

# Trustees' Report and Annual Accounts 2020



The countryside charity  
Bedfordshire

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

CPRE Bedfordshire, the countryside charity, is passionate about making Bedfordshire a better place for everyone to live, work and enjoy. We are the only environmental organisation that stands up against threats to our Bedfordshire countryside and urban green spaces from unsustainable and unsuitable development of all types. We are affiliated to the national CPRE charity and our powerful combination of local knowledge and national influence make us very effective.

The pressures on our countryside and urban green spaces from new homes and other developments such as new roads and warehousing continues to grow across the county reflecting an increasing population and the growth of the surrounding area including Milton Keynes and Cambridge. 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 even 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. The Covid-19 pandemic has brought this into sharp focus and highlighted just how essential our countryside and urban green spaces are to our physical and emotional wellbeing.

Responding to the hugely important issues of the Climate Change Emergency and of Biodiversity Loss are also at the forefront of all the actions we take to ensure our vision of a beautiful and thriving Bedfordshire countryside that enriches all our lives.

## **CPRE Bedfordshire Trustees 2020**

Gerry Sansom – Chairman

Paul Jenkins – Vice Chair

Chris Hall – Honorary Treasurer

John English

Martin Christopher

Mary Walsh

Susan Lynch

Charity Name: Bedfordshire Branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England

Name used: CPRE Bedfordshire

Charity Number: 1023435

Registered Address: 43, Bromham Road, Bedford MK40 2AA

# Summary of 2020

2020 has been a challenging year, but CPRE Bedfordshire staff and volunteers quickly adapted to new ways of doing things and have been working hard to make the Bedfordshire countryside a better place for everyone to live, work and enjoy. Here are just some of the things we achieved in 2020.

## Protecting our countryside

We've enjoyed working with local action groups, communities and parish councils to help deliver positive outcomes across Bedfordshire:

**Swineshead** – we joined Pertenhall & Swineshead Parish Council and a local Action Group in their effort to stop a local farmer from destroying around 800 metres of field hedgerow.

**Willington** – we made a Call-In request to support Willington Parish Council's ambition to decide where development takes place in their community through their Neighbourhood Plan.

**Harrold Lake** – we supported Harrold Village Action Group in their opposition to a proposed development in an unsustainable location on the edge of the Lake in a location which had previously been rejected by the Harrold Parish Council Neighbourhood Development Plan Group for such a large development.

**Clifton** – we worked with the Clifton Action Group and local residents, who responded in significant numbers to an application for 39 houses on an unsuitable location, leading to a positive outcome for the community.

**Eaton Bray** – The Bower Lane Action Group together with the Parish Council and supported by CPRE Bedfordshire, won the battle to protect over 7 ha of Green Belt east of the village and within the setting of an area of valued landscape to local residents.

**Langford** – CPRE Bedfordshire and Langford Parish Council vigorously opposed the proposed development of 55 new homes that were to be built in countryside, on the northern edge of the village and close to the River Ivel. The village's Neighbourhood Plan was nearing completion and this site had not been allocated for development within it.

## Examinations, consultations and applications

Our team have responded to a wide variety of applications, consultations and inquiries:

- Together with CPRE Hertfordshire we strongly objected to the expansion of London Luton Airport from 18 to 32 million passengers per annum.
- A Briefing Document was produced in response to requests from Town and Parish Council members and non-members who asked for our views on Bedford Borough Council's Issues and Options Consultation.
- CPRE Bedfordshire's planning volunteers were present at the final stage of the Examination by Government appointed Inspectors into Central Bedfordshire Council's Local Plan 2035.

## New website

We launched our new website in January 2020 which is helping us to reach even more people. New features include:

- Separate sections for each Local Authority so that you can find the news closest to you.
- Our blog – during 2020 our contributors explored the theme ‘celebrating the everyday’.
- A days out section – filled with walks and places to visit

## Lockdown

During lockdown we helped people connect to the nature on their doorsteps through:

- Our lockdown photo competition – our most popular to date!
- Sharing reading suggestions, tips and ideas on our website and social media channels
- The summer edition of Bedfordshire Matters – packed full of features and news

## Volunteering

Volunteers are very much at the heart of CPRE Bedfordshire and make a real difference to our work.

- During Volunteer’s Week in June we were pleased be one of the first ten CPRE groups to launch Assemble, our new volunteer management system.
- We’ve been delighted to welcome a number of new volunteers to the team during 2020, including some talented photographers who will be helping us develop our photo library.



Photo: Jon Riley

# Trustee's report 2020

## COVID-19

The pandemic has dramatically impacted our lives during 2020 including the ways in which we have been obliged to work. Our physical meetings have been replaced by Zoom or Teams virtual meetings which have been a steep learning curve for us all, and our office has been out of bounds for much of the year, making communication and the administration of our work more challenging. We thank members for their patience and continued support during this period.

On a positive note, many Bedfordshire residents have been introduced to new areas of the Bedfordshire countryside, taking advantage of our wonderful "Natural Health Service" and recognising what a varied and precious countryside we have in our county.

Many more people, members and non-members, have accessed our new website to read our blog and articles, particularly those relating to exploring the countryside and country walks.

Our 2019 AGM was delayed from April until September 2020 due to Covid-19 restrictions and we'd like to say a big thank you to those members who were able to attend a shortened virtual event on Zoom. This enabled us to conform to the Charity Commission's legal requirements.

## Planning and campaigning

### Oxford – Milton Keynes – Bedford – Cambridge Arc

Plans for massive development across the Oxford – Cambridge Arc continue to cause us and our colleagues at CPRE branches across the Arc serious concern. While we are fully supportive of East – West Rail as a means of reducing congestion on the principal road networks, reducing air pollution and carbon footprint we are against the chosen route which will destroy the north Bedfordshire countryside. We are also opposed to the sheer scale of housing development and population increase proposed across the Arc - one million new homes and a population increase of 1.9 million by 2050.

We are pleased to report, that following the hugely effective campaign work of all CPRE charities across the Arc which encouraged residents to make their concerns known to local politicians through the ballot box, government announced during 2020 their intention to withdraw plans for a motorway class expressway linking Junction 13 of the M1 to Oxford. This would have had a devastating impact on the countryside around the Woburn, Woburn Sands and Aspley Guise area so we congratulate Government on this decision.

We also hope that government, through the introduction of its Levelling – Up agenda, is now listening to our argument that the scale of development proposed for the Arc is unsustainable, and that a policy of more equitable distribution of industrial and housing growth across the country should be pursued.

We wait to see if Government rhetoric is turned into action on this important issue as the current development plans for Bedfordshire reflecting government ambitions for the Ox- Cam Arc, remain the cause for very considerable concern.

## **Local Democracy in Crisis**

Over the last few years with the decline in local newspapers, and local news generally, CPRE has noted with growing concern that government and local authorities are introducing new QUANGO's in order, it seems, to undermine the local democratic process.

During 2019/2020, across the Oxford Cambridge Arc, this has been achieved by the formation of Growth Boards and an Ox-Cam group of unelected Local Authority Chief Executives. The Growth Board which incorporates Bedfordshire is called the Central Area Growth Board.

The purpose of these groups is to determine so called growth strategies (e. g. new roads, new towns, new industrial areas etc. etc.) for the Arc without them being subjected to local consultation of residents or stringent Environmental Impact Assessment. Having created these growth strategies the fear is that they will then be implemented by yet to be created, Development Corporations which, through government legislation will be able to implement their decisions without the need for a mandate from local residents.

Alternatively, local authorities could also implement the growth strategies through their Local Plans claiming that they are bound by decisions already taken by the Growth Boards that have obtained government approval.

As an organisation, CPRE is very committed to Local Plans and plans for the Ox – Cam Arc which are developed in an open and democratic manner and subject to stringent Environmental Impact Assessments.

CPRE Bedfordshire will continue to campaign against any attempt to reduce the influence of local Bedfordshire people in the democratic process.

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

Local Plans allocate and designate land for various uses over the next 15 or 20 years 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. Local Plans set out the types of development that should take place and the locations as well as identifying areas that should be protected from development.

CPRE Bedfordshire fully recognises the need for new homes in both urban and rural areas - especially affordable homes - and for areas of employment but 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 to improve local democracy and 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 2020 our planning volunteers spent many hours researching issues on the Local Plan and attending various meetings and hearings.

## **Luton Borough Council Local Plan 2011 – 2031 and Luton Airport Expansion**

This was approved in 2017 but during 2020 one of our Trustees has been working with CPRE Hertfordshire and we have submitted a joint response to LBC's consultation on their plans to double the capacity of Luton Airport, increasing flight movements to 240,000 per year.

Luton airport's plans will have a significant impact on the whole of Bedfordshire, ranging from the effect of the expansion plans on public green space in Luton Borough itself to the provision of

additional housing for employees in Central Bedfordshire and elsewhere plus warehousing, offices, environmental impact of flights. In our view these plans are completely at odds with the Climate Change Agenda recently signed up to by Luton Borough Council which requires a substantial reduction in carbon emissions.

During 2020, we have continued to monitor the situation and have joined with our East of England Regional Group of CPRE charities to consider and respond to, proposed new Flight Path and Stacking proposals that could impact a very wide area.

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

CBC's Local Plan was submitted for approval by government appointed Inspectors in April 2018. In September 2019, following the Public Hearings the Inspectors wrote to CBC expressing their deep concern regarding the Local Plan and asking for major revisions.

Their areas of concern were precisely those highlighted by CPRE Bedfordshire namely:

- Unsustainable development within the Green Belt
- The A6-M1 Link Road that will slice through the Bedfordshire Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), damage ancient woodlands and is entirely in the Green Belt
- Large scale housing developments proposed without any detailed analysis of the impact on infrastructure or evidence of need
- A proposed review of the Local Plan which would have increased housing numbers by a further 20,000 homes

In a deliberate action designed to frustrate the Inspector's decision-making process, Central Bedfordshire Council gave planning permission for the highly controversial A6 – M Link Road during the Examination process. CPRE Bedfordshire and many other environmental organisations including the AONB Board itself then requested the Secretary of State, Robert Jenrick MP to "call-in" the application for a detailed examination. Mr Jenrick refused to do so saying that it was a "local matter". This despite the fact that AONB's are internationally recognised areas of environmental importance – there are just 37 in the whole of England!

We were extremely pleased that during 2020, Crispin Truman the Chief Executive of the national CPRE charity took action and wrote personally to the Leader of Central Bedfordshire Council, the CEO of SEMLEP and the Minister at the Department for Transport asking them to think again.

CPRE Bedfordshire will continue to campaign against this act of environmental vandalism until the bulldozers start their work.

With regard to their Local Plan 2035, Central Bedfordshire Council responded to the Inspectors concerns in 2020 and held a further round of consultations which CPRE Bedfordshire responded to. Further public hearings were held in December 2020 which CPRE Bedfordshire planning volunteers attended and gave evidence.

Unfortunately, Robert Jenrick, the Secretary of State for the Ministry of Homes Communities & Local Government (MHC&LG) announced that when examining Local Plans, it was the role of government appointed inspectors to support local authorities in their attempts to obtain government approval.

We are very concerned indeed that this will mean that the Inspectors will now merely rubber stamp Local Plans rather than subject them to detailed analysis as they have done in the case of

Central Bedfordshire Council's Local Plan 2035. We are fearful that Mr. Jenrick's recent assurances regarding protecting the Green Belt from unnecessary development will mean nothing as did his previous reassurances regarding the government's intention to protect England's AONB's from development. The Inspectors final report is expected during February 2021.

### **Bedford Borough Council's Local Plan 2030**

The Plan was eventually approved by Inspectors at the end of December 2019 and adopted by Bedford Borough Council (BBC) in January 2020.

In our view, BBC are carrying large contingencies in terms of the number of new homes already built in the borough and this was confirmed by independent evidence provided by the government's own planning advisers during 2020. This is more than 1,000 homes - equivalent to a village the size of Oakley. It will enable BBC to reduce by 50% the 2,000 homes they have allocated to the Key Rural Service Centres – 500 each to Sharnbrook, Clapham, Bromham and Great Barford, all of which will be built on greenfield sites.

We have been campaigning during 2020 to ensure that Parish Councils and residents of these communities are aware of BBC's position so that they can encourage the council to think again and avoid the unnecessary destruction of our countryside.

The Inspectors report stated that BBC should Review their Local Plan 2030 within 3 years of adoption taking into consideration government proposals for development across the Ox-Cam Arc. This Review commenced with the "Issues & Options Consultation" in July 2020 and a copy of CPRE Bedfordshire's response to this consultation can be found on our website.

### **East/West Rail – announcement in 2020 of Route E as preferred choice**

Members will know that we are extremely concerned by the huge impact that the choice of Route E for East/West Rail will have on development in the North Bedfordshire countryside. Developers are already putting forward proposals for new towns in areas of open countryside close to the River Great Ouse and its valley area which is so important for biodiversity.

In the winter edition of Beds Matters, we published detailed maps of the "call for sites" in North Bedfordshire these make clear the massive environmental damage that will be done if any of these proposals are allowed to go ahead. We are working with Action Groups and Parish Councils across North Bedfordshire in an effort to change the proposed route of East/West Rail to the southern Route B which we believe is a much more sensible option. It will protect the sensitive North Bedfordshire countryside and the River Great Ouse Valley from excessive development.

Bedford is the only conurbation along the East West Rail route that wishes to see a freight carrying line go through the centre of their town/city – all others prefer a Parkway station well outside the centre of population. The route will eventually carry freight and passengers from the East Coast ports to Swindon and beyond.

The Inspectors have listened to CPRE Bedfordshire by removing the six-month review and instead have said that BBC should review their Plan within years of adoption taking into consideration government proposals for development across the Ox-Cam Arc.

Although we still have significant concerns regarding some elements of the Local Plan we nevertheless congratulate Bedford Borough Council on their achievement.



## Planning success stories

Our planning volunteers across Bedfordshire have responded to a large number of individual planning applications that have been the cause of concern. By working with parish councils, local action groups and the community we have had success in saving many important areas of countryside and urban green spaces from inappropriate development.

**In Willington planning permission was refused** following a CPRE Bedfordshire call in request. This was in response to serious concerns expressed by the Parish Council and CPRE Bedfordshire asked the Secretary of State, Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, to use his legal powers to review Bedford Borough Council's decision to approve a planning application for 46 homes in Willington.

**CPRE Bedfordshire helped save an important hedgerow** when we joined Pertenhall & Swineshead Parish Council and a Local Action Group in their effort to stop a local farmer from destroying around 800 metres of field hedgerow in Swineshead.

**Central Bedfordshire Council refused planning permission for 39 homes** on land off Pedley Lane in Clifton for a third time. CPRE Bedfordshire worked with the Clifton Action Group (CAG) and residents, who responded in significant numbers to the application, leading to a positive outcome for the community.

Eaton Bray's Bower Lane Action Group together with the Parish Council and supported by CPRE Bedfordshire **won the battle to protect over 7 ha of Green Belt** east of the village and within the setting of an area of valued landscape to residents.

**Langford village landscape was saved by a landmark Appeal decision** when CPRE Bedfordshire and Langford Parish Council vigorously opposed the proposed development of 55 new homes that were to be built in countryside, on the northern edge of the village and close to the River Ivel.

Harrold Village Action group, supported by CPRE Bedfordshire, **won their battle to protect Harrold Lake**, north of the village of Harrold from the development of over 90 new homes.



Proposed site of development in Harrold. Photo: Barry Halton

## BRANCH MATTERS

### Volunteering – the heart of CPRE Bedfordshire

In early 2020 we were part of a group of ten CPRE areas who started using Assemble – a volunteer management platform. This allows us to advertise volunteering opportunities on our local and national website and provides a smooth recruitment process. Covid-19 made recruitment and training more challenging but we still recruited seven new volunteers.

We are 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.

### Raising awareness of our work

In January 2020 we had a makeover! This is part of the new branding for CPRE nationally and portrays a modern, positive vision for the countryside and represents the landscapes people know and love. The new look takes inspiration from our heritage, using the same rich green from our original logo from the 1920s at the heart of our new brand. By introducing ourselves as ‘CPRE Bedfordshire, the countryside charity’ it is immediately clear what we focus on and that we’re a charity – so need support. Our website, banners and leaflets were all refreshed and Bedfordshire Matters magazine not only got a new look but was expanded to include more in-depth article across a range of topics. This has all been well received by members and supporters.

Our social media presence has been growing over the last few years and really came into its own during the lockdown enabling us to keep in touch with our followers. As people came to recognise the importance of the countryside on their doorstep, we shared a range of local information to inspire them.



Photo: Craig Lymm

Our lockdown photo competition proved popular with bugs, birds and butterflies, gardens and local nature being snapped by people of all ages.

Celebrating the Everyday was the theme for our blog which turned out to be very fitting for 2020! Features on books to read, local walks and the connection between wellbeing and nature were all popular and the final feature of the year “Walking Through History” was a huge success as people searched for different places to walk over the Christmas break.

## Representing our members

CPRE Bedfordshire representation on important regional and government organisations

During 2020 CPRE Bedfordshire Trustees and 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 was Board member in 2020**
- **Highways England, Stakeholder Group Meetings – with regard to highways developments in our county and those impacting on our county**
- **England's Economic Heartland – Strategic Transport Forum**
- **London Green Belt Council – Member**

## Funding

Covid-19 made funding more difficult as much of the funds were directed to front line services. We are extremely grateful to all the members, donors and grant makers who supported CPRE Bedfordshire during this time.

## Manager and Staff

The Trustees would like to express their sincere thanks to our Manager, Lois Wright for the excellent work she has done this year in the most difficult of circumstances. We look forward to CPRE Bedfordshire moving forward under her strong leadership.

We would also like to thank Shelly Dennison our Digital Engagement Officer for the work she has done implementing a successful media strategy and introducing the new branding. It has brought more people to our website and taken our message to a wider range of people right across Bedfordshire and beyond.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my fellow Trustees and our volunteers for their incredible commitment and hard work during the year.

**Finally, on behalf of the Trustees I would like to thank you, our members and others who have supported us, 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**

**February 2020**

## CPRE Bedfordshire – 2020 Annual Accounts

### Income and Expenditure Account

| Year ending                             | 31st December 2020 | 31st December 2019 |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|
| <b>INCOME</b>                           | <b>£</b>           | <b>£</b>           |
| Branch Shares                           | 8,686.19           | 8,656.18           |
| Raffle                                  | 0.00               | 61.50              |
| Restricted Grants, Donations & Legacies | 371.00             | 11,000.00          |
| Fighting Fund                           | 370.00             | 0.00               |
| General Grants, Donations & Legacies    | 18,324.01          | 11,782.90          |
| Business Account Interest               | 16.99              | 53.02              |
| Event/Presentation Revenues             | 285.00             | 0.00               |
| Neighbourhood Planning Workshop         | 1,536.00           | 345.00             |
| Reclaim of Legal Fees Retainer          | 1,666.80           | 0.00               |
| Gift Aid income tax refunds from HMRC   | 1,440.50           | 1,686.19           |
| <b>Total income</b>                     | <b>32,696.49</b>   | <b>33,584.79</b>   |
| <b>EXPENDITURE</b>                      |                    |                    |
| Postage                                 | 528.00             | 291.28             |
| Beds Matters Printing                   | 1,682.38           | 2,637.34           |
| Printing, Photocopying                  | 19.38              | 78.63              |
| Travel Expenses                         | 0.00               | 314.95             |
| Room Hire/Refreshments                  | 0.00               | 173.39             |
| Adverts, publications & presentation    | 286.00             | 25.00              |
| Strategy Workshop Expenses              | 694.13             | 0.00               |
| Events Charges                          | 628.60             | 122.71             |
| Staff Salary costs                      | 19,610.76          | 19,503.80          |
| National membership subscriptions       | 25.00              | 25.00              |
| Staff recruitment advertising           | 0.00               | 240.00             |
| LCA Costs                               | 0.00               | 2,400.00           |
| Miscellaneous                           | 10.80              | 18.75              |
| <b>Sub total</b>                        | <b>23,485.05</b>   | <b>25,830.85</b>   |
| Costs of Bedford Office                 |                    |                    |
| Rent                                    | 5,195.45           | 4,821.86           |
| Insurance                               | 327.67             | 323.44             |
| Office Consumables                      | 30.58              | 22.17              |
| Telephone/IT                            | 283.28             | 787.45             |
| Relocation costs                        | 0.00               | 1,456.77           |
| <b>Total Office costs</b>               | <b>5837</b>        | <b>7,411.69</b>    |
| <b>Total expenditure</b>                | <b>29,322.03</b>   | <b>33,242.54</b>   |
| <b>Surplus/(Deficit)</b>                | <b>£3,374.46</b>   | <b>£342.25</b>     |

| Year ending                        | 31st December 2020 | 31st December 2019 |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| <b>ASSETS &amp; LIABILITIES</b>    | £                  | £                  |
| Cheque Account                     | 1,865.46           | 1,357.99           |
| Business Account                   | 23,359.53          | 20,492.54          |
| Cash in Hand                       | 8.25               | 8.25               |
| Total                              | <b>25,233.24</b>   | <b>21,858.78</b>   |
| <b>BRANCH FUNDS</b>                |                    |                    |
| Brought Forward from Previous Year | 21,858.78          | 21,516.53          |
| Excess Income over Expenditure     | 3,374.46           | 342.25             |
| Carried Forward                    | £25,233.24         | £21,858.78         |



Chris Hall - Treasurer

Date: 31/1/2021

#### INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REPORT

I have examined the foregoing Income and Expenditure Account and Balance Sheet. In my opinion they give a true and fair view of the state of the Branch's affairs as at 31st December 2020.

Margaret Carpenter - Independent Examiner

Date: 3/2/2021