

CPRE Bedfordshire Annual Review 2022



“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 housing 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 13th 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 last few years 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

Martin Christopher – Chairman

Juliet Ware – Treasurer

Paul Jenkins – Vice Chair

John English

Susan Lynch

Fred Motson

Carmel Edwards (appointed December 2022)

Staff

Lois Wright, Director

Shelly Dennison, Digital Engagement Officer

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

Our Year – Our Chairman and Director reflect on 2022

Martin Christopher, Chairman



As we emerged from the Covid lockdowns of the previous two years, CPRE Bedfordshire was fully engaged in keeping the spotlight on the challenges that we face in our county. In the past year we have continued to campaign for better protection for our countryside and urban green spaces. Bedfordshire is one of England's smallest counties and yet is at the top, or near the top, of most league tables for the loss of countryside and greenbelt to housing and other development.

One area where we have placed more emphasis is on helping the formation of Local Action Groups. Often residents are concerned about proposed developments that may impact them and yet feel they lack the means to stand up and oppose them. Our trustees and volunteers are often able to help bring people together who share concerns and guide them in the practical steps that may be taken either to change plans or to mitigate their impact.

Another way in which CPRE Bedfordshire is pursuing its objectives is by working closely with Parish Councils. Many Parish Councils support our work and in return we have been able to provide advice on planning and related issues – including organising a successful workshop on planning regulations attended by fifty-five delegates. We also organised practical training sessions for Parish Councils and community groups on creating and maintaining wildflower meadows.

Nationally, CPRE has had success in engaging with government to influence their thinking on proposed changes to the planning system. This is an area of critical importance to us all and it is imperative that economic development is balanced against the need to protect the countryside and the quality of the environment. This is the reason for which CPRE exists and we are grateful to you for the support that you have given.

Our work at CPRE Bedfordshire could not succeed without the hard work and commitment of our volunteers and Trustees and of our Director, Lois Wright and our Digital Engagement Officer, Shelly Dennison. To all these people and to our members and to those organisations who have supported us financially I give my thanks.

Lois Wright, Director



2022 was certainly a turbulent year in politics and at times it was difficult keeping up with the many changes. As always, our focus was very much on local issues and we continued to work closely with local action groups to support them in raising awareness of unwelcome planning applications. This grass roots work has really highlighted several issues around our current planning system and the lack of information and access. Without the work of these groups many people would still be unaware of local planning applications that could impact on their lives let alone

know how to access, navigate and understand the plans and how to comment on them. On a lighter note, I had the pleasure of getting out of the office and spending time with lovely groups of people who are passionate about wildflowers in the beautiful setting of Linch Furlong in Oakley. It was inspiring to see so many people passionate about the countryside and we look forward to seeing how their plans blossom!

Finally, none of the work you will read about in this review would be possible without the support of our volunteers. Last year they put in 3,500 hours working on planning and countryside issues, workshops and administration. This small team give up their time to help protect and promote our countryside and make a huge difference – so many, many thanks to all of them.

Making connections

Local Action Groups

Throughout 2022 we continued to work closely with Local Action Groups to help them achieve their aims. This included creating a web resource and a new section the website which gives details of open consultations and advice on how to respond and sits alongside our existing [directory of local action groups](#).

Three highlights from this year were working with the Say No to Greenwoods New Town campaign to create a [photo feature exploring the landscape of the area](#), creating [a video with the Church Road Local Action Group](#) in Flitwick to highlight a piece of Greenbelt under threat, and helping the Save Steppingley Road Field campaign to [tell the story of the site through the centuries](#). Save Steppingley Road Field also helped us pilot a new initiative by [creating a walk](#) to highlight the area under threat.

Following some strong campaigning and excellent research, The Church Road, Flitwick application was withdrawn and we awaiting to hear about both Greenwoods and Steppingley Road Field.



Peaceful Protest walks

On Sunday 13th February [groups from across Bedfordshire](#) braved the weather to take part in peaceful protest walks, raising awareness of threats to green spaces and open countryside.

CPRE Bedfordshire and local action groups joined together to organise and promote a number of walks throughout the county. Each walk had a different focus, but all were united by the desire to raise awareness and take action. From valued urban green spaces to Greenbelt designated countryside, the walks highlighted places under threat.

We used our website to enable local groups to [share information about their walks](#) in the run up to the event and to share photographs afterwards.

Wildflowers and plant life

From workshops to blog posts and our photo competition, this year we put the spotlight on the plant life of Bedfordshire. In June, the first [CPRE Bedfordshire wildflower workshops](#) aimed to bust some of the myths and provide down to earth information and advice on how to establish a meadow and maintain it so that it flourishes.

The workshops were attended by a diverse mix of people from parish councils, local community groups, landowners and businesses. Led by Pat Knight, the workshops were set in Oakley – a parish that really is outstanding when it comes to wildflower meadows. For a small village it boasts two stunning sites – Linch Furlong and Riverside – which made the ideal setting for the workshops and provided a great example of what can be done with good management.

The theme of this year's photo competition was 'plants and people', with entrants sharing their shots of people engaging with the natural world. The winning entry was used on the cover of the [autumn edition](#) of our magazine, Bedfordshire Matters, and was taken by Pavithra Reddy (aged 13) in Clapham Woods.

We also picked up the wildflower theme in our blog posts which featured a diverse range of topics from [snowdrops](#) to [Bedfordshire place names](#) inspired by plants. We looked at Charles Abbot, possibly [Bedfordshire's first botanist](#), and used photographs from the 2021 Living Countryside Awards as the basis for a [photo essay](#) on the different ways that projects used flowers.



Joining with National CPRE

CPRE's Star Count is the country's biggest citizen science project of its kind. Between 26 February and 6 March 2022 we asked you to report the number of stars you could see in the Orion constellation. [In Bedfordshire 41% of respondents reported that they could see 10 or fewer stars](#), this is a significant improvement on the 2021 results where 71% of respondents reported that they could see 10 or fewer stars. However, in both 2021 and 2022 no-one reported being able to see more than 30 stars, the sign of truly dark skies.

Many of you [took action](#) to help with a national CPRE campaign calling on the government to commit to planting thousands of miles of hedges all across the country, with a target of 40% more hedges by 2050.

Planning and campaigning

Demystifying the planning system

Following feedback from groups across the county, we created a [one-day workshop](#) which we ran in November to bring together representatives from Parish and Town Councils in Bedfordshire, Local Action Groups and community representatives to learn more about the planning system in a relevant and understandable way. This was attended by 55 people and the feedback was excellent with request for more workshops on this topic in the future.

Comment and consultations

The political changes in 2022 led to some confusion around planning issues. Our website feature on [The Growth Plan, Investment Zones and Bedfordshire](#), proved very popular, as we sought to cut through the media coverage and explain what government plans might mean for Bedfordshire.

We published our full response to the [Bedford Borough Council Local Plan 2040 Submission Draft Consultation](#). This highlighted some of our key concerns in our more accessible web feature. Making our responses available is an important part of our work to help you engage with the Local Plans

Area development

Raising awareness of our work

Making the public aware of our work is always a high priority for CPRE Bedfordshire and in 2022 we continued to develop our online presence through our website and social media. We also produced our local magazine Bedfordshire Matters that is mailed out to members.

In 2022 we saw an increase in engagement across all digital platforms with followers on both Facebook and Instagram growing by 45%. The website is clearly appealing to a wider audience with a growth of 102% in visitors during 2022! Popular features included the Save Our Greenfields protest walks, Changes to the flight path at Luton airport and Winter Walks in Bedfordshire Villages.

Office move

In January 2022 we moved into a smaller office within the same building as with more remote working we no longer needed the large space. This also saved in the region of £2000 a year.

Representing our members and communities.

CPRE Bedfordshire representation on important regional and government organisations

During 2022 CPRE Bedfordshire Trustees and volunteers attended meetings of the following organisations in order to ensure that the aims and objectives of our members and local people are taken into consideration in their decision-making processes:

- **South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (PDIIDG Group)**
- **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**

Financial Report

The total income for 2022 was £26,111.27 which was more than planned due to the popularity of the workshop. As always, we are extremely grateful to all the members, donors and grant makers who supported CPRE Bedfordshire during this time. Total expenditure for 2022 was £25,433.97. This was slightly less than predicted and means we generated a small surplus of £677.30.

We continue to be vigilant in monitoring costs and ensuring we achieve value from the income we receive. As always, we aim for a mix of income to ensure our charity is sustainable, so we are not reliant on one source. Nevertheless, Covid and the cost-of-living crisis continues to impact. We already operate in a very cost-effective way producing a high level of work on a very small budget but continue looking at ways of cutting costs. In January 2022 we moved to a smaller office giving a saving of about £2,000 on rent.

Our Independent Examiner has agreed the financial summary on page 8 as being consistent with the full financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2022. These were prepared in accordance with the applicable Charities SORP (Statement of Recommended Practice) approved by the Executive Committee and will be submitted to The Charity Commission.

CPRE Bedfordshire Annual Accounts 2022

RECEIPTS	<u>Total 2022</u>	<u>Total 2021</u>
Membership fees	8526	8849
Donations	848	984
Grants & Legacies	14256	16000
Workshops	2460	
Gift Aid	-	263
Bank interest	21	2
TOTAL RECEIPTS	26111	26098

PAYMENTS	<u>Total 2022</u>	<u>Total 2021</u>
Salaries	19371	18858
Office cost		
-Rent	2774	5168
-Insurance	347	346
-IT	296	129
Marketing		
-Beds Matters	1386	694
-Postage	456	367
-Advertising	-	300
Workshops	690	-
Travel expenses	35	35
Room hires	-	175
AGM	54	56
Subscriptions	25	25
Living Countryside Awards	-	4718
TOTAL PAYMENTS	25434	30871

ASSETS & LIABILITIES AT YEAR ENDING 31/12/2022

ASSETS AND LIABILITIES

	31 st December 2022	31 st December 2021
Cheque Account	1105.83	1090.97
Business Account	20024.26	19361.27
Cash in hand	8.25	8.25
TOTAL ASSETS	21138.34	20460.49
FUNDS		
Brought forward from previous year	20461.04	25233.24
Carried forward	21138.34	20461.04