 5 year requirement. It had been the apparent lack of a full land supply that had given rise to a number of inappropriate planning applications being approved.

As part of the planning developments, CDC has indicated they intend to focus major developments on Banbury, Bicester, Upper Heyford and Kidlington. Without wishing to pre-judge any Local Plan contents, given that the Planning Committee recently refused



permission for warehouses in the Upper Heyford area, the inference to be drawn is that they intend to prioritise housing in these areas.

**OxCam Arc**

This initiative had seemed to be dead in the water, although the majority group of CDC have been lobbying hard to resurrect the plans under the new name of the Pan Regional Partnership. Some central government funding has been received and it looks as though this will be pushed forward again in spite of significant opposition.

**Parish Council Liaison Group**

Cherwell CPRE has initiated a (hopefully) regular meeting with the various parish councils of the district in order to exchange information and coordinate assistance to councils in need. The last 12 months have seen an increasing number of proposals aimed at developments, particularly in some of the smaller villages, least able to accommodate significant proposal for growth.

**Robin Oliver**

**West Oxfordshire**

West Oxfordshire CPRE has been concerned with the sheer scale of the Botley West Solar Farm proposal which will cover several thousand hectares of farm land in

the protected Greenbelt. We have been calling for a County wide strategy rather than speculative developments which will change the character of the area for a generation or more. We implore landowners (of whom there are but a few in West Oxfordshire) to continue to farmland to provide us with food security as well as beautiful rolling landscapes that we all know and love.

Farmers are the backbone to this country and in the 1970s there was a farm in almost every village in West Oxon but sadly this is no longer the case. There is a knock-on effect to people living here now, many of whom have left the City to come and live and experience rural life, and they no longer make the connections between what is bought in the supermarket to the land around them. We do need to move to carbon neutrality, but in doing so it is important not to lose sight of the fact that we still need to feed our growing population and take care of the fragile biodiversity around us. Moreover, local hearts and minds will never be won over for these industrial scale solar developments while new warehouses and new homes continue to be built without solar on rooves and there are no grants available for existing homes to add solar or other solutions as alternatives to fossil fuels.

West Oxfordshire District Council submitted a strong response to the City Council’s consultation for housing need and their proposals to use a higher methodology when calculating new homes.

Together with South and Vale, WODC have argued for the standard methodology for houses in the area rather than the one the City is trying to impose on its neighbours.

River pollution is now in the national news, thanks mainly to the efforts of the Windrush Against Sewage Pollution campaign. It astonishes many of us, who advocate common sense, that homes continue to be built despite the infrastructure not being there already to cope with our human effluent and rainwater.

Finally, West Oxfordshire CPRE is a small committee and would welcome anyone who could spend some time volunteering with us. We are looking for representatives from villages who can assist the Chair in formulating responses to planning proposals and also policy. Please get in touch if you can spare a few hours each month.

**Philippa Phelan**

See page 3 for more information on volunteering.

# CPRE Oxfordshire AGM 2023

2.30pm, Saturday 24 June 2023

Thomas Hughes Memorial Hall, White Horse, Uffington,  
Faringdon SN7 7SE

Google directions: [tinyurl.com/n89cbaxu](https://www.google.com/maps/dir/51.751111,-1.183333/51.751111,-1.183333)

Unfortunately, there is no public transport directly to Uffington. There is good parking available at the hall, but we encourage members to share use of cars wherever possible.

We may be able to offer lifts from Wantage, which is served by the Stagecoach S9 bus ([tinyurl.com/3y2tx9nf](https://www.stagecoach.co.uk/route/s9)) from Oxford (via Botley, Cumnor, East Hanney & Grove).

If you would like assistance to attend, please contact the Branch Office and we will do our best to help.

Following the AGM we will be joined by Ridgeway National Trail Officer Sarah Wright and TV presenter and Anniversary Patron Mary-Ann Ochota to explore the past, present and future of Britain's Oldest Road.



## The Ridgeway: the future of Britain's oldest road



The Ridgeway at Swyncombe

The Ridgeway is one of the UK's National Trails, a 'gold standard' long distance walking and riding route that runs 87 miles from Ivinghoe Beacon in Buckinghamshire, through the Chilterns, across Oxfordshire and the North Wessex Downs, eventually terminating at the Avebury World Heritage Site in Wiltshire. Parts of the route can be traced to prehistory, and it passes close to ancient tombs, vast earthworks and the Uffington White Horse. It connects SSSIs and Local Wildlife Sites surrounded by farmland and numerous rural settlements. It's also within close reach of large towns with nature-starved communities in need of fresh air and headspace. A prehistoric route in a 21st Century world – What stories does this trail tell? How do we help visitors, land managers and local communities get the most out of it? How do we tackle the challenges access brings? And what should its future hold?

## Member Discounts

As a CPRE member, you have discounted entry to many of the country's most beautiful houses, gardens and attractions – from stately homes to caves!

The Members Guide 2023 is available on our website.

Members are also able to claim a 10% discount with our partners, Cotswold Outdoor, Snow+Rock and Runners Need.

For almost 50 years, Cotswold Outdoor have been helping people to discover the great outdoors by offering quality clothing, equipment and accessories from the very best outdoor brands.

Simply enter your exclusive CPRE member code you will have been sent online or show your membership card in store.

Offer code valid until 30 September 2023. T+Cs apply.

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