



Bedfordshire Matters



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Chair's column

Martin Christopher



After seven years as Chair of CPRE Bedfordshire, Gerry Sansom has stood down from the role. The contribution that Gerry has made to the work of

CPRE in this county and beyond has been immense. Gerry's commitment to protecting Bedfordshire's countryside and urban green spaces has ensured that the voice of CPRE Bedfordshire has been heard. As a result, many of the potentially harmful decisions impacting our environment have been mitigated.

In taking over from Gerry I am conscious of the challenges that continue to face all of us who care about our surroundings. The threats to our diminishing countryside and green spaces are still growing. As well as the ever-present pressure for new development, be it housing or

transport links, there are emerging concerns for air quality, biodiversity and physical and mental wellbeing.

All of us who live and work in Bedfordshire have a stake in its 'natural capital'. This type of capital, unlike bricks and mortar and other tangible assets, cannot be re-created once it has been destroyed – hence the need for its careful stewardship. If you share these views and would like to help us in any way with the work we do please contact me at martin.christopher@cprebeds.org.uk

AGM & Talk

How to Value a Skylark: The Countryside in a Time of Change by Brian Kerr

Thursday 7th October, 7pm

Wootton Community Centre

During prolonged periods of lockdown the importance of the outdoors and access to the countryside became more important than ever, and we developed an understanding of the part nature plays in mental health and wellbeing.

As we return to a 'new normal', the future of this vital green escape deserves scrutiny. The Government has promised a radical way forward in maintaining and enhancing our rural landscape, embarking on a new environmental 'nature friendly' approach.

All future changes, though, are set against the backdrop of alarm over a climate emergency, and the continuing loss of wildlife. Will the pandemic accelerate these radical changes or push them into the background?

In this illustrated talk based on the book of the same name, Brian Kerr asks "How to Value a Skylark: The Countryside in a Time of Change"

Brian Kerr trained as a soil scientist and has spent most of his career working and writing on landscape and agricultural topics both in the British Isles and overseas. Now based in Ampthill, he has taken an interest in countryside issues in Bedfordshire and has published several books on the countryside. His most recent book "How to Value a Skylark: The Countryside in a Time of Change" was published this year.

How to Value a Skylark The Countryside in a Time of Change



Brian Kerr

This is an in person event and we will be taking steps to minimise the risk of Covid transmission.

To register go to www.cprebedssylark.eventbrite.co.uk or email info@cprebeds.org.uk

Cover photo taken by Barry Halton at Riverside Dairy, Made in Bedfordshire category winners in the 2021 Living Countryside Awards

Living Countryside awards 2021

The pride of Bedfordshire

CPRE Director, Lois Wright,
reflects on the 2021 Living
Countryside Awards

The Living Countryside Awards is an important project for CPRE Bedfordshire and getting out and seeing the entrants is always a delight. This year was even more uplifting following many months of Covid restrictions and our small team travelled to all corners of Bedfordshire to visit an array of projects.

What struck us most were the people. Their passion and commitment to make good things happen, sometimes against the odds, and their enthusiasm and ability to inspire others. And, of course, the contribution they make to improving our countryside and urban greenspaces. Whilst politicians at all levels are talking about climate change, sustainability, and planning how to save the planet, these people are out there day after day making a real difference to their local area. No waffle or greenwashing – they are actually doing something positive where it really matters.

CPRE Bedfordshire Volunteer, Barry Halton has been involved in the Living Countryside Awards since their inception in 2008 and has visited over 180 projects in that time. He has taken thousands of pictures as an aide memoire for the judges and later to show wider audiences the efforts of many people all over our county who are - often quietly - protecting and improving our shared environment.

“You don’t have to talk very long with the folk who enter their projects for the Awards to sense their commitment to improving the quality of life for all of us, and it is a privilege to meet them. Their projects, large or small, in countryside or urban settings, are all inspirational and in a relatively small county it still surprises me how many of these often unrecognised projects come forward for the Awards each time.”

There was also an amazing drive to get things done! Despite the challenges of the last year these projects pushed ahead, re-invented themselves or even came into being due to lockdown. Whether a business or a community group they overcame challenges in a positive way.

Project Volunteer, Jess O’Sullivan worked closely with all the projects. “The passion, pride and determination displayed by every single volunteer and project owner has blown me away. It has been heart-warming to see that despite the challenge of the past 16 months, people across Bedfordshire have remained committed to promoting our countryside and sharing it with the community.”

This last year has shown us how we all need some form of connection with others. The 2021 Living Countryside Awards has really highlighted this and demonstrated that by working together we can all make a difference to ourselves, our communities and our amazing green spaces.

It has been an honour and pleasure to learn about these projects and we hope to continue working with them in the future.

Read more about the Living Countryside Awards and see films of the winners at www.cprebeds.org.uk/discover/results2021/



Better Places to Live - Winner:
Abbey Fields Roundabout Group



Made in Bedfordshire - Commended:
Woburn Country Food



Connecting People to the Countryside -
Highly Commended:
Penrose Roots

Young volunteers making a difference

Volunteering with CPRE Bedfordshire can be very rewarding and help to gain invaluable experience.

Jess O'Sullivan - Project Volunteer

I'm Jess and I've been volunteering with CPRE Bedfordshire since September 2020. As someone who has grown up in the Bedfordshire countryside, being part of CPRE has meant that I have been able to work with people who share my passion for protecting and enhancing our wonderful county.

After graduating in the middle of the pandemic last year, I joined CPRE Bedfordshire to get some work experience. My degree focussed on Environmental Politics so CPRE is a great fit. My main project has been working on the Living Countryside Awards and I've had the privilege of reading all of the applications and making visits to projects to support the judging process.

I have a lot to thank the team at CPRE Bedfordshire for. In May, I was successful in getting a job at CPRE's National Office as a Campaigns and Policy Assistant in the Land Use and Planning Team. My experience volunteering for CPRE Bedfordshire gave me a great head start and allowed me to hit the ground running. I plan to keep on volunteering and spreading the word that Bedfordshire is a beautiful, thriving county.

Rob Carter - Assistant Planning Volunteer.

Ever since I can remember, I have been passionate about the countryside. I was brought up going for long walks across the Lake District and Somerset,

which gave me a love of the British countryside and the beauty we have on our doorstep.

I began to notice the threats being imposed to our green spaces, with the continual expansion of our towns and villages into characterless estates of copy and pasted brick boxes. The fight towards a more sustainable green future has been something that is really important to me.

"Volunteering with CPRE Bedfordshire has been a crucial step that enabled me to become a vessel for good in the protection of our biodiverse landscapes."

As part of my role, I have looked into several projects spanning a multitude of sizes and locations. It opened my eyes to the constant battle and balancing act between developers, the planning office and local parish councils. The team have been very welcoming throughout my training process and beyond and made me feel like a valued member of the team. I look forward to being a part of this charity now and for the foreseeable future.



If you're concerned about the increasing development in your local area, on greenbelt and in our countryside then you could make a difference by joining our volunteer team.

To find out more about volunteering opportunities with CPRE Bedfordshire, visit www.cprebeds.org.uk/get-involved/volunteering/

Could you be our next Treasurer?

If you have a head for figures and a love of the countryside, you could be our next Treasurer and help our growing charity through an exciting development phase.

As Treasurer you will ensure our financial affairs are conducted within legal requirements and good practice. You'll work closely with the Director and other Trustees to oversee the financial sustainability and development of our charity as well as maintaining the day to day accounts.

For more information go to our website or contact lois.wright@cprebeds.org.uk

Autumn Glory!

Enjoy the amazing palette of colour autumn has to offer.

As summer starts to fade and autumn creeps in, nature offers up a stunning array of colours as the leaves turn. During the cooler months there are fewer sunlight hours which reduces the need for chlorophyll in leaves during autumn. As the pigment breaks down, the xanthophylls and carotenes become more visible, producing a stunning array of autumnal colours. Fiery reds, blazing oranges and glowing golds show the natural landscape at its best.

“Autumn is a second spring when every leaf is a flower.” Albert Camus.

Walking amongst trees at this time of year is a feast for the eyes and Bedfordshire has plenty of places to enjoy autumn’s beauty. Our favourites include:-

Cooper’s Hill, Ampthill

A site of special scientific interest (SSSI) this is Bedfordshire’s largest remaining area of heathland. On the edge of Ampthill, the reserve consists of rare and endangered open heath, patches of gorse and broom and isolated trees and is surrounded by pockets of woodland including a mix of beech, lime, birch and oak which produce a glorious display of colour. It is a great place to kick through the leaves!

Ampthill Great Park

A favourite spot in the autumn where you are spoilt for choice with beautiful woodland and views to the far edges of Bedfordshire. With a mix of spectacular trees, some of which are ancient, the colours are breath taking plus there’s an abundance of conkers.

Bedford Park and Cemetery

On the western edge of Bedford lies Bedford Park and Bedford Cemetery. Created in 1888 it is the largest urban park in Bedford and possibly represents one of the finest urban treescapes in Britain. Overall, it comprises 55 acres of beautiful, unspoilt green landscape that is open for everyone to enjoy, just a short distance from the town centre.



Ampthill Park - photo by Mark Osborn

Putnoe Woods

A deceptively large wood attached to the rear of Mowsbury Park which is primarily composed of oak, ash and maple with some coppiced hazel plots. A rare patch of nature in an urban setting, ideal for walkers, runners and a game of hide and seek.

Sharpenhoe Clappers

Situated just north of Luton and part of the Sundon Hills, this site offers stunning views over Bedfordshire. The ancient beech woodland turns rich shades of brown, orange and gold during the autumn and is a great place to blow away the cobwebs. But take care if you visit near Halloween as the site is reputedly haunted!



Sharpenhoe Clappers - photo by Mark Osborn

The Green Belt explained

Recent CPRE Bedfordshire objections to the proposed Greenwoods new town near Wrest Park and the A6-M1 link road have hinged on the fact that they would mean building on Green Belt land and the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

But what do these terms mean, where are they found in Bedfordshire, and what protections do they offer?

Green Belt is a defined area of countryside around a town or city which is protected from ‘inappropriate’ forms of development, as defined in government planning policy on Green Belts. Controls over new development, especially housing, are tighter than for most of the countryside. There are 14 Green Belts throughout the country, covering about 13% of England, which provide fresh air for around 30 million people. The trees, hedgerows and fields act as a carbon sink, can help reduce flooding and reduce the ‘heat island’ effect of towns and cities. Quality or appearance of land is not a factor when deciding whether to

designate it as a Green Belt.

The five purposes of the Green Belt are:

- Check unrestricted sprawl of urban areas
- Prevent neighbouring towns from merging with each other
- Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment
- Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns
- Assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

Green Belt land provides access to open countryside for urban dwellers, along with opportunities for outdoor activities. There tend to be more Public

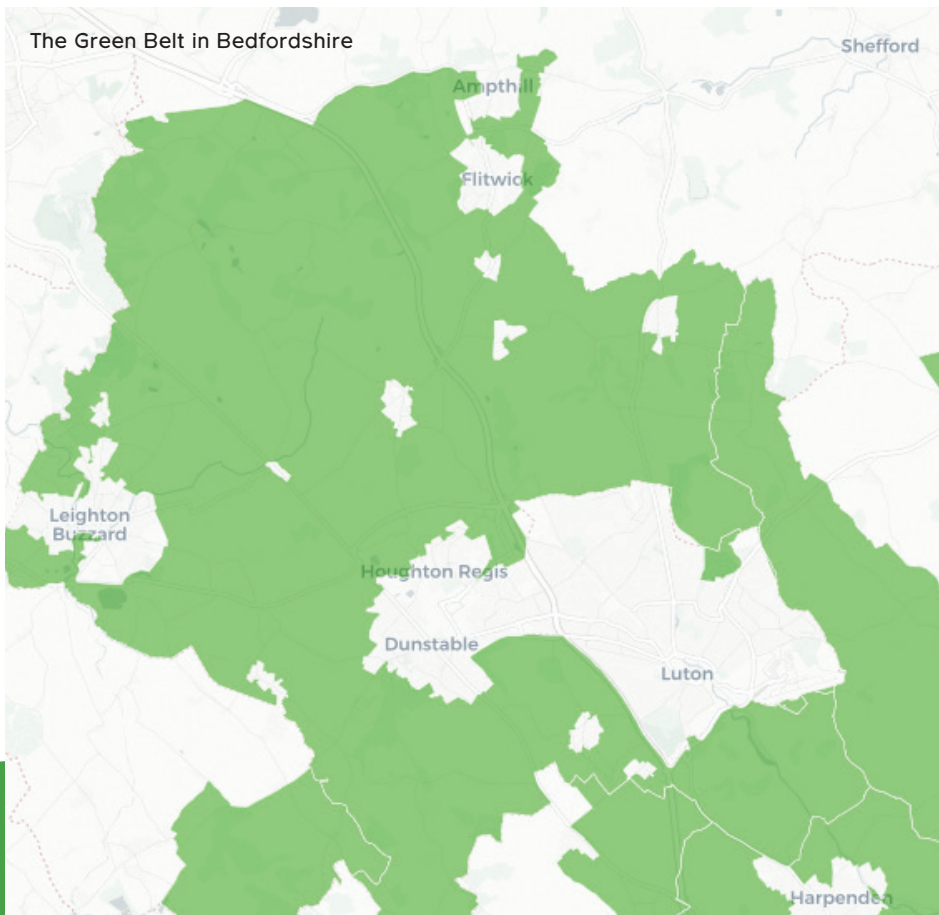


Rights of Way, Country Parks, publicly accessible woodland and open access land in Green Belts than in non-designated countryside. Green Belt land is also important for agriculture, forestry and related uses.

Bedfordshire’s only Green Belt land is on the northernmost edge of the London Metropolitan Green Belt. It provides Luton, Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard with Green Belt designated land.

A lot of countryside described by local people as Green Belt is not actually officially designated as such. Bedford, for example, has no Green Belt, but has a Green Wheel scheme which provides access to parks, countryside and other green spaces. This undesignated countryside often provides many of the same benefits for people and wildlife associated with Green Belt land.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty were brought into being by the same legislation as National Parks – the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949. AONBs are smaller areas than National Parks but are landscapes of similar merit. Natural





London Green Belt Council

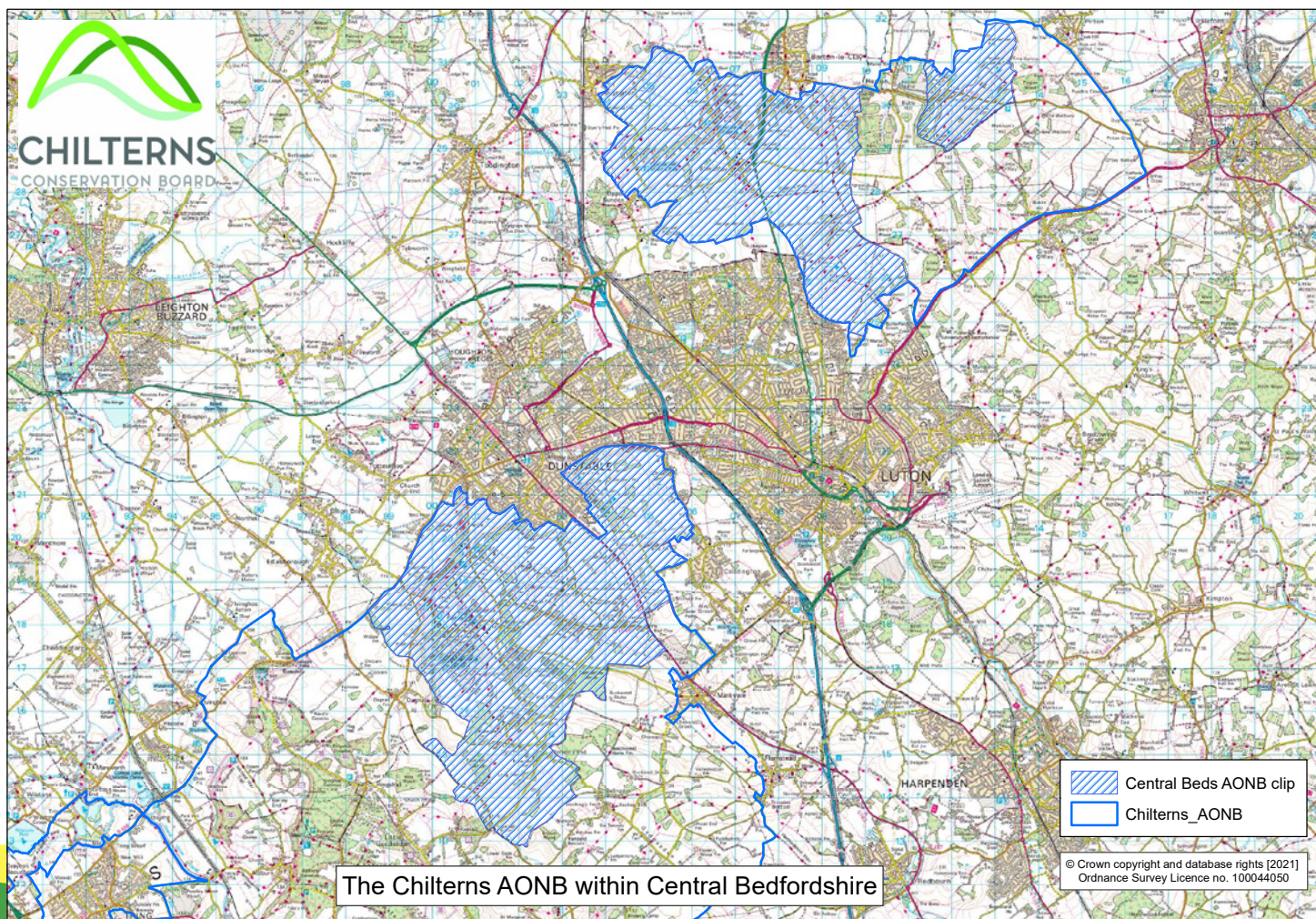
The local CPREs which have land included within this Green Belt belong to the London Green Belt Council. This is a grouping of over 100 organisations including councils, residents and environmental groups with a mutual concern for London’s Green Belt. The organisation shares knowledge and information on the threats and opportunities across London’s Green Belt, makes representations on relevant planning policies and lobbies and influences policy and decision makers. In partnership with LGBC the local CPREs produce a map of current threats to the Green Belt – proposals which will result in loss of Green Belt land. This is used to monitor irreversible loss of Green Belt land and amenities.

England is responsible for designating AONBs in England and advising the Government on policies for their protection and management. There are 34 in all, covering about 15% of England.

‘Permitted Development Rights’ allow for the change of use of land and buildings in certain circumstances

without the need for full planning permission. These are allowed in the Green Belt but restricted in AONBs. There is a requirement to give great weight to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in AONBs that doesn’t apply to the Green Belt, where the only requirement is to maintain openness.

The Chilterns AONB covers part of southern Bedfordshire, including the Dunstable Downs. The Glover Report of 2019 recommended that the Chilterns be made into a National Park. Earlier this year, the government proposed extending the Chilterns and we await more details about the area that this might cover.



The Chilterns AONB within Central Bedfordshire

East West Rail – The big picture

What is East West Rail (EWR)?

EWR is a major rail project to improve transport connections between Oxford and Cambridge. In Bedfordshire, EWR involves an upgrade to the existing Marston Vale line, and the creation of an entirely new railway route from Bedford to the border with Cambridgeshire.

CPRE Bedfordshire supports the concept of East West Rail as a scheme that can bring benefits by reducing car journeys and heavy goods vehicles on our roads.

What are the implications for Bedfordshire?

The options under consideration in Bedfordshire are concerned with;

- The number and location of stations between Bletchley and Bedford on the existing Marston Vale line (Section B of the Consultation Document).
- The alignments for the railway on a new line between Bedford and the boundary with Cambridgeshire, where an interchange station with the East Midlands Mainline is to be located somewhere between St Neots and north of Sandy (Sections C and D of the Consultation Document).

What are the options for the Marston Vale line?

Section B of the Consultation Document looks at the options for operating EWR between Bletchley and Bedford using the existing Marston Vale line. EWR Co proposals are focused on the frequency of services, how vehicles and pedestrians cross



the railway, and the number and location of stations.

EWR Co has developed two alternative concepts for the train services and stations on the Marston Vale Line:

- **Concept 1** - retains the existing hourly service that stops at all current intermediate stations and introduces a fast limited-stop Oxford – Cambridge services alongside it.
- **Concept 2** - merges a number of the existing intermediate stations together to provide five new stations on the Marston Vale Line with improved facilities and more frequent and faster trains.

CPRE Bedfordshire favours Concept 1 because it.

- Retains all existing stations, providing easier access for local people to rail services for local travel. A 'greener' and more sustainable option.
- Avoids the extensive development and relocation of some stations

involved in Concept 2, which involves building new stations in open countryside.

CPRE Bedfordshire believes that it is essential that the views of Parish Councils and local people are fully considered, and that residents' current travel patterns are fully understood, before making decisions about which option will be chosen.

Why does CPRE Bedfordshire say that the chosen route (Route E) from Bedford to St Neots/Sandy is unacceptable?

CPRE accepts that some environmental harm will be inevitable in the construction of a major new railway line, but we recognise the benefits of better east/west rail connections which will provide important opportunities to reduce reliance on roads for cars and heavy goods vehicles.

However, we believe that EWR Co have got their priorities totally wrong in their choice of Route E:

- CPRE Bedfordshire believe it is essential that the railway is developed in a way that makes minimising environmental harms to both urban and rural areas, a primary priority.
- By their own admission EWR Co state in the Consultation Document that the key project priorities are to develop the railway in a way which best supports economic growth and new large scale housing growth.
- Although EWR Co state that environmental considerations are taken into account, these are largely absent from the Consultation Document as far as the Bedford Borough area is concerned.

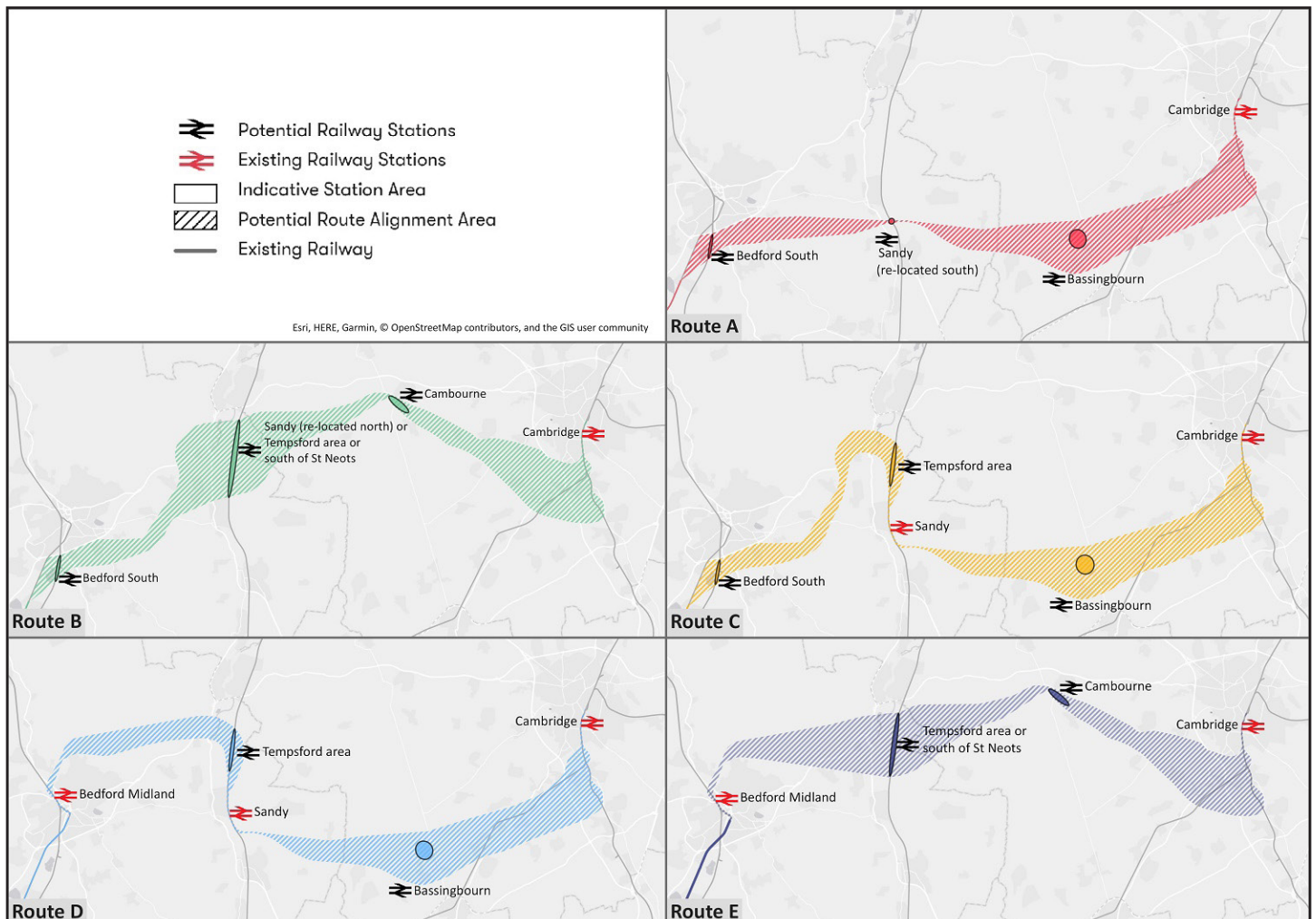
What about the impact on the countryside and rural communities of the southern route preferred by CPRE?

CPRE Bedfordshire have stated a preference for a route which follows the existing A428/A421 transport corridor between Cambridge and Bedford. In the previous consultation Route 'B' provided the closest match to this preference.

We still believe that an alternative route based on Route B is the optimum route corridor in Bedford Borough for several reasons including, ability to serve the maximum number of existing communities, construction cost, operating revenue, least disruption to the countryside and to agriculture,

least opening up of scarce agricultural land for development, speed of delivery, clear alternative to the now cancelled Ox-Cam expressway.

If EWR Co are willing to look more closely at options based on Route B, we would encourage them to explore options to minimise negative environmental impacts by looking at opportunities to align the route with the A421 corridor. This would avoid intrusion into the open countryside south of the A421 and River Great Ouse and the rural communities in that area, for example, Willington, Cople and Moggerhanger.



Empowering communities

When it comes to local campaigning CPRE Bedfordshire works closely with action groups and Parish Councils to help them achieve their aims. This can include sharing information via our website and on social media, making our full consultation responses available for reference and joining meetings to listen to local people and give our input. We believe that empowering local communities is the best way to make change happen.

Over the last year we've worked closely with a number of groups. Here we put the spotlight on three of them.



BFARe

As the implications of the choice of East West Rail's preferred Route E became more widely understood, a number of parish councils invited CPRE Bedfordshire to join a meeting where they were considering their options to challenge Route E. We encouraged those present to engage all the parish councils affected and to urge them to join forces and use their communication channels within their parish communities to broaden awareness and to get residents who object to the route to make their views known.

It soon became apparent that there was a strong groundswell of opposition to Route E. A core group of leading parish councils and CPRE Bedfordshire formed a campaign group called Bedford For a Re Consultation (BFARe) with the primary aim of advocating for a re-consultation on the choice of the preferred route for East West Rail (EWR).

The group rapidly developed into a highly effective campaigning organisation with a website and Facebook group which engaged very substantial attention, attracting more than 2,000 members. A petition which

asks people to demonstrate support for the campaign aims has been signed by over 4,000 individuals.

An energetic group of campaign members have produced a regular flow of information and opinion pieces for the website plus press releases. Members of the technical sub group have generated high quality graphics illustrating the impact of the route on the countryside and members with engineering backgrounds have developed a proposed alternative route that is possibly more cost effective and less damaging environmentally.

The campaign group has been very successful in holding Bedford Borough Council to account for their support of the chosen route, provoking an extensive range of consultation meetings and a major debate at full council.

Local MP, Richard Fuller, has facilitated virtual meetings with senior managers from EWR Co, the Rail Minister and parliamentary debates to highlight the concerns of the campaign group.

The campaign group provided a comprehensive dossier of information in support of their response to the Alignments Consultation which closed early in June.

www.bfare.org.uk



Working with Ridgmont Parish Council

It is always very difficult to decide which projects we should dedicate our limited volunteer resources to. However, when we were approached by Ridgmont Parish Council over three years ago, it was clear that they were fighting an extremely damaging proposal. Developers had submitted a planning application to develop yet another massive warehouse at J13 of the M1. At the same time Central Bedfordshire Council also decided to allocate this green field site in the emerging Local Plan which totalled 43 hectares (around the size of an average 18-hole golf course) for warehousing.

The site forms an integral part of the Greensand ridge and adjoins the remains of a very rare medieval castle, (a 'Ringwork') and the adjacent historic 'Round House' near Brogborough and Lidlington. The Ringwork is one of

only 200 remaining in the county. Its remains, which are very large earth works, sits in the grounds of the Round House, a ruined 17th century Grade II listed red brick building, where it is said Cromwell signed the death warrant for King Charles I.

The Ringwork and Round House are situated on a spur of the Greensand Ridge to take advantage of the amazing views from this site in all directions, along the Marston Vale, and over towards Ridgmont in the opposite direction. Understanding the 'setting' of these historic monuments in this commanding defensive position is a key part of their historic context.

This setting would be really compromised by the proposed allocation and application.

We helped support the strong case being made by Ridgmont and other

objectors including Historic England (the Government's advisor on our historic environment) through our own objections at various stages of the Local Plan process.

We also helped raise local awareness of the objector's campaign and petition through postings on our website and a feature in our monthly electronic newsletter which was circulated to local residents.

Despite the strength of objections and the concerns raised by the Local Plan Inspectors CBC have recently confirmed their Local Plan allocation albeit on a smaller area and with new conditions on increased landscaping and development requiring it to respect the settings of the adjacent historic buildings. We will be watching the situation closely to make sure these are met.



Say No To Greenwoods New Town

CPRE Bedfordshire were very much involved with the campaign against the Greenwoods development and worked with the Local Action Group ‘Say No to Greenwoods New Town’ and seven parish councils adjacent to the proposed site. John English, Planning Volunteer and Trustee represented

“Working with CPRE Bedfordshire on this and other local planning applications is a huge benefit to us. Gravenhurst is a small parish with limited resources and the ability to seek advice and learn from the CPRE team is invaluable.” Alessandra Marabese, Clerk, Gravenhurst Parish Council.

CPRE Bedfordshire on the steering committee to advise on their approach to the campaign and planning matters. CPRE Bedfordshire also submitted their own objection.

The outline application for Greenwoods, essentially a new town on countryside east of the A6 near Barton Le Clay, included 3850 dwellings plus associated amenities. A significant proportion of the proposed development is within the Green Belt and setting of the AONB.

The campaign was set up by local residents who clearly knew what they were doing as they gathered the support of over 2000 local people on their Facebook page.

“I had never been involved in anything like this before and it was incredibly daunting. The support of the CPRE Bedfordshire generally made me feel as though I had expertise at my fingertips and a hand on my shoulder throughout. I can’t thank them enough.” Karina Bartlett, Say No to Greenwoods New Town campaign.

As a result of a well-managed campaign, 1512 objections were registered on the Central Bedfordshire Council planning portal and in late July the application was withdrawn following an exchange of letters between the Case Officer and the Land Promoter. It is likely to re-appear at a later date so the campaign group will continue.

Neighbourhood Planning Workshop

Wednesday 20th October, 10am – 4pm

Meppershall Village Hall

CPRE Bedfordshire is pleased to present a one-day workshop to bring together representatives from Parish and Town Councils in Bedfordshire to learn and share experiences of Neighbourhood Planning.

Guest speaker: Dave Chetwyn

Churches count on nature

We take a look at how churches are regenerating their land and buildings for nature and the environment.

From Net Zero carbon targets to fossil fuel divestment, churches are increasingly taking climate change seriously. At a more local level churchyards can be urban green oases, places of peace and quiet, where nature is able to thrive.

Here we investigate three initiatives that churches near you might be taking part in.

Churches Count on Nature

Churches Count on Nature is run by Caring for God's Acre, a charity which supports groups and individuals to investigate, care for, and enjoy burial grounds and graveyards. June 2021 saw the Churches Count on Nature week help churches to benchmark the biodiversity in their churchyards. The citizen science project helps churches celebrate what's already there and identify what they can do to improve their land for nature.

Bedfordshire is part of the Diocese of St Albans which runs a Living Churchyards project to help churches manage their churchyards in a wildlife



Churchyards are an important habitat for lichens and mosses



Carlton church with conservation area in the foreground

friendly way. Advice and help comes from the local Wildlife Trust.

Both these schemes acknowledge the need for contemplative spaces for visitors and try and balance the needs of people and wildlife.

Eco Church

Eco Church is a project run by A Rocha UK, a Christian conservation charity, and like CPRE, part of Wildlife and Countryside Link.

It is a wide ranging programme where churches score points across five categories – Worship & Teaching, Land, Buildings, Community & Global Engagement, and Lifestyle – progressing through Bronze, Silver and Gold Awards.

Churches from right across Bedfordshire are registered, they come from a number of different denominations and some have already achieved awards. You can explore an online map to find out what's happening in your area, some churches may be running projects that the local community can get involved with, such as litter picks, hosting recycling bins or practical conservation work. <https://app.ecochurch.org/map>

Coming Home

Earlier this year Canon Chris Beales from the Archbishop's Commission on Housing Church and Community spoke to the CPRE network about the Coming Home report which looks at how church land could be used to provide rural affordable housing or affordable and social housing



Looking beyond the churchyard walls

developments on urban brownfield sites. The report recognises the importance of energy efficient buildings, allotments, green spaces, footpaths into local countryside and sustainable transport links when considering new developments.

Under threat – countryside in Sundon Hills

Photo: Keith Brown



Green for Go!

As the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan gets the go ahead, we consider if this is good news or an appalling act of environmental vandalism.

At the end of July, the Local Plan for Central Bedfordshire was finally adopted by Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC). In the last few years, CPRE Bedfordshire has openly expressed serious concerns about the democratic process and the environmental impact of the plan. Our team of planning volunteers have fought hard to protect the countryside and spent thousands of hours

researching the plan, commenting on its contents, and attending hearing.

On the face of it, a Local Plan is helpful and can be an essential tool in managing development in a sustainable way. This should be done in consultation with local people and with consideration for local needs but, in our experience, this was not the case in Central Bedfordshire.

The approval of the Local Plan has been driven by the government's planning policy and a completed disregard for the democratic process. In September 2019, a Consultation generated 6,828 individual

responses from residents, Town & Parish Councils, and environmental organisations with 83% objecting to the Local Plan (1) which led to an 'Inspection in Public' by government appointed Inspectors.

The Inspectors subsequently issued a letter to CBC which was highly critical of almost every aspect of their Local Plan. The Inspectors' criticisms were very much in line with those of CPRE Bedfordshire and the many residents who had participated in the Consultation and Inspection process in good faith.

However, following the appointment of Robert Jenrick MP as Secretary of State for the Ministry of Homes Communities & Local Government in 2020, new guidance was issued on Local Plan Inspections (2) which placed more emphasis on getting Local Plans adopted as quickly as possible. This effectively undermined the democratic process which had required Inspectors to review the submitted Local Plan and judge it against the comments of local people and the regulations laid down in the National Planning Policy Framework. It meant the comments of objectors were no longer important, silencing the voices of residents, and making the primary aim to get the Local Plan approved.

Since this announcement the Inspectors of CBC's Local Plan have made a complete U-Turn and over a period of a few months reversed all criticisms previously detailed in their letter to CBC including:

Approving the route of the A6/M1 Link Road which will slice through the Bedfordshire Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The plans for the new road were objected to by every major environmental organisation in England including the Government's own advisors Natural England and the Chilterns AONB Board.

- Approving over 450 hectares of land, equivalent to about 740 football pitches, being taken out of the Green Belt in Central Bedfordshire for development.
- Approving a New Town of 5,000 new homes in the Community Forest of Marston Vale, between Lidlington and Marston Moretaine for which Inspectors had said that CBC had not provided any detailed evidence of need and that

it would lead to a huge increase in commuting by car.

- Approving the massive expansion of Biggleswade
- Approving huge warehouse developments right across Central Bedfordshire

It is the view of CPRE Bedfordshire that the level of development in the Local Plan is completely unsustainable with just 40% of housing developed to meet the needs of local people. Over 60% of new homes are being built to encourage a huge population movement into Central Bedfordshire from people currently living in London and elsewhere in the UK, driving prices even higher and pushing locals out. All this against a backdrop of the scandal with Houghton Regis North land banking - where land was taken out of the Green Belt in 2014 and planning permission was given for 5,000 new homes. To date, not a single house has been built, so are developers holding back development in order to drive prices higher and ensure that even more land is released for development? Or are they avoiding paying the previously agreed £44million towards the cost of the A5/M1 Link Road? Whatever the reason, this delay has resulted in hundreds of hectares of additional open countryside being allocated for housing in order to compensate for houses not built in Houghton Regis North.

The environmental impact of the plan is potentially catastrophic. It will result in an increasing carbon footprint at a time when the climate emergency is more urgent than ever. It will also cause a substantial reduction of wildlife when the crisis of Biodiversity Loss is evident to all who care about such things. But it seems these issues

are unimportant to our politicians. Mr Jenrick rejected a call to submit the proposals for the M1/A6 Link Road to Independent Review saying that it was a local issue thereby implying this important area of countryside was not of national significance. AONBs are areas of national importance so much so that the government is now proposing to extend the Chiltern AONB. On a local level the Local Plan makes a mockery of the council's own environmental plans and shows they are guilty of greenwashing. In July 2019 the council unanimously supported a proposal to prioritise responding to climate change, and in September 2020 they adopted their Sustainability Plan (3) outlining the steps they will take to become carbon neutral by 2030.

With the Local Plan democratic process in tatters and our countryside under threat, it is now for the residents of Central Bedfordshire to take action through the ballot box if they, like CPRE Bedfordshire, are completely dismayed and disenchanted with their local and national political leaders.

The Inspectors have requested the Council review the Local Plan in six months' time to consider the impact of both the East - West Rail and the Ox-Cam Arc. This exercise will surely pave the way for more development across Bedfordshire.

Sources.

1. www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/info/46/local_plan/470/draft_local_plan_consultation_responses_reg_18
2. www.gov.uk/government/publications/examining-local-plans-procedural-practice/procedure-guide-for-local-plan-examinations
3. www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/info/122/climate_change/672/climate_change

Help protect the Bedfordshire countryside now and in the future

Throughout this issue of Bedfordshire Matters you will have read about the work done by CPRE Bedfordshire. From celebrating local projects and supporting communities in standing up for our countryside to questioning politicians and responding to consultations, we are working with the people of Bedfordshire to protect, promote and enhance our green spaces. And we need your help!

There is no getting around the fact that times are tough for charities at the moment. The funding landscape has always been competitive, but Covid-19 has added a new dimension to this in the last year. Many public and private funders have directed grants towards organisations delivering frontline service or working with people affected by Covid-19. CPRE Bedfordshire does neither of these so this means we are now more reliant on other sources of income such as membership, donations and legacies.

Our members are amazing as their membership brings in a solid regular income throughout the year but it is not enough to cover all our costs. Regular giving, large donations, grants and event income help make up the difference, but it gets harder each year. As with most charities a large percentage of expenditure is on core items – those things needed to deliver the service. Our biggest cost is staff. They are also our biggest asset -

without our very small team of two part time staff many of the projects and activities would not happen so they are essential to the running and development of the organisation. We are lucky to have a fantastic team of volunteers who do much of our planning work but they need the support too.

A turbulent economy means that competition for donations is high. People are tightening their belts in the face of an uncertain future. Meanwhile the demand for our services is increasing with more and more planning applications threatening the countryside and big issues such as East West Rail requiring our attention. Balancing the books is a delicate art form but generating income is not just about surviving year to year, it is also about creating a viable and strong organisation which is sustainable so we can keep protecting Bedfordshire for years to come. And you can help us do this!

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



Ways you can help make a difference

1. Make an everlasting impact by leaving a gift in your will. Please see the enclosed leaflet for more information.
2. Give a regular amount each month.
3. Give a one off donation – maybe to mark a special occasion or in memory of a loved one.
4. Hold a fundraising event or choose CPRE Bedfordshire as your charity if you are doing an event at work, running a marathon, or hiking in the countryside.
5. Tell friends and family about the work of CPRE Bedfordshire and encourage them to join.

Further information is available on our website or by emailing lois.wright@cprebeds.org.uk

CPRE Bedfordshire
43 Bromham Road, Bedford MK40 2AA
01234 880624
info@cprebeds.org.uk
www.cprebeds.org.uk



The countryside charity
Bedfordshire

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