



The countryside charity  
**Bedfordshire**

# A Manifesto for the Mid Beds by-election

August 2023



## We are CPRE Bedfordshire, the countryside charity

We campaign for a beautiful and thriving countryside that enriches all our lives and that makes a significant contribution to reaching net-zero carbon by 2045. We want to see a countryside that is accessible to all, where the voices of residents are heard in decision-making and the needs of communities are met.

CPRE Bedfordshire believe that people have the right to enjoy a countryside that promotes a healthier economy and a happier community, and we urge all political parties to support our ambition to make it happen.

### At a glance: our key priorities in Mid Beds

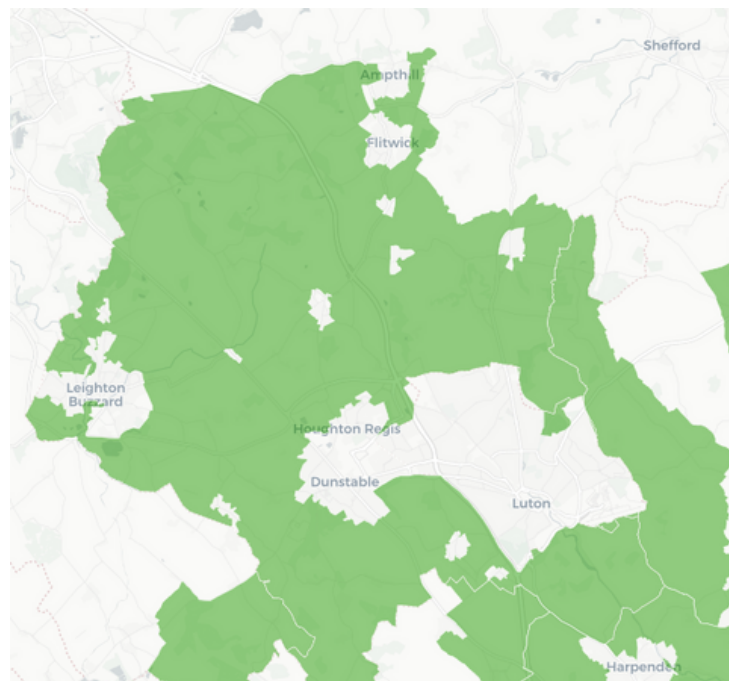
- A planning system that works for local people, nature and the environment
- Protecting the countryside next door
- Affordable housing for local people
- Food and farming
- Rooftop solar

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# Protecting the countryside next door

Local countryside is an invaluable resource for addressing the climate emergency and improving health and wellbeing. We know that many, many people in Mid Bedfordshire value the countryside, nature and the environment and want these protected.

We've seen a proliferation of Local Action Groups across Mid Bedfordshire campaigning to save their local countryside from inappropriate development. This clearly demonstrates the strength of feeling that residents have for the countryside and how vitally important they view its ongoing protection.



The Green Belt in Bedfordshire

# A planning system that works for local people, nature and the environment

The planning system is one of local democracy's most powerful and effective tools. From building truly affordable homes to enhancing the countryside next door, the government must support a well-resourced planning system that empowers communities and promotes development that responds to their needs.

Green Belt loss in Central Bedfordshire (this is the only Green Belt in Bedfordshire) in the last 10 years is 1,290 hectares – that is 5% of the Green Belt and the third highest loss of any Local Authority in England.



# Affordable housing for local people

Homes – both to buy and to rent – are simply unaffordable for many people in Mid Bedfordshire.

To meet the needs of residents, Mid Bedfordshire requires more genuinely affordable housing. This should be affordable to rent, part-own, or buy. Too much of the housing being built is the opposite of this. It is not designed to meet the needs of local people on limited budgets but to profit major developers at the expense of our countryside.

National housing policies should prioritise meeting genuine community need and investment in the future of rural communities, rather than pursuing unrealistic housing targets based on market demand and economic growth

The government must commit to enhancing and protecting the countryside around our towns and villages and in particular protecting the Green Belt in Mid Bedfordshire.

Housing targets must be sustainable and deliverable and be determined by the local authority's housing supply requirement and not by the widely discredited 'Standard Method' which relies on outdated household projections and a profound misunderstanding of the way that the housing market works – building more homes does not bring their prices down.

## Food and farming

Parts of Mid Bedfordshire are largely agricultural and we recognise the food production value of farmland and Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land but areas of BMV land are being used for development reducing our ability to produce food. This also impacts on the livelihood of some rural communities.

Furthermore, agricultural land of all grades is being lost to giant solar farms that blight the landscape. At the same time huge "mega warehouses" are springing up across Mid Bedfordshire with space for rooftop solar panels.

In the recent National Planning Policy Framework consultation CPRE recommends guidelines to ensure the loss of valuable farmland is minimised and a firm presumption against development on BMV land.

## Rooftop solar

When rooftops across the country can host so much of the new solar energy we need, why are we not ensuring every suitable roof is being used for solar panels?

A major new CPRE report has found that over half the solar panels needed to hit national net zero targets could be fitted on rooftops and in car parks and save our countryside.

The government must commit to a national rooftop solar target of ensuring that at least 40GW of the national target of 70GW of solar by 2035 is delivered through the lowest cost opportunities for rooftop solar installations, on new builds, commercial buildings and car parks.

## Contact us

If you would like to discuss this further, please contact CPRE Bedfordshire Director, Lois Wright.

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## Find us online

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