



Bedfordshire Matters



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Chair's column

Gerry Sansom



Well, times couldn't be more different from the Winter edition of Bedfordshire Matters when the huge impact of COVID – 19 couldn't have been predicted.

Firstly, on behalf of my fellow Trustees and everyone at CPRE Bedfordshire, I send you our very best wishes at this difficult time for us all and thank you very much for your continued support.

It has certainly meant that we have had to work in different ways with many of us now working from home, social distancing and having meetings using the amazing "Zoom" app, all of which has taken a bit of getting used to!

On a positive note, COVID-19 regulations have meant that more people have been seeking out new recreational walks in the local countryside - getting to know better the amazing Bedfordshire countryside that surrounds us and its biodiversity. Content in the "Discover our Countryside" section of our website has been viewed by hundreds of people.

With the roads empty and the skies clear we have been able to hear the birds sing!

Our lungs have been able to breathe in lovely fresh air.

It's been fabulous to see so many people taking to their bikes – whole families experiencing the freedom of cycling safely on our roads. Surely that gives credence to the idea of "Dutch Style" cycle lanes free from traffic which CPRE Bedfordshire has been arguing for over the last few years?

When they feel safe, people of all ages, male & female, will use their bikes – reducing car usage and air pollution.

We must encourage our Local Authorities to take note and substantially reduce the priority given to cars, not just in the urban areas, but in our villages and on the rural road network as well.

Do we really need to build the new A6 - M1 Link Road through our precious Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty? We know that it will get jammed up just as quickly as it's built. The environmental degradation will be immense – to the Leader of Central Bedfordshire Council, James Jamieson, to Hilary Chipping, the Chief Executive of SEMLEP and to the Government we say please, THINK AGAIN!

Let's hope that if anything positive comes of this COVID period it will be a lasting recognition of the value of our environment and the things that we should aspire to that make for a good quality of life.

CPRE is the countryside charity that campaigns to promote, enhance and protect the countryside for everyone's benefit.

We connect people with the countryside so that everyone can benefit from and value it.

We promote rural life to ensure the countryside and its communities can thrive.

We empower communities to improve and protect their local environment.

Through all our work we look at the role of our countryside in tackling the **climate emergency**, including seeking ways to increase resilience and reduce impact.



Photo: Clive Mear

Photo competition

Our lockdown photo competition proved very popular with over 100 entries. It's very clear how important spending time in our gardens and taking local walks has been during this difficult time. Several themes emerged from the photos entered:

- **Details and close ups** - many people seem to have taken the opportunity to look in much more detail at the natural world on the doorstep, from the patterns of snail shells to the inside of flowers.
- **Garden birds have been bringing joy** – we enjoyed photos of birds having baths and exploring your gardens.

- **Spring has looked wonderful this year** – from bluebell woods to cherry blossom, misty dawns to sunny days spent in the garden, you've shown us the season in all its glory.

The winning entry features on our front cover and was taken by Barbara Coulson. It is a beautiful image which invites us to see a flower we often take for granted in a new way.

You'll find more of our favourite entries throughout this issue and we hope you enjoy them as much as we have.



Photo: Claire Eddy

If you have a passion for photography and love the countryside then join our team as a Photography Contributor. For more details go to www.cprebeds.org.uk/getinvolved

Managing in difficult times - The impact of Covid-19 on CPRE Bedfordshire

During the last few months we have all had to adapt to the ever changing situation and with lockdown looming CPRE Bedfordshire quickly responded to the challenge. Our small office team moved to home working and staff, volunteers and trustees pulled together to ensure that we could continue working effectively.

Inevitably we had to change some of our plans for this year. The AGM was cancelled and we hope to be able to hold this in September if all is well. The Living Countryside Awards are postponed until 2021 and we hope to be able to use the awards to support some of the rural businesses and organisations affected by Covid-19. Other events that were in the pipeline such as Green Clean were also shelved.

During lockdown we have been working harder than ever to ensure that planning applications do not sneak in under the radar and also raising awareness of the way our local councils are dealing with planning issues during the crisis. We have also been active on social media, encouraging people to explore the countryside on their doorstep and appreciate nature in their garden. As you will see throughout this newsletter, our photo competition was very popular!

Charities and voluntary groups have an important part to play in the Covid-19 response and those working on the frontline have our admiration and support. However, small charities like CPRE Bedfordshire who are not working on the frontline but still doing important work have so far been unable to benefit from government

grants. In addition, access to funds from trusts and grant making organisations has been limited, as has the opportunity to hold fundraising events. This reduction in income will mean we have to use more of our reserves in the coming year.

So what does the future hold?

Lockdown has inspired people to explore and connect with the countryside, to appreciate clean air, blue skies and green spaces and we want to encourage them to continue. We also have plans to grow our volunteer team (see p15) so we can develop new projects and support and empower more

communities to protect their local environment.

However, the current crisis has had an impact on our ability to raise funds and will continue to do so for some time. In the next year we need to focus on building our reserves again and making CPRE Bedfordshire financially stable. If you are a member, we are grateful for your continued support and hope that you will renew your membership in the coming year as this is an important source of income. Our earlier fundraising appeal for the "2020 Fighting Fund" is still active so please consider making a donation if you have not done so already and again, our thanks go out to those generous donors who have already contributed. We are also grateful to The Wixamtree Trust for their continued support.

At the time of writing this we are hopeful that we will soon be able to return to our office in Bedford and get back to a "new normal" whatever that may be!

We have a clear vision for a thriving a beautiful countryside for everyone but we need your help to achieve it.

We launched the 2020 Fighting Fund so that together we can fight to secure a better future for the Bedfordshire countryside.

Recent donations have helped to:-

- **Preserve 7 hectares of greenbelt land in Eaton Bray (that's about 13 football fields!)**
- **Save Langford village landscape from development**
- **Protect Harrold Lake from development**

You could help make a difference like this!

To make a donation go to www.cprebeds.org.uk/make-a-donation/





Photo: Craig Lymm

Major road network developments

In the last issue of Bedfordshire Matters we reported our concerns about Highways England's continuing appetite for major road schemes in our area and in particular our opposition to the proposed A6 – M1 Link Road, Milton Keynes to Oxford Expressway and A1 realignment.

We are pleased to report that the government seems to be having second thoughts about its major road network strategy, certainly in regard to the Expressway, where clear statements have been made that it no longer features in current priorities. This change of heart may more likely be finance led, rather than born out of genuine concern for the environment. The effectiveness of the No

Expressway Group campaign, supported by local CPRE branches, will have also played a significant part in this. It is likely that the A1 realignment will also be de-prioritised as a result of the economic pressures arising from the lockdown measures as well as the government's election pledge to give the north a fairer share of infrastructure investment.

Sadly, the same cannot be said of the A6-M1 Link Road. Despite opposition from local people, nature groups and the Local Plan Inspector, Central Bedfordshire are still pushing ahead on this. As we go to print, we are launching a final campaign to try and stop this road.

Please see more on this campaign on page 12.

The air that we breathe

Since the Covid-19 pandemic began the issue of air quality has taken on a new significance. Firstly it has become apparent how much better air quality became in many previously heavily polluted areas as a result of the lockdown. The Guardian newspaper reported (April 20th, 2020) that compared with the same period last year, levels of nitrogen dioxide in the UK had fallen by 40% while tiny particulate matter – known as PM2.5 – was down 10%. These two forms of pollution, which can affect the heart and respiratory system, are normally together responsible for 470,000 deaths in Europe each year according to the Centre for Research on Energy and Climate. The Centre estimates that improvements in air quality since the lockdown began has led to 11,000 fewer deaths from pollution in the UK and elsewhere.

Even before the Covid-19 pandemic struck there was a growing concern in the UK for air quality. More and more hard evidence has emerged in recent years linking pollution with chronic health problems and early deaths. In response a number of government actions have been taken, or have been advocated, in some areas such as city centre traffic restrictions, the phasing out of diesel engines etc.

The challenge will be how to maintain the levels of air quality we enjoyed during lockdown once economic activity is resumed at anything like its pre-Covid-19 levels. It has been suggested



Charlotte Parnham aged 14

that our experiences during the lockdown have alerted many people to the need to take air quality more seriously and that there may now be a greater appetite for the behavioural change necessary to bring about a permanent improvement.

One significant change could be a dramatic transformation in where we work and how we work. For many people the enforced period spent working from home was an awakening as we saw how technology in particular could easily be substituted for commuting. We are now contemplating a scenario where there will be less need for travel but also a demand that whatever travel is undertaken be on a much greener and cleaner basis.

Here in Bedfordshire we are acutely aware of the impact of transport on air quality. As a

county crossed by major road arteries such as the M1, A1 and A6 as well as an expanding international airport there is an obvious risk of increased pollution. When warehousing and distribution activity and the resulting freight traffic generated is added to the mix a potent recipe for environmental harm is created.

In the light of these pressures CPRE Bedfordshire is concerned to ensure that any planned development – be it transport infrastructure or housing development (which inevitably creates more traffic) – takes into account its impact on air quality. If we are to learn anything from the tragedy of Covid19 it must be that the air that we breathe must be of significantly higher quality than has been the case in past years.

October 8th 2020 is 'Clean Air Day'. Let us have your thoughts on how we should mark this – info@cpredbeds.org.uk

CPRE Bedfordshire supports Local Plan policies against speculative planning applications

CPRE Bedfordshire warned that the transitional arrangements introduced last year, aiming to protect councils hit hardest by the new housing needs assessment formula, were seriously flawed and were likely to result in a development 'free for all'. The revised national policy guidelines introduced the risk that planning authorities in the process of making a new Local Plan, were at risk of their planning policies being ruled out of date until the new Local Plan was adopted.

A number of speculative applications specifically aimed at exploiting this loophole were made by developers on sites in

open countryside in Bedfordshire. Local communities in a number of parishes were very active in lobbying the Council in opposition to these applications and CPRE Bedfordshire supported these communities with written submissions to Bedford Borough Council.

We are pleased to report that many of these speculative applications were ultimately unsuccessful.

Whilst the Council determined that it was legally obliged to permit applications for development in Bromham, Wilstead and Willington under the transitional arrangements, by the time final decisions were made, the new

Local Plan was adopted and the applications could be legally refused against the Council's new planning policies. For the Willington application, a call in request to the Secretary of State made by CPRE contributed to delays which enabled the decision to be made under the new Local Plan.

CPRE Bedfordshire attended appeal hearings to speak against proposed developments of 80 homes at Oakley Road, Bromham and for 90 homes at Harrold Lake, Odell Road. There was a strong presence from local residents objecting to these applications. The Council was successful in defending these appeals.

More success stories!

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 local residents.

Langford village landscape was saved by a landmark appeal decision which can be used as a precedent in similar case in the future. CPRE Bedfordshire and Langford Parish Council worked together to oppose 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.



Wixams residents frustrated by Bedford Council's failure to consult

Residents of Wixams are frustrated and angry about Bedford Council's 'hands off' approach to community engagement on the development of employment sites alongside existing residential areas.

Planning permission for the erection of up to 3 employment units, providing a total of over 50,000 square metres of floorspace was agreed by the Council in December 2019. The application was received by the Council in May 2019 with invitations for comments from residents by the end of June published in the normal way. This attracted very little attention and it is clear that resident's awareness of the application was not widely shared until a follow up application on 'reserved matters' came to the notice of the Wixams Community Group in January 2020. Only 3 letters from residents were submitted in response to the original application, compared to over 100 letters of objection from residents in February this year to the reserved matters application.

The three units are planned to be built on land which is currently open space and offers views across the Marston Vale. If built, the warehouses will be highly visible when entering Wixams via The Causeway, to residents as they move within the village along Brooklands Avenue and Bedford Road, and the biggest impact would be to those whose homes look directly onto the site. The closest unit will be within 90 metres of the closest home and will be over 18 metres tall.

Residents also have major concerns about the impact of this level of additional commercial activity will have on local roads.



Whilst the Council asserts that the original consultation process was advertised in compliance with Council policy, in view of the significance of the proposed development to local residents, CPRE Bedfordshire supports the case made by the Community Group that greater efforts should have been made to raise awareness amongst residents and to give them better opportunities to make their views known before planning permission was granted.

National planning policy states that: "Good quality pre-application discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community" (NPPF para 39) and continues (in para 40) that local planning

authorities: "should... encourage any applicants who are not already required to do so by law to engage with the local community."

In the case of a development of such significance to local residents it is remarkable to learn that there was no pre application community engagement by the developer or the Council, to inform residents about the proposals so that their views could be made known

and taken into account at an early stage.

CPRE Bedfordshire have highlighted these issues to the Chief Planning Officer, the Mayor and Chair of the Planning Committee but disappointingly, so far no one at the Council seems to see this as a matter of any great concern.

Bedford Council has an ambition to include the development of new settlements as a significant feature of its future housing growth strategy. The new Local Plan makes a commitment to promote high quality place making and states that "Development should add to what is locally distinctive or help to create a new sense of place where this is needed."

Unfortunately, the Council appears to take the view that this can be achieved through its planning policies and standards, with scant regard to community engagement as a means to achieve this ambition. The reserved matters process could provide a valuable opportunity to involve local people in shaping the way that this development is delivered. CPRE Bedfordshire will continue to press the Council to reconsider its current position, and instead, make a concerted effort to engage proactively with residents.



Photo: Kathryn Lee

Bedford Borough Council adopts new Local Plan 2030... and immediately starts a review

CPRE Bedfordshire heartily congratulates Bedford Borough Council (BBC) on obtaining the approval of government appointed Inspectors for its Local Plan 2030.

The Inspector's approval was subject to a range of modifications which were accepted by BBC and the Plan was adopted by Full Council on the 15 January 2020.

Whilst we still have a number of serious issues regarding the Local Plan, we are happy that there are now clear plans for the location and size of future housing developments, industrial areas, infrastructure etc in the Borough.

Importantly, the Plan also provides clarity with regard to the areas of countryside and other green spaces that will be protected from future development.

An approved Local Plan enables BBC to robustly defend its housing policies against an increasing number of unwelcome and opportunistic planning applications which CPRE Bedfordshire together

with local Parish Councils and Action Groups have been fighting across the Borough over the last year. We are very pleased that BBC has been doing just that since January.

One of the Inspectors principal modifications to the Local Plan was that the Council should undertake a review of it within the next 3 years (i.e. by 2023). This is to incorporate any changes due to the Government's plans for development across the Oxford - Cambridge Arc. This review is already underway, and we understand that the first "Issues & Options" stage, will be published for public consultation in July.

Our principal concern regarding the Local Plan 2030 remains the very large numbers of new homes proposed for the Key

Rural Service Centres (KRSC's) of Clapham, Bromham, Sharnbrook and Great Barford – each are expected to take an additional 500 new homes. Sharnbrook currently has 1,000 homes so this represents a massive and unsustainable increase.

During the Local Plan Inspection our planning volunteers uncovered the fact that BBC are holding huge contingencies in their Local Plan 2030 amounting to around 2,000 homes. We urge BBC to use this contingency to substantially reduce the housing numbers at the KRSC's. All of these new homes will be built on open countryside.

CPRE calls for big shift in government housing policy to provide more affordable homes

National CPRE has recently submitted evidence to the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee's inquiry to examine the long-term delivery of social and affordable rented housing.

CPRE's mission is to promote, enhance and protect a thriving countryside. To make that a reality, we must ensure that there are enough low cost homes in our villages and market towns. Rural social and affordable housing will be an important public campaigning focus for us, both nationally and at a local level in collaboration with our local groups. Rural areas are often excluded from the wider public and political debate about the housing crisis. We aim to work with partners to change this.

The Government has set a target of delivering 300,000 new homes per year by mid-2020. However, current expectations mean that as little as 3% of this target could be social homes built by local authorities. Housing charity Shelter has warned that over 3 million new social home would need to be built over a 20 year period to address social housing need. Amounting to 150,000 new social homes per year, this is significantly higher than the Government's current plans.

'Affordable rent' at 80% of market rates is not affordable for many low and middle income rural households. Rural communities urgently need more homes for

social rent. It would take 130 years to provide everyone on rural council waiting lists with a social rented home at current build rates. Local authorities and housing associations do not have enough funding to build social rented homes in the quantity they are needed. A significant increase in grant funding is needed.

CPRE supports the call from the National Housing Federation for the Government to invest £12.8bn per year over 10 years in building 1.45m homes for social rent and other genuinely affordable tenures, with a fair proportion allocated to rural areas.

CPRE Bedfordshire joined forces with Cambridge, Buckinghamshire, and Oxfordshire branches to make a further submission to the committee, to specifically addresses relevant issues on this subject for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc area. The submission emphasises the belief held by CPRE that the scale of housing and population growth proposed by the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) for the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Arc is far too great in terms of what the Arc area should be expected to sustain. The Arc strategy, if taken forward, would



Photo: Amy Collins

result in a massive increase over and above the levels of housing growth already proposed in Local Plans based on local authority assessments of housing need. There is no Government commitment to work towards high standards of design or to prioritize meeting local housing needs as distinct from wider market demand.

CPRE believes that an Arc-wide commitment to high standards of affordable housing provision and design is required. The Government should make it clear that high levels of affordable housing – as much as 50% - should be achieved in new developments. Local needs for social rented or other low-cost housing must be prioritized over servicing market demand for larger, more expensive houses. As a minimum, developments should meet all the criteria under the industry's Building for Life 12 Standard for the design of new schemes.

Millions paid to Bedfordshire Local Authorities in New Homes Bonus – no way to run a Housing Development Strategy

The New Homes Bonus is a grant paid to Local Authorities (LAs) in England as an incentive for them to build more new homes in their area. It is a fixed amount paid for every new home built.

Local Authority funding from Central Government has been slashed in recent years as part of the “austerity programme” meaning that services ranging from Libraries, to Children’s Services and Environmental Green Space maintenance and development have also had to be cut.

In order to try and minimise the impact of these massive cuts to funding, LAs have been relying on New Homes Bonus to offset at least part of the cuts.

In Bedfordshire, Local Authorities have been building more and more new homes, not to satisfy the needs of local people but to earn huge sums in New Homes Bonus.

Latest government data shows that, in the 2020/21 tax year our LAs are expected to receive some of the highest payments in the country as follows:

Bedford Borough Council (BBC) - £6.9m

Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) - a massive - £9.5m

Luton Borough Council (LBC) - £1.6m

This is no way to run a housing development strategy - it simply results in massive numbers of new homes being built across the Bedfordshire countryside, not for local residents but to encourage

people from elsewhere in the UK to move to Bedfordshire. It is adversely impacting our environment and the quality of life of residents. Hard and soft infrastructure simply cannot cope.

Despite the massive number of new homes that have been built in the last 2/3 years, they are no more affordable for our local people, particularly the young and those on low wages.

Government data shows that CBC will receive more in New Homes Bonus than Manchester which has roughly twice the population and large amounts of brownfield land.

New Homes Bonus is now the principal driver behind the housing development plans of the Bedfordshire LA’s and it simply does not make sense!



Photo: Kev Kindred

Think again about the proposed A6 – M1 Link Road!

Protect the Bedfordshire Chilterns, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

We recently launched a final campaign to stop the A6-M1 Link Road. Many CPRE Bedfordshire members and supporters responded to our call for action and there has been great interest across our social media platforms. The need for economic recovery post COVID-19 has been widely welcomed as a chance to build a healthy, green and fair future for all and we are hopeful that this will include a review of spending and road building. But we need to put pressure on our local decision makers NOW and demand that they think again about the A6-M1 Link Road for the following reasons:-

The destruction of our countryside

This road runs alongside an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – the Bedfordshire Chilterns and will be entirely within the Green Belt and beside 2 Ancient Woodlands. These are vital parts of our “Natural Health Service” – the green lungs for our urban areas. All will be adversely impacted by the A6 – M1 Link Road which will get jammed up just as quickly as it's built.

The cost

The total cost of building and maintaining the road is unclear and therefore a financial risk not just to Central Bedfordshire Council but to SEMLEP who are providing £32.75m of funding. It has been estimated at over



Photo: Keith Brown

£60 million which equates to at least £22.2 million per mile over the 2.7 mile route! At this time of economic decline should Central Bedfordshire be wasting our money on a road that is not needed?

The Climate hypocrisy

In July 2019 Central Bedfordshire Council committed to prioritise responding to climate change with the creation of a Climate Change Plan. The detrimental environmental impact of the planned road also goes against SEMLEPs Sustainability Policy. Not only will the road lead to countryside loss but also to increased air pollution and carbon emissions, taking us in exactly the opposite direction to where we need to be going to tackle the climate emergency.

The democratic deficit

The efforts of local people and organisations, including CPRE Bedfordshire, to stop this road have been dismissed. This is despite Government appointed Inspectors raising serious concerns regarding the need for the new road during the examination of Central Bedfordshire's new Local Plan 2035. A “call in” request to MHC&LG to review the road plan was declined by Robert Jenrick, stating that the issue was a local matter. This is most certainly not the case – the Chilterns AONB is of national significance and our countryside is a matter for all of us.

To join our campaign go to www.cprebeds.org.uk

Local Spotlight

CPRE Bedfordshire supports local community groups working for change

Sustainable Bedford

CPRE Bedfordshire supports local community groups working for change in their areas. Here Cory Walker introduces Sustainable Bedford and Jayne Anthony tells us about the Ampthill Climate Change Group.

Sustainable Bedford is an environmental community group in Bedford and surrounding areas. Set up by Cory Walker originally as “Plastic Free Bedford and “Refill Bedford” in June/July 2019,

the group name was changed recently to facilitate becoming an organisation in the near future whilst also merging the two schemes into the group.

We cover all aspects of sustainability from sustainable living to eating healthy and growing your own food, sustainable fashion, upcycling, plastic pollution and lots more. We have successfully run litter picks in the past and plan to continue these and also offer other events such as workshops, talks and film screenings.

We run the group entirely through volunteers and appreciate the work they do to keep us going. We aim to start induction sessions when everything returns to usual so we can expand our team which will allow us to do more with the group and linked schemes.

If you would like to find out more about what we do or how to get involved, you can find us on our social media: Search “Sustainable Bedford” on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube or email Bedford. nomoreplastic@outlook.com

Ampthill Climate Change Group

The Ampthill Climate Change Group is a community group strongly supported by Ampthill Town Council aiming to work on projects that (i) reduce the carbon footprint of the town, its businesses and residents, (ii) reduce waste, particularly plastic waste, and (iii) restore nature.

The idea of forming the group was to bring like-minded people together, sharing skills and knowledge, as well as enthusiasm, and to collaborate with other towns and villages, campaign groups and the local councils on addressing these issues at a local level.

Jayne Anthony, who first took the idea to Ampthill Town Council with help from CPRE Bedfordshire, said ‘Individually we feel as though we can have little effect on these issues, but together we can make a difference and be a force for positive change.’

Some of the projects that the group had started working on before Covid-19 hit were:

Organising litter picks. Susan Clinch, Ampthill Town Councillor said ‘Our first litter pick was a real social event, and not only did we collect more than 30 bags of rubbish (that would otherwise be left in the landscape), everyone seemed to have a great time.’

Looking at ways of recycling more items through the various Terracycle schemes. Planning has been underway to investigate

collaborating with existing local schemes and to start projects in school. They hope to re-start this project asap.

Changing some of the town’s verges to ‘no-mow’ and/or adding wildflowers. Sites for this were chosen and we plan to continue this project from the autumn if possible.

We have many plans for future projects including promoting walking and cycling in the town, setting up a youth section, getting plastic-free status, and helping residents and businesses to share ideas towards reducing their carbon footprint.

For further information, contact the group of info@ampthillclimatechange.co.uk or find us on Facebook.

Branch News

New website

In January we launched our new website. In case you haven't yet had chance to explore it for yourselves here are a few of the new features:

- A more modern layout with a home page that features more stories and links
- Under the 'what we care about' menu, new pages that group news stories by local authority, making it easier for you to find out what's happening in your area
- In the 'discover our countryside tab' you'll find ideas for days out in Bedfordshire, our new blog section and information about the Living Countryside Awards



- 'Stories' is a new section in the 'about us' menu - here you'll find more in-depth content Recent features include 'Environmental protections – what do they mean?'
- You'll also find **new sections** which give an overview of the key areas of work for CPRE at local and national level.

Blog

“Celebrating The Everyday” is the theme we've chosen for our blog during 2020. When we started back in January with a post about a woodland walk on a grey and uninspiring day, we couldn't have predicted how relevant the idea of appreciating the nature on your doorstep would be for this year.

You'll find the blog section of the website at www.cprebeds.org.uk/category/best-of-the-countryside/

Find out how CPRE Bedfordshire Manager Lois Wright came to realise that garden birds aren't boring; immerse yourself in our specially curated reading list of books related to trees; and ponder how to stay connected to nature when you cannot go further than the back garden.

We'd love to hear your suggestions for topics for future posts. Perhaps you might even like to write something about what celebrating the everyday means to you or tell us about a special local place that is under appreciated? Get in touch via shelly.dennison@cprebeds.org.uk



Photo: Lucy Goodson (age 11)

CPRE Bedfordshire leads the way in volunteering

During Volunteer's Week in June we were pleased to be one of the first ten CPRE groups to launch Assemble, our new volunteer management system.

Assemble is cutting edge software used by organisations across the UK including the RSPCA, Parkinsons, Barnardos and the Ramblers. Assemble enables us to communicate with volunteers in an easy, straightforward way and will greatly improve our ability to recruit, train, manage and support all our wonderful volunteers. Assemble is fully GDPR compliant and all details are held securely.

This was timely as it coincided with our plans to develop volunteering opportunities in Bedfordshire. We're passionate about enhancing the countryside in Bedfordshire to make it a better

place for everyone to live, work and enjoy but we can't do this alone. We value the contribution of our volunteers enormously but need to develop our team so we can achieve even more.

Our volunteers support us in many ways including fundraising, providing specialist advice, investigating proposed planning developments, providing admin support and helping at events. Trustees are also volunteers and provide essential governance for the organisation.

By volunteering with us you'll be part of a friendly team of like-minded people. You'll gain

new skills and we'll give you the training you may need for your volunteering role. You can join in with our events, attend workshops and take part in our annual national conference.

We want to give you a first-class experience when you volunteer with us and Assemble is the one-stop place for all your volunteering information. You can apply for an opportunity using an easy online form and track your application every step of the way. Search our current opportunities to find one that's just right for you at <https://www.cprebeds.org.uk/get-involved/volunteering/>

We'd love to hear from you if you've other skills to offer or if you've any questions about volunteering. Just contact our Manager at lois.wright@cprebeds.org.uk



CPRE Beds Volunteers on Living Countryside Award site visit

Mike Stonnell, Vice Chair, CPRE Bedfordshire

On behalf of the Trustees, it is with great sadness that I have to inform members that our good friend and highly respected fellow Trustee, Mike Stonnell passed away on Saturday, 11th January 2020.

This follows a long illness that Mike bore with great courage and fortitude.

Mike will be remembered for his infectious sense of humour and total commitment to the protection of the Bedfordshire countryside.

A Bedfordshire man through and through, Mike was born in Luton and lived in the village of Sundon where he was also Chair of the Parish Council.

He joined CPRE Bedfordshire after retiring from work as a University Lecturer and soon made his mark as a highly respected and committed environmentalist.

He was particularly revered for his detailed analysis of a wide range of planning matters that adversely

impacted the Bedfordshire countryside and his ability to assimilate complex issues.

Mike became Vice Chair of CPRE Bedfordshire and held this position until he passed in January.

Mike will be very sorely missed by us all and we send our deepest condolences to his wife Helen and their family.

Gerry Sansom

Join us

Join us and be part of the movement for a countryside that benefits everyone!

Without CPRE our countryside wouldn't exist as we know it – and CPRE wouldn't exist without people like you to support us.

Becoming a member of CPRE is one of the best ways to celebrate and protect the countryside you love and membership starts at just £3 a month for individuals.

To join, go online at www.cprebeds.org.uk, email us at info@cprebeds.org.uk or call 01234 880624



Bedfordshire Matters is the biannual magazine of Bedfordshire's CPRE branch. CPRE Bedfordshire is a local independent charity who works to protect and promote the countryside and urban green spaces of Bedfordshire.

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The countryside charity
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