

## **CPRE Bedfordshire**

### **Trustees' Report for the year 2018**

*“Protecting Bedfordshire’s countryside and urban green spaces for present and future generations”*

CPRE Bedfordshire is a local Bedford based charity. We are the only environmental organisation that stands up against the threats to our Bedfordshire countryside and urban green spaces from unsustainable and unsuitable development of all types.

We are affiliated to the national CPRE organisation.

During the year the pressures on our countryside and urban green spaces for new homes and other developments (new roads etc.) continued to grow right across the county as it has for the last few years, reflecting an increasing population and the growth of Milton Keynes, Cambridge and to a lesser extent Northampton.

Bedfordshire is already one of the most densely populated counties in England (ranked 13<sup>th</sup> of 47).

This pressure makes the work we do to protect our countryside all the more important.

We promote the recognition of the intrinsic value of the countryside and urban green spaces which are so important to our quality of life.

### **CPRE Bedfordshire Living Countryside Awards 2018**

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2018, we hosted our prestigious bi-annual Living Countryside Awards in the Harpur Suite at Bedford Corn Exchange with over 100 people attending - it was one of the highlights of our year!

The objective of the Living Countryside Awards is to celebrate and promote the wonderful people and projects that are making a positive impact in our county.

A record number of entries were received for this year’s Awards and we were really pleased to see so many people attending the Awards evening which was hosted by our Trustee, Martin Christopher.

The Awards were presented by HM Lord-Lieutenant of Bedfordshire, Helen Nellis in the presence of the Deputy Mayor of Luton, Cllr Mark Rivers.

New Award categories were introduced this year - “Greening Urban Spaces” and “Health and Wellbeing” - the latter recognising the importance of the countryside in supporting people’s physical and mental health.

The growing prestige of the Living Countryside Awards and their popularity is confirmed by the fact that this year for the first time, we were able to attract an overall sponsor, KSK Limited - Chartered Accountants, and also individual sponsors for each category.

Full details of the 32 projects shortlisted and the winners can be found on our website.

This activity takes up a considerable amount of resource for a small organisation such as ours but we firmly believe that the recognition it provides for the projects and those involved (mostly volunteers) is hugely important.

Our thanks go to CPRE Beds member Barry Halton for his excellent photographs of the projects.

### **Oxford - Milton Keynes - Bedford - Cambridge Arc (Corridor)**

Plans for massive development across the Oxford - Cambridge Arc continue to cause us deep concern.

Whilst we are fully supportive of East - West rail, which we see primarily as a means of reducing congestion on the principal road networks, reducing air pollution and carbon footprint. We are firmly opposed to the scale of housing development and population increase proposed across the Arc - 1 million new homes and a population increase of 1.9 million by 2050.

During the year CPRE Bedfordshire worked with other CPRE Branches across the Arc and our National Office to develop a campaign to fight against these proposals which we consider to be unsustainable and highly damaging to the Bedfordshire environment.

**The CPRE Campaign was launched in October 2018 and received a good deal of positive publicity - public awareness is growing and local residents are voicing strong opposition to the Ox-Cam proposals. This despite a deeply troubling democratic deficit caused by a complete absence of consultation or debate with local people.**

Towards the end of 2018, all the Wildlife Trusts across the Arc came together to take legal action against the government regarding the absence of a Strategic Environmental Assessment of the proposed new corridor for the Expressway from J13 of the M1 to Oxford. CPRE Bedfordshire supported the Wildlife Trusts in their action.

We have very serious concerns regarding the impact on important wildlife and landscape areas around the Greensand Ridge area including Woburn and Aspley Guise.

We believe that upgrading the current principal road network is a more sustainable option than ploughing a new motorway class road through pristine countryside - the prime objective of which is the opening up of new areas of countryside for housing development.

### **Local Plans - Central Bedfordshire, Bedford Borough and Luton Borough**

Local Plans allocate and designate land for various uses over the next 20 years (until 2035 in most cases) so it's vitally important that we use our resources to influence Local Plans positively to ensure the long term protection of our countryside and urban green spaces.

They set out the types of development that should take place and the locations.

CPRE Bedfordshire fully recognise the need for new homes in both urban and rural areas (especially affordable homes) and for areas of employment etc. Getting the balance right is important.

**As well as engaging in the Local Plan Consultation process, CPRE Bedfordshire's other principal objective has been one of communication - improving local democracy.**

**That is, to ensure that Members, Town & Parish Councils and the General Public are informed of the detail of the Plans and how they will impact on the Bedfordshire countryside and urban green spaces.**

In addition, we are very keen to ensure that all communities rural and urban, have sufficient affordable homes, particularly those for social rent. For this reason, we have been campaigning to ensure that minimum levels of affordable housing of all types are specified in the Local Plans. They are crucial to the vitality and sustainability of all communities.

During 2018 CPRE at a national level undertook a detail investigation of the situation regarding affordable homes together with the housing charity, Shelter. This detailed the massive shortages of this type of accommodation across the country and the causes of the shortfall.

### **Luton Borough Council Local Plan 2011 - 2031**

This was approved in 2017.

### **Central Bedfordshire Council's (CBC's) Local Plan 2015-2035**

CBC's Local Plan was finally submitted for approval by a government appointed Inspector in April 2017 and a public Hearing is expected to be announced for May 2018.

Original plans were for the development of a massive 60,000 new homes over the plan period.

**Thanks to the work of CPRE Bedfordshire in bringing the enormous scale of the proposal to the public attention, the final submitted Local Plan was reduced to 40,000 new homes.**

This is still very high, representing the equivalent of 10 new towns the size of Ampthill and almost all of the development will take place on Greenfield sites.

The entire housing needs of the people of Central Bedfordshire can be met with around 40% of the number of houses planned. We believe that planning to encourage large numbers of people to migrate into Central Bedfordshire from elsewhere in the UK is unsustainable.

Central Bedfordshire Council have said that within 6 months of their Local Plan gaining approval, they intend to review it based on the government's programme for development across the Oxford - Cambridge Arc.

They have laid out in their Local Plan the additional areas for development which will take the Local Plan back up the 60,000 new homes level. Something that we will vigorously oppose.

In Central Bedfordshire proposed development in the Green Belt and across the Chilterns AONB are of particular concern.

### **Bedford Borough Council's (BBC's) Local Plan 2030**

BBC started 2018 with a Local Plan for the 20 year period 2015 to 2035 containing plans to develop around 20,000 new homes.

This Local Plan incorporated one of the most outrageous and potentially damaging development proposal for a Greenfield site ever seen in north Bedfordshire.

A New Town of at least 4,500 new homes and a Parkway station to be located at Sharnbrook/Colworth on beautiful open countryside to the west of the small village of Souldrop.

Thanks to CPRE Bedfordshire who joined forces with Souldrop Parish Council, The Campaign Group “Keep North Bedfordshire Green”, the people of Sharnbrook and those of North Bedfordshire generally. Recognition of the proposals was raised and in the face of growing local opposition and a looming local election in 2018, BBC removed the New Town and the Parkway station from their Local Plan in September 2018 stating, unbelievably, that noise issues were the reason.

At the same time BBC decided to reduce the Local Plan period to 2030 and the number of homes accordingly to approx. 15,000.

This Local Plan 2030 was submitted to the government for approval in December 2018 and the Public Hearing is expected to commence on 27<sup>th</sup> May 2018.

In this new Local Plan 2030, BBC announced, in the same way as CBC, that they would review their Local Plan 6 months after gaining approval in order to take account of the government’s programme for development across the Oxford - Cambridge Arc.

This Review would reconsider the four New Town proposals previously proposed during the Local Plan 2035 consultations. We consider the Review to be undemocratic and we will oppose any unsustainable New Town proposals.

There are several areas of this Local Plan that we approve of e.g.

- The proposed construction of a 1,000 new homes (a medium sized village) at the old brickworks brownfield site at Stewartby.
- The redevelopment of the Bedford urban area, provided that sufficient high quality green space is included and that public consultation is substantially improved.

We remain very concerned by the large number of new homes (500) proposed for each of the “Key Rural Centres” of Sharnbrook, Clapham, Bromham and Great Barford. These are very significant developments indeed for these communities - in some cases increasing housing numbers by 50%.

Overall, the housing numbers remain very large - the entire housing needs of the people of Bedford Borough can be met with around 50% of the proposed numbers of new homes.

### **Planning Issues Generally**

Our planning volunteers across Bedfordshire have responded to a large number of individual planning applications that have been the cause of concern.

Due to our work, in most cases together with the local community, we have had success in saving many important areas of countryside and urban green spaces from inappropriate development.

## **Events Organised for Members**

### **Planning Workshop**

In March 2018 we held a day long Planning Workshop open to all councillors (members and non-members) from across Bedfordshire and interested individuals.

The focal point of the Workshop was a series of interactive lectures from Paul Miner, Head of Strategic Plans and Devolution from CPRE National Office. Followed by an interactive exercise led by one of our Trustees, Susan Lynch.

The workshop was very well received and we intend to repeat the Workshop but with different content in 2019.

Several Parish Councils became CPRE members following the Workshop.

### **CPRE Bedfordshire - Representation on Important Regional and Government Organisations**

During 2018 CPRE Bedfordshire Trustees and/or volunteers attended meetings of the following organisations in order to ensure that the aims and objectives of our members are taken into consideration in their decision making processes:

- **South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (PDIIDG Group)**
- **Bedfordshire Local Nature Partnership - Trustee is Board member**
- **Highways England, Stakeholder Group Meetings - with regard to highways developments in our county and those impacting on our county**
- **England's Economic Heartland - Transport Forum**

### **Branch Matters**

#### **Volunteers**

We welcomed Paul Jenkins as a new Trustee during 2017.

We are in urgent need of more planning volunteers particularly for the Central Bedfordshire and Luton areas. The only experience people need is a commitment to the countryside, our urban green spaces and CPRE values. Full training and mentoring will be provided.

We are very grateful to everyone who gives their time to CPRE Bedfordshire, ensuring that future generations will be able to enjoy our beautiful Bedfordshire countryside and urban green spaces.

#### **Office issues**

#### **Social media activities**

Our 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Fundraising Appeal was very successful in attracting financial support for our charity and we thank all those who contributed to it very much indeed.

Social Media is a very important part of life these days especially if we wish to get our message out to a wider audience.

For this reason, part of the funds raised have been used to employ a part-time Social Media person - a Social Media Strategy has now been developed for CPRE Bedfordshire. It will be implemented during 2019.

#### **New Office**

At the end of 2018 the Trustees agreed to move to a new office within the CVS Building in Bromham Road, Bedford. The new office will provide slightly larger accommodation allowing us to take on additional volunteers and improved IT services.

In addition we will be able to use the meeting facilities of the CVS building. Overall we expect that the move will be cost neutral compared to our current location.

The move took place in early March 2019.

### **Branch Manager**

The Trustees would like to express their sincere thanks to our Branch Manager, Susan Walls for her work and commitment during the year. She has had made a very positive impact on every facet of our work during her first year in particular increasing our presence on social media.

**Finally, on behalf of the Trustees I would like to thank you, our members for your continued and highly valued support without which our work to protect the Bedfordshire countryside and urban green spaces would not be possible.**

Gerry Sansom

**Chair, CPRE Bedfordshire**