



The countryside charity
Oxfordshire

Campaigning to protect our rural county

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Spring 2025

Oxfordshire Voice



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Oxfordshire Voice

Spring 2025

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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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Chair's voice



What an incredibly packed few months it has been. We are seeing the Government's manifesto proposals now beginning to shape up into policy, alongside a large number of projects that have reached key decision points.

Amongst these there are several areas in which the voice of CPRE, speaking up on behalf of achieving the right balance of countryside, renewable energy, agricultural land and sustainable housing, is incredibly important. And at CPRE Oxfordshire the team has been working hard to feed in appropriately to a number of consultations and other processes, while promoting the value of the countryside and the urgent need to protect nature.

Our support for renewable energy – in the right place – has taken shape in a number of ways. We continue to campaign against the 10km² Botley West Solar Farm. Renewable energy is desperately needed, but not in huge monolithic lumps that destroy so much else. With well over a thousand representations to the Planning Inspectorate regarding the project, the strength of public feeling and argument against the development are clear.

We supported the private 'Sunshine Bill' brought by Cheltenham MP Max Wilkinson, aiming to make solar panels standard in all new homes – and the campaigning work of CPRE on 'rooftop renewables' got a special mention in the House of Commons. While the bill didn't get through, it secured a commitment from the Government to ensure solar energy will form part of amended building regulations that will be rolled out later this year –

reportedly setting 'solar standards that are both ambitious and achievable'.

On a happier note, we just reached our target with the Big Give Green Match Fund, meaning the pilot for our Rooftop Renewables project, promoting the use of solar energy on rooftops, will now go ahead later in the year. Thanks to everyone who donated.

With the Government's aim to create as many as 1.5 million new homes, it's imperative that they are energy efficient. But they also have to be in the right place. Here the recent Planning and Infrastructure Bill, published as part of the Government's commitment to 'get Britain building', is key. This is a good opportunity to push for sustainable homes in sustainable developments, which will help to support nature and the environment, alongside the growth agenda. But before any land is lost, we believe that developing brownfield sites first is absolutely critical. I was astonished to read that 1.2 million homes could be built on brownfield sites in England alone, saving precious local green spaces and farmland. The big housing developers should not be allowed to sacrifice these spaces for profit.

As ever, a lot of work has gone into the opposition to the Abingdon Reservoir, which you can read about on page 5 of this edition.

Do have a look at the CPRE Oxon webpages under 'News' for how to engage with the revised Local Plan for Oxford – early engagement runs to April 28th, ahead of formal consultation in the summer.

Finally, we're on the lookout for a new Treasurer – if you are able to take this on or know someone who could, we would be delighted to hear from you. Here I would like to say an enormous thank you both to Nick Dolden, who comes to the end of his term as Trustee and Treasurer in June, we have also said goodbye to our district chairs and Trustees, Phil Phelan and Elizabeth Gillespie, and Dorian Grier, Trustee and Secretary. We thank them for all their hard work, dedication and sound advice over the years. And a very warm welcome to Debby Hallett who has already taken up the reins as Secretary.

Susie Mather, Chair

Family of four completes the OGBW

Are you looking for some inspiration to get out and enjoy the countryside? In January we heard from Lottie Adams to tell us about her family's remarkable achievement of walking the entire length of the Oxford Green Belt Way with her husband and two kids – the youngest being just two years old!

Having set themselves a new year's resolution to complete the walk in 2024, she told us: "We set off from Beckley on the tenth of February unsure whether it would even be feasible, but, aiming to go out to do another stage together roughly once a month, we have made it!

"We are very appreciative of all who helped to make this wonderful route accessible and who work hard to ensure that the enjoyment of



Finishing at Beckley



Embarking on the adventure in February

exploring our beautiful countryside is preserved for generations. It's such an interesting and rewarding walk, we'll definitely be recommending it to others who want to get some quality family time in the fresh air across all the seasons of the year"

We were so impressed that we designed special certificates for the kids to congratulate them on an epic

achievement for such little legs! 87km in total

If you're looking for something to get the family out in nature this year, why not take on the OGBW challenge? Tell us about your adventures, and we'll send a certificate to any kids to manage to finish the route. Email comms@cpreoxon.org.uk or write into the office.

Oxford Fieldpaths Society revisits the Oxford Green Belt Way



The Oxford Fieldpaths Society (OFS) has had a long association with the OGBW since its inception, being involved with the initial waymarking and more recently funding

some of the accessible gates. OFS members walked the route in 2008 and, last year, walks organiser Liz

Adams, decided it was time to revisit the walk to see how much had changed. Despite various setbacks due to bad weather and flooding, walkers managed to make most of the way round, starting in March at Thornhill, reaching Abingdon by May, and as far as Thrupp in the Autumn.

Closing the loop...

The proposed dates for walking Hampton Poyle to Elsfield (5.7 miles)

is **Wednesday 28 May**, and the final section from Elsfield to Thornhill Park and Ride (6.8 miles) on **Wednesday 9 July**, meeting at 10am.

These final sections are not on public transport so require a little more planning. If you'd like to join the walk, please contact **Liz Adams on 07855 170592** by 25 May and 6 July to work out logistics. Walkers should bring a picnic and refreshments.



Hedgerow Heroes update

Hundreds of volunteers have been extremely busy over the last few months helping to plant and rejuvenate hedgerow across Oxfordshire in phase 4 of the Hedgerow Heroes project, facilitated by our partners Wild Oxfordshire.

New hedgerow has been planted in 15 locations across the county involving 400 volunteers – adding up to a whopping 3.3km, 1.3 km over target. 600m of existing hedgerow has been rejuvenated with laying, coppicing and gapping up, while workshop leaders, Toby Swift and Nigel Adams, ran workshops in Witney, Eynsham and Watlington, training up 30 volunteers in the art of hedgelaying.

A massive thank you to everyone who has helped with the project so far, to International Tree Foundation for funding some of the whips, canes and guards, to Green Man Tree Nursery and Murray Maclean for supplying all of the whips and, of course, to Wild Oxfordshire, our partners for this project.

And we couldn't have done it without our volunteers from:

Hill End Outdoor Education Centre staff, Nuneham Estate, Sustainable Harwell, Oddington Environment Group, FarmAbility, Kelmscott Manor Environmental Stewards, Biodiversity Bloxham, Milton-under-Wychwood Parish Council, Oxford Conservation Volunteers and The Green DoTs



Take Action!

If your community would be interested in taking part in Hedgerow Heroes next autumn, please do get in touch.

T: 01491 612079

E: campaign@cprexoxon.org.uk

Why are hedgerows so important?

Primarily introduced as a way of marking boundaries and managing the movement of livestock, hedgerows form an important part of our cultural heritage and historical record. While they are less useful for those reasons in the modern world, they are more vital than ever for the protection of our landscapes, the health of our wildlife, and the production of our food.

Hedgerows play a major role in **preventing soil loss, reducing pollution, regulating water supply and mitigating against floods.**

They provide crucial habitat for a range of threatened or rare species, such as the Plymouth pear, insects like the brown hairstreak butterfly, birds like the yellowhammer and mammals like the dormouse.



They are also vital for **sustainable and cost-effective agriculture**, helping with **pest control** by attracting insect-eating birds, flies and wasps and creating barriers to windborne pests, whilst also providing a reliable and long-term habitat for pollinators such as wild bees.

Date fixed for Judicial Review into SESRO decision



Derek Stork of GARD and CPRE Oxfordshire's Lisa Warne look over the site of the reservoir

In September 2024, Steve Reed, the Secretary of State for DEFRA, approved Thames Water's Water Resource Management Plan (WRMP) which includes the new 4.5 square mile (7km²) reservoir near Abingdon, also known as the South East Strategic Reservoir Option (SESRO). This was despite the Environment Agency's advice (unearthed following a Freedom of Information request) that the plan should not go ahead due to "outstanding concerns regarding costs, justification and options appraisal".

Make no mistake, this is a colossal project.

The reservoir, covering an area the size of Gatwick Airport and with a completion date of 2040, it would be formed by a 25m-high earth bund, storing much of the water above today's ground level, increasing flood risk in an already flood-prone area.

Predicted lifetime costs of the reservoir are expected to be £7.5billion. While construction of the reservoir itself is a massive undertaking, there's also the supporting infrastructure that needs to be built: an access road; a pumping station; a conveyance tunnel; infrastructure linking the reservoir to the Thames; moving the Steventon-Hanney road to the south; a temporary rail siding to enable construction materials to come in by

freight train; diverting local streams to the east and west; construction of a "compensatory floodplain".... All of which will cause huge disruption not only to the local people, but also to the natural landscape and surrounding wildlife.

We believe Thames Water have used exaggerated data to predict climate change and population growth and that this huge infrastructure project would do more to line the pockets of their investors than to fix the issues of clean water supply.

DEFRA has so far refused a Public Inquiry.

CPRE Oxfordshire and Saferwaters, working in partnership with Group Against Reservoir Development (GARD), have now appointed a legal team to call for a Judicial Review of Defra's decision. Mr Justice Mould, a High Court Judge for planning, has judged the case as complex and significant - a Public Inquiry is the logical and necessary next step to allow the case for the reservoir to be properly and transparently assessed, particularly in light of strong opposition from local MPs, authorities and over 5,000 residents.

Many of you will have seen the BBC's recent documentary, Thames Water: Inside the Crisis, a gripping and very human portrayal of an organisation on its knees. In 2023

Thames Water lost **570.4 megalitres a day** from leakages, equivalent to just under a quarter of its entire water supply, while they pumped **72 billion litres of sewage** into the Thames in two years – meanwhile **water bills are going up by 26%**. With the recent news that they've picked US private equity giant KKR (a firm that inspired a book about corporate greed called Barbarians at the Gate) as their preferred choice to buy them out, is this a company which we can trust to have our best interests at heart?

The Judicial Review is set for 24-25 June 2025.

Take Action!

Ask friends and family to sign the petition on 38degrees.org.uk



Join GARD for their online information sessions at 7-8pm on 1st, 7th or 8th May. <https://bit.ly/3EoSHPO>

Write to your MP. (This is important, every letter is counted and displays support from their constituents).

Get involved. Contact gard.secretary@gmail.com to help with the campaign.

2024 Impact Report

2024 was an eventful year for the Oxfordshire branch of CPRE, with a change of director, chair and president as well as a change of Government bringing with it planning reform. We had our challenges and our successes, which we'd like to share here.



Tree ID and recording at Dornford Lane on Blenheim Estate. The lane faces becoming a sterile corridor through Botley West solar farm

Protection and enhancement of the countryside via planning

Contributed to the national CPRE response to the new National Policy Planning Framework (NPPF) consultation.

Contributed extensively to Local Plans as they developed, including the Oxford City Local Plan and the South and Vale "Preferred Options" consultations (see planning report on page 11 for details).

Volunteers in our district committees continue to work hard responding at a level on many planning applications which impact the countryside, not always simply objecting, but also often calling for considerations around light pollution, wildlife and biodiversity impacts and traffic which can significantly improve a developments impact.

Supporting networks

Took part in Oxfordshire Environment Board's Land Use Vision Round Table with other key Oxfordshire organisations.

Supported the development and mapping of Oxfordshire's draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), outlining Oxfordshire's biodiversity priorities for nature recovery.

Our Hedgerow Heroes project cemented our relationship with Wild Oxfordshire for the fourth year running.

We continue to work, liaise and communicate regularly with our parish council networks.

Campaigning for the countryside

As part of our continued campaign against the **Botley West** solar farm we organised a well-attended walk along Dornford Lane, an ancient hedgerow under threat, which made its way onto several news channels.

A Freedom of Information request unearthed the Environment Agency's advice not to go ahead with the proposed **Abingdon Reservoir** and we submitted a detailed response to the consultation. We continue to call for a public inquiry and have now requested a Judicial Review.

We **met with MPs** Charlie Maynard (to talk about affordable housing) and Olly Glover (discussing Abingdon reservoir), continuing to nurture relationships with key decision makers.

We also supported the private '**Sunshine Bill**', aiming to make solar panels standard in all new homes. The bill secured a commitment from the Government to ensure that solar energy will form part of amended building regulations to be rolled out later in 2025. Over 10,000 responses went to MP's across the UK.

We campaigned for the successful rejection of **two solar farms**: one proposed for the middle of Otmoor on the Oxfordshire Green Belt, the other on open countryside at Godington, a tiny village near Stratton Audley. Sadly, we are seeing both of these sites go to appeal, so our fight continues.

THANK YOU for your continued support, without which none of this would have been possible.

Countryside improvement



Hedgerow Heroes

Hedgerow Heroes. Our fourth year saw hedgerow planting and rejuvenation projects in 15 different locations across Oxfordshire. We surpassed our planting target by over 1km, collectively planting approximately 3.3km of new hedgerow and rejuvenating over 600 m of hedgerow with nearly 400 volunteers, and four hedgelaying workshops training 30 people.

Dark skies. Richard Harding, our former Chair, has been delivering talks across the county, highlighting this important issue and we took our Dark Skies stall to Greener Henley's Nature Discover Day in June. We believe our campaigning on the issues around light pollution and its effect on nature, have been instrumental in steering Oxfordshire County Council to consider adopting a Dark Skies policy, subject to public consultation.

In May, we marked the completion of the current stage of our Oxford Green Belt Way improvement project (which replaced nine stiles with accessible, self-closing gates) with a celebratory walk around Nuneham Courtenay and Marsh Baldon. The project was implemented by Oxfordshire County Council's Countryside Access Team, made possible through a grant from the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE) with funding from Grundon.



Ardley Energy Recovery Facility

Community engagement

Hosted a **Countryside & Environment General Election Hustings** in the run up to the general election, chaired by CPRE national director, Roger Mortlake, attended by almost 100 members of the public.

Took part in Henley's **Great Big Green Week** with our Dark Skies stall.

We commissioned a survey into **public attitudes to the Green Belt** and found that 80% of respondents wanted the Green Belt to remain undeveloped – an increase of 10% from 10 years ago!

Teamed up with **Refugee Resource** to take a group of women on a trip to Harcourt Arboretum.

In September we joined forces with CPRE Berkshire on the county boundary in Goring and Streatley for our first ever **Countryside Day**, the CPRE network's new annual

celebration of rural England, inspiring us to protect and promote it for future generations.

We continued with our ongoing recruitment of planning volunteers, **"Green defenders"** to monitor planning applications in their local areas and feed through to the branch and local committees. We developed training material, including short videos to assist them and hope to continue to grow numbers this year.

Attended and hosted events including two **Open Gardens**, the **Oxford Green Fair**, a trip to the **Ardley Energy Recovery Facility**, plus local talks.



Countryside Day



Refugee Resource



Oxford Green Fair

Update on Botley West Solar Farm

In December 2024, the developers submitted their application for the Botley West Solar Farm to the Planning Inspectorate. The application is extensive, comprising over 200 documents, but thanks to the dedication of our volunteers, we were able to efficiently review and respond to the first stage of the consultation with our relevant representation by the February 2025 deadline.

CPRE supports the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy, but this must not come at the cost of our precious countryside.

The scale and location of this proposed development are unacceptable and would harm both the landscape and rural communities. While solar energy is vital, it should not be deployed indiscriminately across the countryside. The Climate Change Committee's forecasted need for solar energy represents just 0.6% of the land area in England – an area roughly equivalent to the land occupied by golf courses. This provides ample opportunity for decision-makers to be discerning in selecting appropriate locations for solar installations. We believe the focus should be on utilising rooftops for solar power, rather than dedicating large tracts of land.

CPRE's key concerns about the Botley West Solar Farm proposal:

- **Landscape Impact:** The site is vast and would be larger than Heathrow Airport, situated in the heart of the Oxfordshire countryside. The scale of this development would be visually overwhelming and harmful to the landscape.
- **Loss of Agricultural Land:** Over one-third of the proposed site is on prime agricultural land, which currently produces food to help feed the nation. We strongly oppose the use of such valuable land for this development.
- **Impact on the Green Belt:** A significant portion of the proposed site—more than 75%—falls within the Oxford Green Belt. This would represent a 3.1% loss of the Green Belt in Oxfordshire, potentially the largest single loss in the county's history. We strongly oppose this intrusion into the Green Belt.
- **Heritage Concerns:** The development threatens local heritage, including scheduled monuments and features of local historical importance. It does not comply with the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site Revised Management Plan 2017, a plan created by Blenheim and endorsed by West Oxfordshire District Council.
- **Flooding Impact:** We are concerned about the potential effects on surface runoff, erosion, and subsequent downstream flooding, particularly in the Cassington area.
- **Public Rights of Way (PROW):** The application underestimates the significant effects the development would have on the PROW network.
- **Biodiversity Loss:** The biodiversity improvements promised in the application appear overstated, and we believe the proposal could result in a net loss of biodiversity.



Rosemary Lewis from Stop Botley West and CPRE director, Lisa Warne, look over plans for the site

A huge thank you to our members who submitted their own relevant representations. In total, 1,115 responses were submitted to the Planning Inspectorate. By registering as an Interested Party and providing your comments, you will have the opportunity to be part of the examination process. The Inspectorate reviews all submissions and has set a timetable for the examination, with the initial Preliminary Meeting taking place on 13 May. Full information about the Preliminary Meeting and Open Floor Hearings can be found via this QR code.



We are closely monitoring the progress of the application and will continue to engage in the consultation process to ensure that CPRE's concerns are fully addressed throughout the planning stages.

Unfortunately, Botley West is not the only proposed solar development in Oxfordshire. The developers of the Noke Solar Farm have appealed, and the case will be heard by the Planning Inspectorate. Additionally, Cumnor is facing increasing pressure from solar farm proposals, including the Red House Farm Solar Power Station, which is currently in the planning process.



Do we need dark skies?

If you're a moth, a bat or a migrating bird the answer is definitely yes. Many animals navigate by the moon and stars and bright lights confuse – which is why we see moths circling around bright lights and birds flying into lit windows. Studies show less insects on lit road verges and, of course, our insects have declined by 50% in the last 20 years.

But for humans the position is less clear. Brightly lit windows certainly can disrupt our sleep patterns, a cause of a whole range of health problems. More controversially, does lighting improve security from crime? Fascinatingly many studies, from the UK and abroad, show that crime goes down when street lighting is turned off! I've been giving talks about dark skies over the past few months, and it is this latter issue which causes the most discussion. What is going on here? Is it that people avoid the dark streets? Or do assailants not like the dark? Of course, bright lights cause dark shadows – particularly when your eyes have adjusted to the light. It is, however, true that vulnerable people feel safer in brightly lit areas – so we should proceed with caution.

There is a lot we can do. Switch off

lighting when it's not needed, for example late at night, close curtains when the internal lights are on and shade external lights, so the light goes downward, where it is needed, not upward. And studies show warm light is better for wildlife than harsh blue light. You'll see many examples of bad lighting, my neighbour has two 500 watt LED floodlights on all night and, guess what, our bats have disappeared. Our Councils do have dark skies policies, and we should be working with the planners to get rid of unnecessary lighting on new developments.

CPRE has been campaigning for dark skies for many years and working with architects and lighting engineers to identify good practice. You'll find a lot of information on our website via this QR code.



Finally, I would like to add that the beauty of the stars, the milky way, the planets and comets have inspired humans for thousands of years, let's not lose them.

Richard Harding

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Joint Local Plan consultation

The Secretary of State has appointed two Planning Inspectors to conduct an Examination into the soundness and legal compliance of the Joint Local Plan.

The Inspectors are adopting a staged approach to the Examination. Part 1 will consider Matters of Legal Compliance and the Overall Housing and Employment Need and Requirement only. Part 1 Hearing Sessions will commence at 09.30am on Tuesday 3 June 2025 within The Bee House, 140 Eastern Avenue, Park Drive, Milton, Abingdon, OX14 4SB. The hearings are open to the public, and CPRE will be there.

Following consideration of these matters, the Inspectors will decide if the Plan and Examination is capable of progressing. Should they decide this is the case, additional hearings will be identified in due course to consider further matters with separate arrangements being made.

Spotlight on South Oxfordshire

Since the resignation of our Chair, Geoff Botting in autumn 2023, closely followed by the sad death of Vice Chair, Judy Crockett, the remaining members of the committee have continued to respond to consultations, and monitor and respond to planning applications across the district. In 2024 across the district we responded to 39 applications with concerns and objections regarding unplanned development, large solar farm applications, harm to the landscape, impact on dark skies by light pollution and harm to the purposes of the Oxford Green Belt, plus an additional 13 responses we submitted concerning impacts on Public Rights of Way.

Along with the CPRE Vale of White Horse District Committee we submitted a joint response to the Joint Local Plan 2041 Reg 19 consultation. We also met with members of a parish council concerned about a large solar farm proposal, we made representations at appeals and attended appeals to show CPRE's support for local communities.

The impact of the new "Grey Belt" term which applies to planning applications within the Green Belt, has already been felt with the recent approval of yet another solar farm, this time near Burcot – already twice refused by SODC. We are extremely concerned

that the Oxford Green Belt in South Oxfordshire will continue to be subject to renewable energy proposals; including more applications for Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) scattered across fields between Cowley substation and the B480 and the road to the Baldons, as well as a possible addition to the Cowley substation.

There appears to be no joined up thinking about locating solar farms and BESS close to each other which would contain the harm to the landscape and we are concerned the whole area between the A4074 and the B480 (Baldons to Greater Leys) taken over by the approved housing allocation and renewable energy developments, reducing the amenity value of the many Public Rights of Way in this area including the Oxford Green Belt Way.

On a positive note, we continue with successes in getting the potential problems of light pollution addressed, and some developments turned down due to there being no proven need.

If you're interested in getting involved with the work of the South Oxfordshire District Committee, please email admin@cpreoxon.org.uk

Becky Crockett

Local Elections 1 May 2025

As we go to press, local elections are fast approaching, including elections for Oxfordshire County Council. After the 1st May, the number of county councillors will increase from 63 to 69 elected members.

We're asking candidates to consider six key topics around: Affordable Housing, Protecting the Green Belt, Brownfield Development, Rooftop Solar, the Devolution Bill and Working Together. Read more on our website.



Are you interested in volunteering on planning issues?

We are always actively recruiting for volunteers to help us to respond to Local Plans and planning applications within our county. There is the opportunity to get involved at many levels, either just checking for planning applications which have an impact on the countryside in your local area and flagging these up to us, or helping to draft responses with assistance from both staff and current volunteers and resources we hold, or joining one of our district committees who tend to meet quarterly to discuss and agree application responses and other campaigns and activities to promote the countryside. If you are interested do get in touch with Lynda Moore, our Planning co-ordinator by emailing lyndam@cpreoxon.org.uk, or calling the office to find out more on 01491 612079.

In uncertain times it's vital to keep the pressure on!

Many of our districts are pressing ahead with Local Plans, which now must take consideration of the revised housing targets set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

The Local Plan is an important document which not only outlines the future development of the area, including the policies and proposals for new development, but also sets out the council's plans to respond to climate change and to protect the countryside and environment. CPRE are one of the few charities who actively engage on issues which are important to us to influence these Plans and with increasing pressure on the Green Belt coming from the governments "Greybelt" proposals in the NPPF it is even more critical that our voice is heard.

Oxford City are fast tracking a revised Local Plan

Following the rejection of the Oxford City Local Plan by the Inspector last summer, the council have now issued a timetable for a revised plan. The key dates we are working to are :

- 17 March to 28 April: An Early Engagement Survey.
- June/ July 2025: Reg 18, The "Preferred Options" consultation, where development sites for future development are put forward, alongside Policies which set out how the Plan can develop over the coming years.
- Nov/ Dec: Reg 19, the final stage of consultation, where the detail of the Plans are open for scrutiny only against certain legal, soundness and duty to cooperate criteria.
- April 2026 Plan submitted to the Inspector for independent examination.

This timescale is relatively fast in relation to a typical Local Plan timescale, with the Engagement survey just undertaken replacing the normally lengthier "Issues" consultation. While the survey covers many of the areas CPRE would like to see, in particular

consultation on a policy to allow housing on land currently reserved for employment, the survey was restricted in its scope and did not allow for any free text responses. We consider the survey was not a suitable replacement for an Issues Consultation which usually underpins the writing of a new Local Plan and was last done 4 years ago. We lobbied the planning department, councillors and asked our Oxford members to also write in asking for our key issues to be considered:

- Brownfield sites must be developed first
- Providing new homes for Oxford's current needs should be prioritised over new employment.
- Oxford City should provide accessible, genuinely affordable social rent housing sufficient to meet identified local need.
- Green space must be protected and interconnected
- Do not build on flood plains
- Wastewater facilities must meet Environment Agency requirements with any necessary work undertaken before development.
- New development, including supporting infrastructure, must comply with Oxfordshire's zero carbon targets

Cherwell are pushing their Local Plan through

We responded earlier this year to the Cherwell District Council final public (Reg 19) stage of their Local Plan consultation. This Plan hopes to be finalised without having to be revisited in line with the new NPPF target housing numbers. Overall, we support the approval of this Plan.

CPRE Oxfordshire have responded in detail as this Plan has progressed and we welcome that in many areas our views have been taken onboard and the Plan amended. The proposed Plan now includes:

- The withdrawal of the Green Belt site on the Land Behind the Moors in Kidlington which we strongly opposed
- The additional wording we suggested that new development should be delivered to the "highest possible energy efficient standards" in the vision
- The withdrawal of the phase

"wherever possible" in the strategy "Minimise carbon emissions and achieve set net gains in biodiversity, in delivering new development."

A 20% Biodiversity net gain target on all strategic development allocations within the plan.

- 17 Local Green spaces (LGS) in the latest Plan, up from 3 in the last round of consultation.

At this final stage of consultation, we were able to comment only on the legality, duty to cooperate and soundness of the Plan. We will have challenged the Plan on a few key areas where we feel that the Plan lacks soundness as the proposals are not effective.

The Local Green Space designation (LGS) protects local green areas of particular importance to local communities. This enables communities to identify and protect areas that are of value to them. Once designated, the LGS is subject to the same strong development restrictions as Green Belt, and new development here is ruled out other than in special circumstances. Whilst we support the 17 now in this Plan, we feel the application process has been unduly difficult and unfair for some small communities and would like to see unsuccessful applications reviewed and revisited.

We would like the council to extend the 20% Biodiversity net gain target to ALL development, including any speculative, windfall and smaller non-strategic sites.

We seek a review of the Settlement Hierarchy, which sees quite a number of smaller villages moving to a category B classification, which puts them at higher risk of seeing new developments. We feel villages without a safe route by public transport, walking or cycling to a larger settlement with access to services and amenities should fall under a lower category.

Affordable homes must be genuinely affordable and we would like to see a tightening of wording so that a minimum of 35% of all affordable accommodation will be socially rented housing.

We have grave concerns over the provision of waste water for any new

development and seek guidance that any new infrastructure is provided prior to the occupation of any development.

There has been a large increase in employment sites and we seek assurances that any necessary infrastructure for this is in place before development and that a local need is clearly demonstrated for any unallocated employment sites.

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse... there is more to support

The Joint South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Local plan has been submitted to the Inspectors, and we have now been advised that the Inspectors hearings will take place in early June. We have registered an interest to attend these meetings. We are generally very supportive of this Plan, which has a strong overall ambition for sustainable development, with some clear policies to back this up, such as a proactive Dark Skies policy to protect wildlife. Of concern is the lack of a strong, clear Green Belt policy for the districts, instead relying on the National policy, which has recently been diluted through the introduction of the "greybelt". We will be seeking a clearly written policy which gives protection to the cherished Green Belt in these districts.

West Oxfordshire ... we wait to see what May holds

The West Oxfordshire Local Plan timescales have slipped over recent years and we now expect them to be as follows going forward :

- Consultation on preferred policy options (Regulation 18): May 2025
- Publication of pre-submission draft Local Plan (Regulation 19): October 2025
- Submission for independent examination: March 2026
- Examination and adoption: 2026

We have had little feedback and remain unsure what we expect to see in the June consultation, but it is likely that the Plan will have been revised to meet the new NPPF housing targets. We wait to see if new sites are proposed, and we'll be responding to strongly oppose anything on the Green Belt.

AGM save the date

2:00pm, Saturday 7 June 2025

Eynsham Village Hall, 46 Back Lane, Eynsham, Oxfordshire, OX29 4QW

Members and non-members very welcome (although only members are eligible to vote). Members should find hard copies of the AGM agenda enclosed with this newsletter.

This year, we have decided to save both funds and carbon by providing only the AGM Agenda and candidates for election. Full information, including the full list of candidates being put forward for election, last year's AGM minutes, our Annual Report and Accounts and a Proxy Voting Form, will be available on our website from early to mid May. A link to this will be sent by email to those members for whom we hold email addresses. However, if you would like hard copies sent to you by post, we will be very happy to provide these – please just contact the Branch Office: T: 01491 612079 or E: administrator@cpreoxon.org.uk

After the AGM you are invited to visit Long Mead for a visit and walk, we

have places for 25 people. If you would like to attend, please contact the Branch Office (details above)

Speaker: Catriona Bass

We are delighted that our speaker will be Catriona Bass from Long Mead Local Wildlife Site.

Catriona Bass is a conservationist and co-owner of Long Mead Local Wildlife Site, a 10-hectare historic floodplain meadow on the River Thames near Swinford, Oxfordshire. With her partner Kevan Martin, they have restored and connected ancient wildflower meadows through the Thames Valley Wildflower Meadow Restoration Project. A passionate advocate for biodiversity and sustainable land management, Catriona also runs care farming initiatives at Long Mead, supporting adults with learning disabilities and mental health challenges through nature-based activities.



Catriona Bass

Thank you and goodbye

We are sad to say goodbye to Nick Dolden, who comes to the end of his term as Trustee and Treasurer in June. With integrity, professionalism and a meticulous attention to detail, Nick has greatly improved our financial processes over the last five years, as well as being an active member of our CPRE Cherwell district committee. In this role, he has drafted considered, well researched and influential responses on Local Plans, infrastructure proposals and planning applications which impact the countryside in the district.

Nick's calm and approachable nature, make him a greatly valued ambassador for CPRE Oxfordshire and we wish him the best of luck moving forward.

We are on the lookout for a new treasurer so if you, or someone you know, might be interested, please do get in touch.

We're also bidding farewell to Dorian Grier who has served as secretary since 2019 but, following her decision to return to the states, will no longer be able to fill the role. Alongside her secretarial duties, Dorian was active in the South District Committee and played a pivotal role in local campaigning on the development site at Clifton Hampden. Dorian was also involved in the recruitment of new staff and was always the friendly and welcoming person at the end of the telephone during the recruitment process. We welcome Debby Hallett who has taken over from Dorian.

We also recently said goodbye to Phil Phelan as trustee and chair of West Oxfordshire District Committee. An active and vocal campaigner in West Oxon District, Phil has showed huge commitment to CPRE over the years and her local knowledge of west Oxfordshire will be sorely missed.

Elizabeth Gillespie has had to step down from Chair of Oxford City District Council due to family commitments. Elizabeth was instrumental in reestablishing the Oxford City committee at the end of last year and we thank her for the time and effort reestablishing this group.

As we have had a number of trustees stepping down after serving a long period of time we are recruiting a number of roles:

- Treasurer
- Chair of West Oxon, Oxford City, Cherwell and South Oxfordshire
- We are also looking for Trustees with experience of fundraising.

The Voice reaches 1000 people twice a year. For future issues we will have advertising space for sale. If you are interested, please contact Nemone: comms@cpreoxon.org.uk

Oxfordshire Voice

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