



Bedfordshire Matters



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Celebrating 15 years of the Living Countryside Awards

Since our Living Countryside Awards began in 2008, we've celebrated the best of Bedfordshire. From building restorations to wildlife friendly farming, from food producers to school gardens, we've seen an amazing array of projects from all around the county. Since we started, we've run the awards nine times and 2023 will be the tenth. We've had 56 winning projects and given out 96 other awards.

Early days

CPRE Bedfordshire was one of the first local CPREs to start an awards programme. Our 2008 winners were a diverse group including the Walled Garden at Stockwood Discovery Centre in Luton, the Castle Close Wildlife and Heritage Site in Sharnbrook and Moggerhanger House and Park. At that time the scheme was called 'countryside and design' awards and the categories covered landscape, historic buildings, vernacular buildings and new buildings.

The range of projects covered by the awards quickly expanded and the following year the categories included landscape improvement, historic landscape, countryside craft and leisure and infrastructure landscape. New categories added in later years included sustainable enterprise, young people and local food and drink.

Changing emphasis

In recent years we've seen a change in the kinds of groups and projects entering. In 2018 we introduced categories dedicated to urban greening and health and wellbeing. These are often community-based projects, bringing new life to forgotten corners and helping to tackle mental and physical health issues in outdoor settings.

Going digital

The 2021 awards looked a little different to those of previous years. The pandemic meant that we decided on a digital first approach and many of the entrants told us about how they had adapted to the challenges of Covid. We looked at new ways to engage with the projects, including commissioning short films of the winners and providing entrants with digital assets to use on their websites and social media. You can still watch the films via our YouTube channel @cprebedfordshire.

Giving you a say

2021 was also the first year that we gave you a say. Over 3,000 votes were cast in the Bedfordshire Choice category, which saw Treewell Community Farm take the top spot. We'll be doing this again this year so

keep an eye on our website and social media for information on how to get involved.

Repeat winners

Projects and organisations can enter in more than one year if they can show that the project has developed or that they have started something new.

In 2008 the Castle Close Wildlife and Heritage Site in Sharnbrook won a CPRE Mark in the landscape category, ten years later they won a second CPRE Mark for biodiversity and landscape improvement. In 2008 we described the project as "A piece of formerly neglected land next to a recently developed housing estate now managed by local volunteers for the benefit of the village. New pathways lead to an ancient earthwork and ponds as well as mature woodland and open grass areas."



Cover Photo: Sheep from Bevistan Dairy (Living Countryside Award 2018 Winners)



By 2018 our judges could describe the site as “a haven of peace and quiet in a busy village.” They praised the active volunteer group who “clear undergrowth, manage trees, repair bird boxes and undertake regular plant and wildlife surveys. A stag beetle colony has recently been discovered and a boardwalk with information boards added.”

Since 2018 they have commissioned a totem pole carved with some of the invertebrates found on the site. It is about 10 foot high, carved in oak by two local wood carvers, a fantastic visual representation of some of the species found on the site.

Don't miss our 'The Living Countryside Awards in 25 photos' feature on the website. All the photographs were taken by Barry Halton, who has worked on the Living Countryside Awards with us since they were launched in 2008. For this series we've chosen some of his most striking and unusual images, alongside more traditional pictures.

We've added the complete back catalogue of Living Countryside Award brochures to our website so that you can browse through 15 years of amazing projects at your leisure!

Just go to www.cprebeds.org.uk/resources/, select Living Countryside Awards from the topic menu and hit the 'filter resources' button.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE
**LIVING
COUNTRYSIDE
AWARDS**



The countryside charity
Bedfordshire

2008

The first awards were held. There is a focus on landscape and built heritage with categories covering historic, vernacular and new buildings. 19 projects are entered with 6 CPRE Marks awarded.



2009

The awards now aim “to recognise landowners, individuals and commercial users of the land who are making special efforts to preserve and enhance the visual appearance and biodiversity of Bedfordshire.”

2010

Tony Juniper (now Chair of Natural England) presents the awards, saying “Our landscape protects our wildlife, is a source of food and is valuable to our health and well-being... Climate Change is bringing incredible challenges but individuals can make a huge difference - hence the importance of the projects highlighted in tonight's Awards.”

2011

The awards are presented by Peter Kendal, President of the National Farmers Union, himself a farmer in Bedfordshire.

2012

The awards are held at the RSPB HQ in Sandy. Dr Mike Clarke, CEO of the RSPB said, “I am delighted to host these excellent Awards in our historic Meeting Room in front of such a large and enthusiastic crowd and to be working with CPRE locally as well as nationally.”

2014

The awards are held in Moggerhanger Park and presented by by HM Lord-Lieutenant of Bedfordshire Helen Nellis, who became a huge supporter of the Living Countryside Awards.

2016

A Youth Award is introduced, with schools and individual young people entering. Two schools, one in Luton and one in Woburn Sands, receive the top prize - CPRE Marks.

2018

The biggest number of applications yet with 32 projects shortlisted across six categories – including new awards for Greening Urban Spaces and Health & Wellbeing

2021

The awards go digital in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Over 3,000 public votes were cast in the new Bedfordshire Choice category.

2023

CPRE Bedfordshire celebrates 15 years of the Living Countryside Awards

Living Countryside awards 2023

We are delighted to announce the three categories in this year's Living Countryside Awards.

Grassroots and green shoots

This category celebrates community action and volunteering, it recognises community groups and projects that are making a difference to the natural environment and the community in which they are based.

Made in Bedfordshire

This category champions local food, drink and crafts, recognising local producers of food, drink, arts and crafts who through their work, either directly or indirectly enhance the rural environment and the rural economy.

Keep it wild

This category celebrates projects that nurture nature, recognising groups that are working to improve biodiversity

Bedfordshire Choice

Alongside the three categories we will be repeating 2021's popular Bedfordshire Choice award. This award goes to the project that best promotes a living and thriving countryside as chosen by the people of Bedfordshire. Details of how you can get involved will be announced once entries close on 30th April.

Find out more about the kinds of project we're looking for and how to apply on our website. www.cprebeds.org.uk/discover/2023-awards/



Chair's column

Martin Christopher



We are all increasingly aware of the threats to the natural environment arising from human activity. Many of us have witnessed a decline in bird life and other species, more rivers and beaches with higher levels of pollution and the potentially dangerous levels of particulates in the air that we breathe.

There are sadly many examples of the lasting and severe damage that the UK's ecosystems have sustained in recent years. One example that has gained media attention is the massive level of marine life deaths off the northeast coast of England which, it has been suggested, is likely to have been caused by the release of toxins during dredging operations in the Tees estuary in connection with the planned Freeport. Thousands of crustaceans – crabs, lobsters and other shellfish – are reported to have died with a devastating effect on the local fishing industry.

Examples such as this are fuelling the demand for actions to be taken to halt these catastrophic events. Recently, the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) – a body established to monitor the UK's observance of environmental regulation – published a damning report on England's performance in meeting the Government's targets for improvement. Of the 32 trends assessed across the natural environment, only nine saw any improvement. The Chair of the OEP said in her report that "progress on delivery of the (Government's) 25 Year Environment Plan has fallen far short of what is needed to meet Government's ambition to leave the environment in a better state for future generations". The report concluded by stating: "Overall, we do not think the current pace and scale of action will deliver the changes necessary to improve the environment in England sufficiently, as required by the Environment Act 2021".

To compound the problem a further concern is the potential impact of the "Retained EU Law Bill" which is currently being considered in Parliament. The aim of this proposed legislation is to revoke many of the 4,000 EU laws and regulations by which the UK was bound during membership of the EU. A significant

number of those laws and regulations relate to the natural environment and have, by common consent, had a real impact on reducing harmful activities and have encouraged better stewardship of nature and the countryside generally. There is a real danger that if this bill is passed into law that the Government's stated improvement targets will become even more unlikely to be achieved.

Even when regulations exist, they are not always enforced. At the present time an egregious example of the failure to implement such regulation is the continued release of untreated sewage into our waterways and seas. Almost every day there are reports of such events with little consequence for those responsible.

The only way that these threats to the natural environment can be halted and reversed is by the application of constant pressure from concerned citizens and organisations such as CPRE. As such, your continued support for the work of CPRE is vital. If you are able to persuade your friends, colleagues and family that they too should add their voice to amplify this concern this can only help to bring about some much-needed urgent action.

The local angle

At our AGM last year, we welcomed Dr. John Strutt from the Bedfordshire Great Ouse Valley Environmental Trust as our speaker. The Trust is a charity which cares about the condition of the Great Ouse and the ecology of the valley. Find out more about their work on their website www.bedsgovet.org



Shining a light on rooftop renewables

In recent months several large solar farms have been approved in Bedfordshire and many more are in the pipeline, blighting the countryside and taking up good quality agricultural land. With competing demands for food security, nature recovery and renewable energy, we ask, is there a better way?

CPRE Bedfordshire is a strong advocate for the generation of electricity through a variety of both small and large scale solar PV systems. However, we want to ensure that wherever possible these are located in the most appropriate locations, ensuring that environmental

damage is kept to a minimum. Opposition to the mega solar farms in the countryside is growing across the country and this puts the crucial goal of decarbonising the UK's energy system at risk of getting bogged down in planning objections and protests.

While some solar farms on greenfield land will be necessary to hit the government's renewable energy targets by 2030, new analysis shows the vast majority of panels could be placed subtly which could lead to a much greater chance of strong public support.

In contrast to the UK's approach, France has announced plans to fast

track renewable energy by mandating solar panel-covered car parks. This is a popular policy that could generate up to 11 gigawatts of power, equivalent to 10 nuclear reactors. Meanwhile Germany has focused on rooftops first, with 80% of its solar power coming from panels that generate little public opposition.

CPRE Bedfordshire has long advocated for solar panels to be mandatory on warehouse rooftops and we are pleased to be part of a national CPRE campaign calling on the government to adopt a renewables strategy that prioritises rooftops, surface car parks and brownfield sites in a concerted effort to attract wide public support. If



implemented quickly, the policy could drastically reduce energy bills during the cost-of-living crisis and speed up the transition to net zero. At the same time it leaves as much countryside as possible available for farming and nature restoration.

Analysis by CPRE, using highly conservative estimates, shows that if only a quarter of the UK's total 250,000 hectares of south-facing commercial roof space was useable, it could generate 25 gigawatts of electricity annually. A good example of this is the 661,000 sq ft Co-op regional distribution centre located just off the A1 near Biggleswade which uses 100% renewable energy to power the site and includes solar PV designed into the roof. But this needs to be the norm rather than the exception.

Low hanging fruit

Tom Fyans, Interim Chief Executive of CPRE, said:

‘Commercial roofs and car parks are low hanging fruit ripe for solar installations. There would be little to no objections from the public, meaning no time and money lost to planning delays. It’s a no-brainer to maximise the amount of solar that can be installed out of the line of sight and frankly it’s baffling this hasn’t been done already.’

It is evident that a combination of rooftops, surface car parks, brownfield sites and small-scale community energy schemes could make a huge contribution to our onshore renewable energy requirements, especially when coupled with better measures to reduce total energy demand that are currently missing from the government’s approach.

Urgent policy changes

Three urgent policy changes are needed to ensure renewables are done well:

1. A national land use strategy to balance the competing demands for development, energy and infrastructure, food security and nature recovery; and planning policy amended so that it actively promotes solar panels on suitable brownfield land, avoiding best and most versatile agricultural land.
2. Solar panels should be a standard expectation for all suitably orientated roofs on new buildings, including homes; and planning permission should not be granted for commercial or public car parking spaces unless they also provide solar energy generation.
3. The government needs to give more financial support to community energy, so that new brownfield solar schemes can be connected to the grid quickly.

Watch out for more information and ways you can help as CPRE Bedfordshire will be taking part in the national Rooftop Renewables Campaign and find out more at our Talk and Annual General Meeting on Wednesday 26th April, 7pm (see back cover.)

Planning on making a difference?

How our team of Planning Volunteers are helping protect the countryside.

CPRE Bedfordshire would be hard pushed to respond to planning applications without our amazing team of planning volunteers. Last year they dedicated over 3,000 hours to help protect the countryside, urban green spaces and rural towns and villages. Across the county they responded to well over 150 planning applications and had some successful outcomes including one in Shillington.

In November 2022 an application for land adjacent to 70 Hanscombe End Road, Shillington was refused by Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC). This application was for 70 residential units on prime agricultural land in an outstanding countryside

setting beyond the settlement envelopes of two of Shillington Ends. These points were part of the CPRE Bedfordshire objection and were also recognised by CBC who said the proposed development would have a detrimental impact on the character and appearance of the countryside, landscape, and settlement of Shillington and result in the loss of Grade 2 and 3a 'Best and Most Versatile' agricultural land.

The developer submitted an appeal that was later withdrawn so for now this piece of countryside is safe from development. As well as submitting an objection CPRE Bedfordshire also supported Shillington Parish Council and the Local Action Group in campaigning against this intrusive proposed development.

We are currently looking for more volunteers to join the team particularly in Central Bedfordshire. Planning Volunteers work as part of a team and are initially mentored and supported by a more experienced volunteer. They develop a good understanding of the planning process and planning policy and spend time researching planning applications, liaising with parish councils and writing and responding to planning applications. If you are interested in protecting the countryside, have an eye for detail and enjoy a challenge then this could be a good role for you.

For more information, take a look at our volunteering page www.cprebeds.org.uk/get-involved/volunteering/



Shillington

Hedgerow Healers

Hedgerows are teeming with life providing homes and food for a variety of wildlife, but they are also a provider of medicinal plants for humans. Throughout history people have turned to natural remedies to treat their ailments so plant-based medicine is steeped in tradition and folklore. Hedgerow foraging is also a great way to connect with nature and the many emotional and physical benefits this brings. Here we go back to our roots and look at the healing properties of two common hedgerow plants.

Hawthorn

Hawthorn is one of the most ubiquitous and prominent plants in our hedgerows. Easy to identify throughout the year with its white and pink flowers in the spring and an abundance of glowing redberries in the autumn and winter. In Celtic mythology it symbolises love and protection so it is no surprise that it's said to be food for the heart and is widely used by herbalists to treat the cardiovascular and circulatory systems. Hawthorn also soothes the spiritual and emotional heart and is used as a relaxing nervine tonic.

Hawthorn tea can be made with an infusion of leaves and flowers and the berries makes an excellent jam or sauce.

Elder

As spring tips into summer the lacy white flowers of the elder blossom start to appear in our hedgerows and emit their summery sweet fragrance and then, as summer drifts into autumn, the deep purple elderberries start to appear. Both the flowers and the berries have excellent medicinal properties and well known for treating colds and flu.

Elderberries

Elderberries are a great example of food as medicine and are often included in drinks and cordials and can be eaten but heat them first as they are mildly toxic when raw. They are packed full of antioxidants and several studies have shown them to be effective in reducing the severity and duration of colds and flu. A syrup or 'rob' is a good remedy to keep to hand to stop colds and flu in their tracks and is easy to make.



Elderflowers

Elderflowers have long been used for easing the symptoms of hay fever and have anti-catarthral effects. They also contain high levels of antioxidants and are good for modulating inflammation and supporting the body to naturally reduce fever. Herbalist Maude Grieve wrote in the 1930s that elderflowers are an "almost infallible cure for an attack of influenza in its first stage." A simple elderflower tea in the first stages of a cold or flu can help reduce fever and limit symptoms. Elderflower tea also makes a good mouth wash.

Remember we share the hedgerows with many other animals so only take what you need and always be sure you can positively identify the plant before picking it.

Always consult a qualified Medical Herbalist if you have a medical condition. www.nimh.org.uk/find-a-herbalist/



Galley & Warden hills

Spotlight on Local Plans

CPRE Bedfordshire recognises Local Plans as the cornerstone of the planning system and that Councils that do not have an up-to-date plan are in a very weak position to restrain speculative planning applications. The efforts that council officers have made to meet a very challenging timescale, set by the Planning Inspectorate, for the delivery of Local Plans in Bedfordshire are appreciated. Here we look at the Local Plans across Bedfordshire and highlight some of our concerns.

Central Bedfordshire Local Plan Review

Following the adoption of the Local Plan in July 2021, the Inspector requested a review of the Local Plan within six months. Central Bedfordshire Council confirmed this stating that “In the context of Central Bedfordshire’s position within the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Arc, the Council will commence a Partial Review of this Plan within six months of its adoption.”

At the time of writing this, the webpage on ‘Reviewing our Local Plan’ confirms that this will start in early 2022 and promises more information as it becomes available. We are aware that the timetable for the review was approved by the Council’s Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 28th February 2022 and by the Council’s Executive on 5 April 2022, but this update has not yet appeared on the page. We have however discovered a draft timetable.

A year into the Review of the Local Plan, CPRE Bedfordshire is concerned about the lack of information and transparency regarding its progress and scope. Throughout the Local Plan 2035 process we had concerns about the public consultation process. While this met the minimum statutory requirements, information was not readily available or easily accessible to the general public. These concerns have been born out during our work with Local Action Groups and communities who have no awareness of the Local Plan or the impact it has on their neighbourhood. We would like to see more transparency and assurances that the people of Central Bedfordshire are made aware of that the Local Plan Review is happening and, when the time comes, how they can be involved in the public consultation.

In relation to the Local Plan Review itself CPRE Bedfordshire would like to see CBC take this opportunity to re-evaluate their housing numbers in line with the recent ONS data which show that the Luton and Central Bedfordshire population has already reached the number in the 2015 estimates. This indicates a reduction in the number of homes required in Central Bedfordshire. Papers from the above meetings made it clear that Officers have experienced a challenge with assessing need, when future Government white papers may alter the process for doing this. However, the Head of Strategic Growth advised that the starting point for Housing Demand will be the nationally set Standard Methodology Calculation and Housing Land Supply will be updated during the Review process.

We appreciate that there is still no clarity from Government in relation to both the Ox-Cam Arc or the intended route and delivery of East-West Rail and that this may impact on the timing of the review. Other areas we would like to see considered are the need to conserve the county's good agriculture land (BMV) to ensure our present and future food security and the challenges of the lack of water supply in the area.



Draft timetable

This timetable has been taken from the Central Bedfordshire Council Local Development Scheme (LDS)

- **January 2022:** Commence review of the Local Plan
- **August/September 2022:** Complete review
- **August/September 2022:** Commence evidence gathering for Local Plan update:
- **August/September 2022 - August 2025:** Preparation of Local Plan update (including monitoring of policies and updating the evidence base.) This is an ongoing process as the evidence base is developed and updated throughout the preparation of the Plan, up until its Submission to the Secretary of State
- **January 2023 – January 2024:** Informal and non-statutory engagement and evidence review. This stage will involve reviewing key parts of the evidence base internally, as well as stakeholders. Any required updates to the evidence base will also take place
- **September - November 2024:** Public and stakeholder engagement in preparing the Draft Local Plan - Formal Consultation. Consultation will take place over a 6-week period however, the exact timeframe will be confirmed once the updates and review of the evidence base has been undertaken
- **June - July 2025:** Publication of the proposed submission (Pre-Submission) plan for representations. Consultation will take place over a 6-week period, however, the exact timeframe will be confirmed once the representations made at Regulation 18 have been reviewed and any updates to evidence base has been undertaken.
- **November 2025:** Submission of Plan to Secretary of State for Examination
- **January 2026 – June 2026:** Examination Period:
- **August 2026:** Inspector's Report
- **October 2026:** Adoption of the Local Plan

Note 3.12 of the LDS states: "The timetable has been produced with the best available information at the time of writing. This is based on the context of ongoing uncertainties around the outcomes of the Government's Planning White Paper, 'Levelling Up Agenda' and progress on the Arc Spatial Framework, as well as outstanding decisions on the delivery of strategic infrastructure, such as the East-West Rail, upgrades to the A1 and the Bedford and Milton Keynes (BMK) Waterway Park project."



Bedford Borough

It was agreed at the meeting of Full Council on 11th January 2023 that Bedford Borough Council's Local Plan 2040 Plan for Submission be submitted to the Secretary of State for public examination. As a result of the impact of the government formula for setting housing targets, Bedford have suffered a staggering 40% increase on the locally assessed housing need calculated by the independent social research company engaged by the Council to undertake the housing needs assessment.

The Local Plan explains the implications of this for future population trends in Bedford as follows; It [the government's standard method] forecasts that an increase in population of around 50,000 people and inward migration of more than 22,000 people over and above existing trends will need to take place if dwellings are to be populated at the standard method rate of 1,355 dwellings per year. This represents a 40% increase on the housing requirement of 970 dwellings per year set in the Local Plan 2030. In other words, the reason for this increase to Bedford's local needs target is to

provide additional housing, not for local people, but to provide more housing to allow for unprecedented levels of inward migration, apparently needed to boost the local economy.

Without the 40% increase on the local housing needs assessment (which includes the normal allowance for inward migration), Bedford Borough could continue to build at 970 homes per year and deliver nearly 20,000 dwellings over the 20-year plan period. The Local Plan states that the Council's existing commitments amount to nearly 15,000 dwellings, so this would leave approximately 5,000 dwellings, to be allocated in the new plan, instead of the 12,000 dwellings allocated in the submitted plan.

If it were not for the increase in Bedford's target to provide for exceptional levels of inward migration, there would be no need for the two new town developments to the south of Bedford and at Little Barford. It's hard not to see this as Bedford's contribution to Ox-Cam phase 1, so look out for phase 2 if the chosen northern route for East West Rail goes ahead, bringing threats of more major new town developments across north Bedfordshire.

Luton Borough Council Local Plan Review

The adopted Luton Local Plan (2011-31) is now in the early stages of a review which should consider the housing need for Luton and in particular the unmet need which is unable to be accommodated within the borough. This will impact on surrounding authorities i.e., Central Bedfordshire, who have a duty of co-operation to accommodate any need that Luton cannot meet.

CPRE on the Local Plan process in Bedfordshire

CPRE Bedfordshire has been monitoring the BBC and CBC Local Plan process for some time and reporting on our concerns, you can read more about the developments in 2019/20 by following these links:

www.cprebeds.org.uk/news/the-final-stage-of-central-bedford-councils-local-plan-2035-examination/

www.cprebeds.org.uk/news/bedford-local-plan-2040-submission-version-consultation/

A man of action

Sometimes it takes just one person to bring a community together. Keith Lewis, Chairman of the Flitwick Local Action Group, talks about his inspiration for setting up the group.

In June 2021 a neighbour asked me if I knew that a field near my home had been removed from the Greenbelt and placed into the Local Plan for Central Bedfordshire for houses to be built on in order to fulfil a housing need for Luton. I had no idea.

The field concerned is beautiful. It is 30 metres away from an ancient woodland, around it is Greensand Country and the bridleways and footpaths form part of Katherine's Walk. Whenever you walk around it you are very likely to see deer, hares, skylarks and kites. Hundreds of people walk around this field every day, it is an immensely calming walk. I've known this field for over forty years but in 2006 I had a health problem which led me to walk round it every day and I know these walks were instrumental in my recovery. The road that this field sits on and which would form the entrance and exit to it is a B road which feeds a Center Parcs, a Tesco Superstore, a rail, bus and taxi terminus, a leisure centre and two schools. It is also a diversion route for any problems on the M1. In June 2021 Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) started building a crematorium on this road and now directly opposite to this proposed build, they are building a huge retirement village.

With all of this in mind you can imagine how unimpressed I was when I heard Central Bedfordshire Council had removed such a beautiful landscape from the Greenbelt and proposed to



Keith Lewis

tarmac it over and build a couple of hundred houses on it.

So, I had 2,500 leaflets printed telling local people who lived closest to the field what was proposed in the Local Plan and inviting any concerned residents to come to a meeting. Around 35 people turned up and from that meeting we formed the Flitwick Local Action Group and a steering group of 11 with myself as Chairman and my neighbour as Vice Chair. I was very fortunate that CPRE Bedfordshire became aware of my leaflet and two of their team attended this initial meeting and agreed to sit on the steering group. Of course, neither I nor other members of the steering group had any previous experience of fighting this kind of battle, but CPRE Bedfordshire have many times and their input into our campaign is invaluable. To be honest I really don't know how we would have progressed and got to where we are without them.

It's now been 18 months since I found out about the Local Plan and became energized to take action. Along the way my group have placed posters all around the field several times informing people of our progress. We have regularly posted updates and

comments on Facebook. We have taken a full page in a local publication that goes through all houses in and around our town. We leafleted houses for a second time and invited residents to an open meeting in our village hall, where we informed over 160 people that a planning application had been submitted to CBC by the builder for 200 houses on the field and showed them how to object. Following this meeting we posted information on how to object on Facebook, placed posters around the field and delivered a letter to over 7,000 homes. From these actions we achieved a total of 1380 objections to the plan.

Our fight goes on. We have recently heard that the developer is submitting a revised plan so our work continues. At times it has been time consuming and wearing but it's been worth it. Who knows whether we will win our battle but for sure if we weren't fighting there would already be an approved plan to build 200 + houses on this beautiful field!

For more information of Local Action Groups supported by CPRE Bedfordshire
www.cprebeds.org.uk/working-with-you/directory/

Sustainable farming and the Living Countryside Awards

With changes to farming subsidies high on the political agenda, concern over food security and growing public support for environmentally friendly farming methods, we take a look at some projects from across the history of the Living Countryside Awards.

Wasseldine were one of our early winners, earning a CPRE Mark in 2010 in the Sustainable Living category. Our awards brochure described the project as “A small farm business run by a dedicated team who aim to make a viable living from the land whilst at the same time leaving it in as good, or better, condition in terms of productivity, beauty and biodiversity as when the project started. 70 acres of old water meadows, new hedgerows and commercial willow and hazel plantations host varied wildlife habitats and a herd of Red Poll cattle, whose beef forms one of the farm’s main products.”

We caught up with Jane and Guy Lambourne from Wasseldine earlier

this year to find out how the business has developed since they won the award.

“It was a huge surprise and a great pleasure to be awarded a CPRE Living Countryside Award in 2010 and the twelve years since have flown by.

We are still here in Gravenhurst, still coppicing willow and hazel and still producing beef from a small suckler herd of pedigree Red Poll cattle.

We have benefitted greatly from Defra’s Higher Level Stewardship Scheme. It has allowed us to improve the quality of habitats on our small farm which is something of an oasis of grassland and sprawling hedges in a desert of arable. Our current agreement ends later this year and the future looks exciting. Although nothing is certain yet, there are some important developments in the pipeline. We hope to plant another hazel copse (with funding from the Forest of Marston Vale). This will be worked commercially and add significantly to the coppice side of the

business. We hope to create several ponds and develop a mosaic of scrub and trees in one field, to benefit great crested newts and a whole range of other species (this thanks to funding from the Newt Conservation Partnership). Finally we aim to further improve our old water meadows alongside the River Hitt, through a new Mid-Tier Countryside Stewardship agreement with Natural England.

At the end of 2021, we let an acre of land to a business partnership called Hillside Market Garden and they are already producing fantastic vegetables using sustainable methods. We like Jenny and Simon’s approach and it’s good to have them around.

Although change brings potential for stress, we are looking forward to the next chapter in our stewardship of this small corner of Bedfordshire.”

Three more farming winners

Riverside Dairy won the 2021 Made in Bedfordshire award. Their family farm sits along the banks of the River Great Ouse as it meanders through the beautiful Bedfordshire countryside. They use the fresh milk from their free range, pasture fed herd of cows to make artisan ice-creams. The herd of cross-bred Jerseys and Friesians produces high quality milk which is just perfect for making ice-cream. Customers not only love the taste of the ice cream, but love the fact they can see the cows, and that the ice cream has been made on-site, becoming far more aware of food provenance, food miles and standards. Our judges praised the way the business was shifting to a more sustainable way of farming – and the amazing ice cream!



Cattle at Wassledine



In 2016, the BCN Wildlife Trust's Galley and Warden Hills grazing project won a CPRE Mark in the Biodiversity and Landscape Improvement category. The stunning chalk downland site is home to several rare chalkland plant species, butterflies such as the Small Blue and Chalk Hill Blue and is a breeding area for the Skylark and Corn Bunting. It is located on the urban fringe of Luton and is popular with local residents and dog walkers. To maintain its open appearance it needs continuous scrub control and also livestock grazing. The Wildlife Trust set up an impressive project to carefully introduce Red Poll cattle for this purpose, they needed to install fencing and water supplies, and engage local residents with the aims. The animals have been brought in to graze in selected areas each year since 2014 and already the benefits to the local wildlife are visible on the hillside.

You can read an update on the project on the BCN Wildlife Trust website.

Barton Hill Farm in the Chilterns won their first award which was for Landscape Improvement in 2009. The Songs and Plovers project gave attention to agricultural practices

which encourage wildflowers and wildlife with broad field margins and woodlands designed to attract birds. The farm encouraged visitors and had a strong educational theme, wanting to demonstrate that commercial farming and environmental protection can be compatible.

In 2014, they won a CPRE Mark for Sustainable Enterprise. The Mrs Middleton's brand started by producing high quality cold-pressed rape seed oil, farming in a way that enhances biodiversity on the land. The idea came from the realisation that many visitors to the countryside

have little knowledge of how healthy, good quality foodstuffs are produced. The oil bottles show a map reference to indicate exactly in which field the seed was grown and bears a Made in Bedfordshire label. Our judges at the time said "the company is set to become a leading sustainable food producer, with the oil already being used in top restaurants and selling at farm shops across England." This turned out to be a sound prediction and Mrs Middleton's won a second CPRE Mark in 2018. This time they had collaborated with Phil Fanning of Paris House restaurant in Woburn to produce two salad dressings, using their rapeseed oil, developing a strong working relationship between two local and successful food-based companies.

www.wassledine.co.uk

www.riversidedairy.co.uk/our-farm

www.wildlifebcn.org/blog/north-chilterns-team/galley-and-warden-hills-and-blows-downs-nature-reserves-update

www.mrsmiddleton.co.uk/pages/environmental-work



CPRE Bedfordshire Talk and AGM

ROOFTOP RENEWABLES

Wednesday 26th April, 7pm

Great Barford Village Hall

In recent months several large solar farms have been approved in Bedfordshire and many more are in the pipeline, blighting the countryside and taking up good quality agricultural land. With competing demands for food security, nature recovery and renewable energy, we ask if there is a better way?



The UK is lagging behind France and Germany who are already mandating roof top renewables as the way forward. So it is timely that CPRE are launching a new campaign to call on the government to adopt a renewables strategy that prioritises rooftops, surface car parks and brownfield sites in a concerted effort to attract wide public support.

Following the CPRE Bedfordshire AGM, Kate Allberry from National CPRE will talk about the current campaign and CPRE's upcoming work on rooftop renewables. Kate is Campaign Officer and is co-leading on the Rooftop Renewables campaign. Previously, she worked as a Development Officer for the Woodland Trust in Scotland and completed her doctorate in conservation science in Southeast Asia in 2022.

For more information go to www.cprebeds.org.uk/get-involved/events/agma/

Meet our new Trustee, Carmel Edwards



Why did you want to be a Trustee for CPRE Bedfordshire and what do you hope to achieve?

I joined CPRE Bedfordshire as a Trustee to apply my governance and food and land use policy and advocacy expertise to supporting the charity to promote sustainable land use locally, as well as nationally through national CPRE campaigns.

My aim is that through working with local stakeholders on policy and campaigns I can support CPRE Bedfordshire to achieve land use policy reform, including on food and farming, that will improve the sustainability of

food systems, such that people have greater access to and connection with local thriving nature spaces and sustainable, affordable, healthy food.

What is your favourite outdoor activity, local green space and food/place to eat?

My favourite outdoor activities are walking in nature and kayaking along the River Great Ouse. I particularly love mixed blue and green spaces. My favourite food is organic vegan world cuisine and my favourite place to eat is anywhere in the countryside with a good view of nature.

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Registered Charity No: 1023435



The countryside charity
Bedfordshire

Bedfordshire Matters is the biannual magazine of CPRE Bedfordshire, a local charity that works to protect and promote the countryside and urban greenspaces of Bedfordshire.