

# Bedfordshire Matters



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## Chair's column

Martin Christopher



Even though the government's target for new housebuilding is a long way from being met, it still seems as if everywhere you look there are large scale housing developments underway. CPRE acknowledges the need to increase the UK's housing stock to meet demand, particularly for affordable housing. However, what does concern us is where those houses are being built.

Here in Bedfordshire in the last few decades many thousands of new houses have been built, mainly on greenfield sites, and many more are planned for the future. The ambitions

that some in government have for what is called the Ox-Cam Arc are indicative of what might lie ahead for this county. It has been suggested that up to a million new homes should be built in the arc between Oxford and Cambridge. Hopefully the likelihood is that these aspirations will be scaled back but there will certainly be continued pressure to build more houses across our rapidly diminishing countryside.

What is the alternative? CPRE has long campaigned for a greater use wherever possible of so-called brownfield sites for future housing schemes. A recent report from CPRE suggests that over 1.3 million homes could be built on previously developed land. The government has also signalled its support for developing brownfield land. The Housing Secretary, Michael Gove, giving evidence to the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee on November 8th, 2021, said "I am very keen, working with Homes England and local government, to get a brownfields first policy that really works, and to provide

people with the sort of housing that is welcomed and needed and, I hope, affordable in urban settings that we need to concentrate on".

At the moment there are few signs that these welcome words are being transformed into actions. Instead the erosion of greenfield land continues at pace.

Many of us would agree that in this crowded island the need for green space has never been greater – a point brought home by our experience of Covid-19 lockdowns. Further weight is given to the argument for following a brownfield first housing strategy by the environmental impact of building over yet more greenfield sites. In recent years we have witnessed more frequent and damaging flooding, deteriorating air quality and the loss of biodiversity – much of it caused by this type of development.

If you share these views, please let your local councillors and MP know. The more our voices are heard the greater the chances that a change in policy will happen.

## A date for your diary!

**CPRE Bedfordshire, the countryside charity**

**Annual General Meeting 2022**

**Thursday 21st April, 7.30pm -9pm**

**Flitwick Village Hall, Dunstable Road, Flitwick MK45 1HP**

Speakers: **Simon Brown and John Strutt from Bedfordshire Great Ouse Valley Environmental Trust** will give an illustrated talk – The River Great Ouse – past, present and future.

See the events section of our website for updates.



River Great Ouse at Oakley

Cover Photo – Shillington WI and Say No to Greenwoods protest walk (see page 8)



Jordan's Mill sits on the banks of the River Ivel

## Beyond the Great Ouse – exploring Bedfordshire's other rivers

Bedfordshire's best-known river is probably the Great Ouse which threads its way across the north of the county, through a valley with many pretty limestone villages. However, Bedfordshire is home to more than one river and here we explore some of the walks and attractions along their routes.

### Lea

The Upper Lea Valley walk starts at Leagrave Park. The park is home to Leagrave Marsh, a fragile wetland habitat which is home to several rare plants, and Wauluds Bank which is a Neolithic Henge close to the source of the river. The walk then heads towards past community gardens and orchards into Luton where the river cuts through Wardown Park and feeds the lake.

### Flit

The Flit Valley walk allows walkers to explore Greensand Country by following the River Flit between Westoning and Silsoe through an area

rich in history and wildlife. The 7.5 mile route encompasses peat bogs, ancient woodland and historic buildings.

Flitwick Moor nature reserve is an important wetland habitat and a Site of Special Scientific Interest.



Flitwick moor photo by Veronica Ames

### Ivel

There have been watermills on the River Ivel at Stotfold since at least the time of the Domesday Book (1086). Today the restored Stotfold Mill is a heritage attraction open to the public. The Mill stands in an eight-acre Local Nature Reserve with native trees, hedges and a wildflower meadow.

Ponds of varying depths benefit the local wildlife and there is a lovely one mile walk which meanders through the meadows and along the riverside. Stotfold's conservation group, Teasel, have produced six short linked walks many of which also include stretches of the river.

### Ouzel

Leighton Buzzard is home to the Ouzel Meadows, these flood regularly in autumn and winter but are dry throughout the summer and support a wide range of plants, birds such as kingfishers and herons, and bats. The seasonal flooding creates a special habitat where damp meadow species can thrive. There are a number of tracks across the meadows with links to neighbouring footpaths and The Grand Union Canal towpath.

### Hiz

The Hicca Way at Arlesey follows the River Hiz. The name draws on the history of King Offa of Mercia who founded a religious settlement in Hitchin. The path takes the route the Hicca tribe would have more or less followed from Hitchin to the Danish Fort near the south east corner of Henlow. The Old Moat Reserve is home to frogs, toads, newts and dragonflies while the Glebe Meadows are rich in wildflowers.

You can find this article on our website, complete with links to walking trails and more information about the places mentioned at [cprebeds.org.uk/category/days-out/](http://cprebeds.org.uk/category/days-out/)

# Plans for massive broiler chicken factory raises pollution fears for River Great Ouse

A planning application has been submitted by Bedfordia Ltd for a massive new factory which will intensively raise 2.4 million broiler chickens per year near to the north Bedfordshire hamlet of Knotting on the Northamptonshire/Bedfordshire border. This has led to concerns that the River Great Ouse in Bedfordshire may be threatened by increasing pollution.

CPRE Bedfordshire has objected to the planning application, which is currently being considered by North Northamptonshire Council (East Northants District).

One of our major concerns relates to Bedfordia's plans to spread the enormous amount of chicken manure generated by the factory, estimated to be around 3,500 tonnes per year, over fields along the valley area of the River Great Ouse in North Bedfordshire and in the valleys of tributaries feeding the Ouse.

The Manure Management Plan shows that the chicken manure will be spread across fields stretching from the outskirts of Bedford itself, north through the Parishes of Oakley, Milton Ernest, Radwell, Thurleigh, Bletsoe, Sharnbrook, Souldrop, Melchbourne and Riseley.

Our concern is heightened because Bedfordia are already spreading the manure from the 28,000 pigs raised annually at the company's intensive pig factory located at Twinwoods near Milton Ernest, across the same fields.

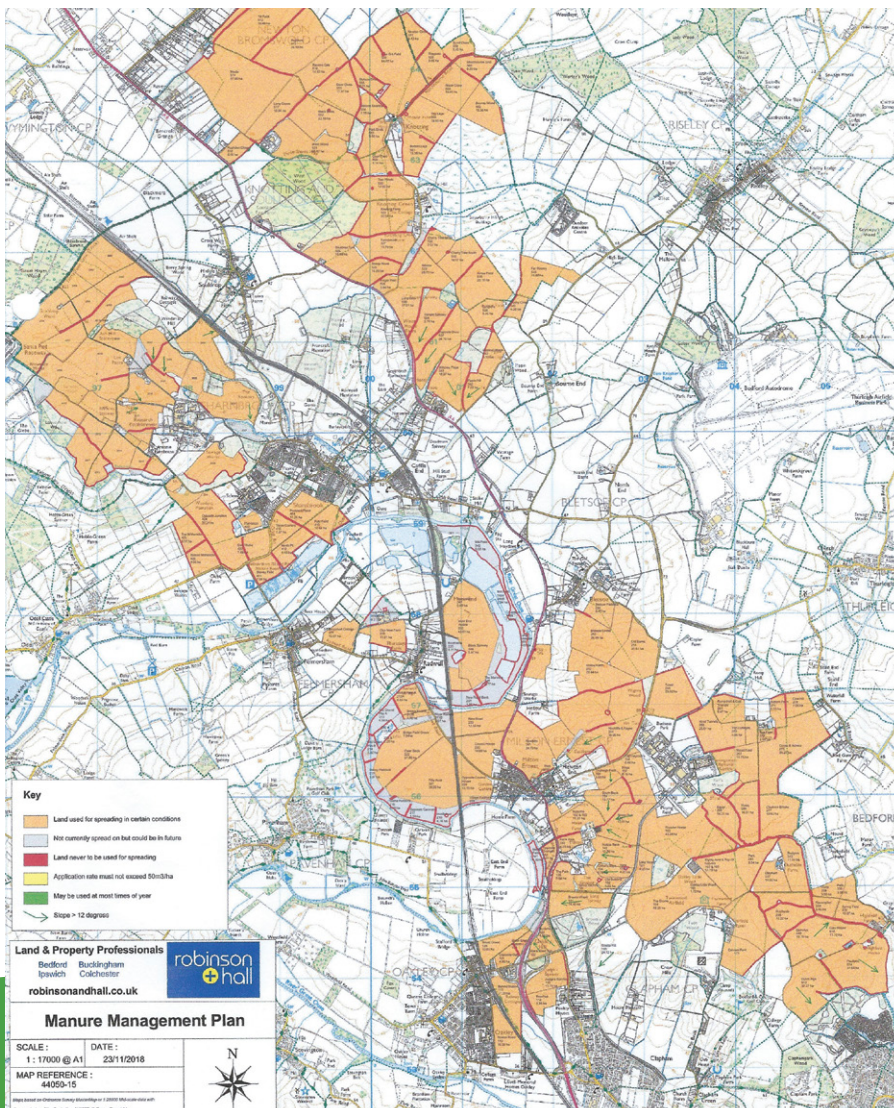
This is added to by material from two Biogen plants at Twinwoods and at Westwood, near Knotting on the Northamptonshire / Bedfordshire border.

In addition to our objection to the planning application, CPRE Bedfordshire has also been in discussion with the Environment Agency (EA) regarding our fears over the potential for the pollution of the River Great Ouse in Bedfordshire. The river provides both drinking water for our population and it is also a very important area for biodiversity which is currently in crisis across the UK.

We do not wish to see the Great Ouse polluted in the same way as the River Wye in Wales which has gained substantial publicity recently due to pollution caused by the spreading of vast amounts of chicken manure and other intensive farming practices.

CPRE Bedfordshire has been using Freedom of Information requests to obtain more information from the EA regarding water quality of the River Great Ouse and the impact of the spreading of very large quantities of animal manure.

Our objective is to ensure that our precious River Great Ouse does not suffer the same pollution problems experienced by the River Wye in Wales.



You can read CPRE Bedfordshire's full response on our website [cprebeds.org.uk/news/rushden-broiler-rearing-unit/](http://cprebeds.org.uk/news/rushden-broiler-rearing-unit/)

# How clean are Bedfordshire's rivers?

## Spilling the truth on sewage in our rivers.

Farming is not the only activity to impact on our rivers – nationally half of our rivers are polluted by sewage effluent. Most widespread is discharges of treated sewage but raw sewage spills via storm overflows also make a significant contribution.

The Environment Agency monitors sewage spills and, as part of their licence conditions, water companies are legally obliged to monitor and report Event Duration Monitoring (EDM) data. They claim that annual reporting helps them to understand when storm discharges occur and to help water companies address their environmental impact. But a report by the Rivers Trust states that only 14% of rivers pass good ecological health – that is based on the presence, absence, and abundance of species in a river. In Bedfordshire all the main rivers are either poor or moderate which is not surprising given there were almost 9,000 spillage hours in these rivers during 2020.

## So why do these spills happen?

The systems which drain rain from our streets and take sewage from our houses are usually combined, but during heavy rain this system can get overloaded. To prevent sewage backing up into our homes, water companies are permitted to overspill untreated sewage into rivers during extreme rainfall. Clearly this system is not working in the best interest of river health as there were 430,171 spills reported in England in 2020 and likely many that were unreported as not all sites are monitored. Although the Environment Agency is working towards tougher regulation, increased rainfall because of climate change will continue to be a problem. In addition, concreting over our countryside by building more roads and houses increases the surface water that is running into drains and building more houses adds to the amount of sewage the system has to cope with.

This is a big problem that requires long term radical solutions to make a lasting difference. The Environment Agency suggests that wider action through water company investment and better farming practices will help ensure we have healthier sewers, cleaner rivers, and a better environment for all. However, the Rivers Trust say technology and engineering alone aren't going to solve all of our problems and suggest that we need to work with nature and use a range of nature based solutions to clean up our rivers.

# STORM OVERFLOW INTO BEDFORDSHIRE'S RIVERS



4

Number of affected rivers

5

Number of sewage treatment works included in the data



8,904

Total spillage hours



**STORM OVERFLOWS**

During times of heavy rainfall, when sewers and pumping stations become overwhelmed, stormwater overflows enable excess flows to be discharged into the sea, rivers or watercourses.

446

Total number of incidents



## DATA SOURCE

Environment Agency, Event Duration Monitor 2020

| Sewage treatment plant | River      | Spillage hours | Number of incidents |
|------------------------|------------|----------------|---------------------|
| Odell                  | Great Ouse | 4,193          | 185                 |
| Keysoe                 | Kym        | 3,500          | 165                 |
| Leighton Linlade       | Ouzel      | 836            | 54                  |
| Shefford               | Ivel       | 200            | 18                  |
| Bedford                | Great Ouse | 175            | 24                  |

## Find out more about river pollution:

[www.riverstrust.org](http://www.riverstrust.org)

Rivercide Video <https://youtu.be/5ID0VAUNANA>

Environment Agency - <https://environmentagency.blog.gov.uk/>



Photo by Dean Nicholson

## Planning explained – local and neighbourhood plans

What are local and neighbourhood plans and why are they important?

CPRE's Land Use Officer, Philippa Oppenheimer, writes "locally-led development offers the best outcomes for people and nature. It can ensure that the right development is in the right place, and creates places where people actually want to live."

There are two levels of local planning in England. Local Plans are a statutory requirement and are prepared by local planning authorities, Neighbourhood Plans are voluntary and are prepared by local communities.

Local Plans have an economic role (business and infrastructure), a social role (building strong communities) and an environmental role (protection

of landscapes, wildlife, heritage and sustainability).

Neighbourhood Plans should conform generally with the Local Plan and exist to help communities develop a shared vision for their neighbourhoods. They cannot prevent the scale of development deemed necessary in the Local Plan but can have input into areas like the protection and creation of nature reserves and green spaces, renewable energy projects, where houses are built and levels of need for affordable housing.

CPRE Bedfordshire comments on Local Plan consultations, you can read these in the Resources section

of our website. We also run planning workshops to help local groups and Parish and Town Councils develop Neighbourhood Plans.

### Interested in learning more?

CPRE have two booklets which you can download

#### Neighbourhood Plans

<https://www.cpre.org.uk/resources/how-to-shape-where-you-live-a-guide-to-neighbourhood-planning/>

#### Local Plans

<https://www.cpre.org.uk/resources/planning-explained/>

# Local Green Space – a little known tool in the planning toolkit

What is the Local Green Space (LGS) designation and why does CPRE think that it is important?

One of the things that we learned from the lockdowns of recent years is that access to nature and green spaces is incredibly important.

It's really easy to think of access to nature in quite an abstract way, measuring proximity to green spaces using online maps, but knowing which spaces provide benefits for people and are accessible by foot or public transport, is all about local knowledge.

There are chances to do this during the preparation or review of a Local Plan or during the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans. To use the LGS designation, local people can submit evidence showing that the space they want to protect meets the necessary criteria.

The LGS designation is a particularly useful tool to secure those smaller bits of green space that give you access to nature on your doorstep but that might be at risk of getting built over, especially if they don't already benefit from other protections.

This designation gives some special protections to the smaller patches of green space that are close to where people live and that are particularly valued by local communities.

## What have we learned from looking at the Bedfordshire data?

- Luton Borough Council have no designated LGS sites in either their Local Plan or in Neighbourhood Plans; as an urban area Luton could really benefit from using the designation to protect important local sites.

- Bedford Borough Council is the only local authority using the LGS designation in their Local Plan.
- At Neighbourhood Plan level, Central Bedfordshire Council parishes are making more use of the designation than ones in Bedford Borough.
- Many Neighbourhood Plans have designated multiple sites as LGS.
- The most common reason for designation is recreational value, followed by wildlife. Many sites gave more than one reason for the designation.
- Lots of different kinds of sites have been designated – including allotments, village greens, woodland, nature reserves, urban parks, and orchards.

In CPRE Bedfordshire's view it is important to raise awareness that the designation exists across the county and encourage communities developing their Neighbourhood Plans to make use of it so do spread the word!

### Possible reasons for designation of a site as LGS:

- Recreational value
- Wildlife
- Beauty
- Tranquillity
- Historic significance

Read more about LGS at [cpre.org.uk/opinions/why-cpre-is-passionate-about-those-little-local-pockets-of-green/](https://www.cpre.org.uk/opinions/why-cpre-is-passionate-about-those-little-local-pockets-of-green/)



Linch Furlong at Oakley has LGS status

# Bedfordshire stands up for the countryside!

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 twelve 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 threw the spotlight on places under threat.

## North Bedfordshire – BFARe

BFARe are working with concerned parties to do research, provide information and gain support for their campaign for a Better East West Rail Route for Bedford. They organised a number of walks with different start points, meeting in the middle at Clapham Wood, all highlighting the route that East West Rail will take through the North Bedfordshire Countryside.

## North Bedfordshire – Parish Council Walks

The parish councils of Ravensden, Wilden, Great Barford, Roxton and Renhold organised local walks.



BFARe protest walk. Photo by Alan Goodger

## Flitwick

The Flitwick Local Action Group (Save Steppingley Field) and Church Road Action Group are campaigning to save two Greenbelt sites under threat. Their walk took them around the field, through Flitwick Woods to Burghley Close and then right onto Manor Way and down to the Church Road site.

## Shillington WI and Say No to Greenwoods

This walk was raising awareness of the proposed Greenwoods development of 4,000 houses between Barton-le-Clay and Gravenhurst. They started at Wrest Park, walking from there to the greenfield site. (See cover photo)

## Houghton Regis – Friends of Windsor Drive Community Open Space

The Friends of Windsor Drive wanted to give people a way to show their support for saving a local open green space. They wanted to send a clear message to Central Bedfordshire Council who plan to progress to site investigation stage with their proposals to build up to 100 homes on the site. The walk used the wheelchair friendly public footpath.



Friends of Windsor Drive Community Open Space



CPRE Bedfordshire presents a workshop  
**Creating and maintaining  
 wildflower meadows**

Led by Pat Knight

Tuesday 14th June 10am-1pm  
 Thursday 16th June 10am - 1pm



Establishing wildflower areas is a great way of improving biodiversity and providing areas that people can enjoy and get closer to nature. Many local groups are keen to do this but it is not as simple as it first appears. Establishing wildflowers takes time and maintaining and helping the site to develop and become sustainable requires good planning and the right approach.

This workshop will give you a good understanding of all you need to know to establish your wildflowers and help them thrive and grow into something amazing. Topics will include: -

- Soil types and how to improve soil quality
- Choosing the right plants - annuals and biennials
- Encouraging small mammals, butterflies and insects
- Mowing and collecting

The workshop will be based outside at Linch Furlong and Riverside in Oakley in North Bedfordshire- two beautiful wildflower sites where you will be able to see first-hand the result of good management. We will move between the two sites and then finish with a look at some equipment and a cup of tea at Pat's barn. This will be an informal workshop with plenty of opportunities for questions.

Pat has over 40 year's experience in environmental and countryside management across Huntingdonshire, Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire including Hinchingsbrooke Country Park and Bedford Priory Park.

He has managed numerous public access sites for people and wildlife, country parks, nature reserves and community orchards and, working alongside the parish council, is largely responsible for the success of Linch Furlong and Riverside in Oakley.



Pat has a great love for the outdoors and is always keen to share his in-depth knowledge of nature through local walks, talks and workshops.

For more information, please email [lois.wright@cprebeds.org.uk](mailto:lois.wright@cprebeds.org.uk)

Link to booking page <https://www.cprebeds.org.uk/get-involved/events>

## Photo competition - Plant life of Bedfordshire

For this year's photo competition we want to see your photos of people interacting with nature.

To get your creative juices flowing, examples of pictures that would fit the theme include a close up of hands touching bark, boots in autumn leaves, people giving scale to a bluebell wood, or children sowing wildflower seeds.

The winning entry will be used as the cover photo for the autumn edition of Bedfordshire Matters, a selection of the best of the rest will feature inside the magazine.

Please explore the Bedfordshire countryside responsibly – stick to the paths, keep dogs on leads and don't pick wildflowers.

### What you need to know

- Max three entries per person
- Portrait format is preferred for the cover image
- Entries close at 5 pm on May 31st
- Entries can be sent to **info@cprebeds.org.uk** - please include your name and tell us where the photo was taken.
- Please make sure you have the consent of any adults or guardians of children under 16 who feature in the photographs before entering.



## What next for our Living Countryside Awards projects?

In August 2021 we announced the results of the CPRE Bedfordshire Living Countryside Awards. These awards are held every two years and celebrate the people and projects making a difference across the county.

We caught up with some of the entrants in early 2022 to ask them about what came next, new projects and the experience of being involved. Here's what they told us.



Penrose Roots new site in Bedford

### Wooden Hill Coffee

For every 100kgs of coffee we roast, we plant a tree. These are organised through the Forest of Marston Vale. Thanks to all our customers and everyone who bought a cup of Wooden Hill Coffee we have just ordered 220 trees. These will be planted on the public planting day on Sunday 6th February, at the site adjacent to Houghton House on the Ampthill/Houghton Conquest border. *(Ed. The new community woodland site at Houghton House was also an entrant in the 2021 awards!)*

<https://woodenhillcoffee.co.uk/>

### Edible High Town

Edible High Town were Highly Commended in the Better Places to Live category for their work at half a dozen small sites and a community orchard in their part of Luton. They have since received a grant from Luton Council's Citizen's Fund, in recognition of how their work can benefit mental health and reduce social isolation. Under the expert guidance of a professional orchard skills tutor, volunteers pruned the fruiting trees in People's Park in December. In January, they laid woodchip paths on their former pumpkin patch and worked to

create a rainwater harvesting system for their raised beds elsewhere.

<https://edibleluton.org/portfolio/edible-high-town/>

### Ampthill Buzz

In the autumn we planted over 500 more wildflower plants on five new sites around road junctions within Ampthill - Flitwick Rd/Holland Rd, Flitwick Rd/Station Rd, Brinsmade Road/Lea Rd, Church Avenue/Church Street, Katherine's Gardens/Chandos Rd. We aim to plant another two sites this spring and are currently working on a wildflower identification resource for the Ampthill Climate Change Group website.

<https://ampthillclimatechange.co.uk/projects/the-ampthill-buzz/>

### Penrose Roots

Penrose Roots is pleased to announce that following the success of our Luton based Roots to Recovery garden we have been working with BPHA to secure a new site to replicate the community garden in Bedford. The new "Food for Thought" project will be based at the old Milburn community garden site and will welcome members from the community of Bedford. The garden will provide a therapeutic

space for individuals with mental health and/or learning disabilities, but anyone is welcome to come along and join in.

We held our first volunteering day at the site in November where we had 24 individuals come together to help clear the site ready for the new growing season. We anticipate opening from April 1st 2022

**If you would like more information on how you can get involved or have a client that you would like to refer please email [samantha.smith@penrose.org.uk](mailto:samantha.smith@penrose.org.uk)**

**<https://www.facebook.com/PenroseRoots>**

### Riverside Dairy

Our family were delighted and proud to win the Made in Bedfordshire award. The win raised awareness of the work we are doing moving to a sustainable way of farming. We are now one of six farms in the UK working on a five year pilot project with Arla looking at the impact of nature and climate on soil health, biodiversity and carbon capture. The CPRE Bedfordshire video was great fun to make (though scary!) and has really helped to promote our Riverside Dairy free range ice creams that we make here using our milk from our herd of pasture fed cows.

**<https://www.riversidedairy.co.uk/>**

### Houghton Hall Park

It was only a few days after the award winners were announced, that visitors to the park and gardens were stopping to say congratulations. There was a sense of pride in their voices, indicating it wasn't our award, the community gardener and volunteers, but theirs, the visitors to



the gardens. There was a genuine feeling the visitors felt as much part of the gardens and as connected to the award as we were. We haven't rested on our laurels since the award either. Plants from an area beside the pond have been moved to create a children's activity area. To include tables and benches there will be large boards along the back wall, where the children will be able to express and display their artistic skills. Apart from being able to take part in a range of organised activities, the children will be able to sit and examine their finds from both garden bug hunts and pond dipping events. Railings have been installed around the pond area with gated access to the platform that overhangs the water. To replace our ad-hoc produce table, work has started on the construction of a hut, providing a permanent space where visitors will be able to access flowers and produce grown in the gardens. In addition to physical developments, we have formed a Friends of Houghton Hall Park group, giving the opportunity to further cement our relationship with those enjoying the area. Membership is open to everyone and will provide

a voice for ideas in how we further improve and add to the development of both park and gardens.

**<https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/>**

### Aragon Lacemakers

Despite the challenges in 2021, Aragon Lacemakers as a group has continued to thrive. We have:

- Attracted 6 new members to learn or join us making bobbin lace. There were 108 members pre COVID.
- Increased our Facebook following from 54 to 77.
- Restarted our monthly lace meetings in August 21, with attendance increasing from 35 to 50 members at each. The use of larger village halls in Bedfordshire has meant that we could maintain COVID security.
- Held a smaller but very worthwhile Lace Day in November 21 with an excellent speaker.
- Started a weekly, term time, drop-in group in collaboration with Bedford Arts and Crafts to broaden

the opportunities for members to socialise and make lace in a safe environment.

- Participated in the St Paul's Church, Bedford, Christmas Tree Festival with a range of beautiful lace, felt and crocheted cats and mice on our tree all of which were made by members.
- Continued to gather lace flowers and items ready for an exhibition at The Higgins museum in 2023, along with a book of patterns that we aim to produce.
- Stayed in touch with members through monthly newsletters.
- Donated £696 to charity; £536 to St Johns Hospice and £160 to Macmillan.

Aragon Lacemakers are striving to keep lacemaking alive by offering opportunities for all ages to learn the craft and participate in events.

<https://aragonlacemakersbeds.wordpress.com/>

### Treewell Community Farm

The avenue at Treewell Farm (a 400m tree lined path), which is within registered parkland, was in desperate need of restoration, with a number of diseased trees requiring removal and improved access to light needed, in order to protect local wildlife. As well as supporting this important restoration work, thanks to funding from both the Greensand Country Landscape Partnership and Treewell Farm, Treewell Farm were able to sell the dead wood, and donate proceeds to the hospice in Moggerhanger.

The design ethos of Humphrey Repton, the eminent landscape designer of the late 18th century, whose work can



be enjoyed at a number of historic parklands across Greensand Country, was to build the anticipation of the visitor by allowing fleeting glimpses of the house along the approaching drive, through carefully positioned trees in the parkland, before finally revealing the house in all its glory.

“It was important to us that whilst we improved the safety of the woodland, by removing trees that were at risk of falling, and to provide light and space for wildlife and trees to flourish, that we also preserved the heritage of the site” explains Meghan Kempson, Lead Partner.

“Being able to donate money to Moggerhanger Hospice was a fantastic additional benefit and we are proud to have been able to support the local community through this project.”

Daniel Bowles, Project Co-ordinator at the Greensand Country Landscape Partnership says: “the landscape partnership is committed to working with its project partners to help protect the heritage of Greensand Country, including all 28 of its historic parklands.”

<https://www.treewellfarm.com/community-farm>

### Rural Revolution

We have been extremely busy since your visit. By the end of the year, with the help of our wonderful Badger Brigade volunteers (including our younger helpers, the mighty Rural Revolution Badger Cubs) we managed to collect an impressive 25,000 litres of litter from the local countryside.

During the summer months our main focus was on the restoration of the Sundon Quarry site. The site is very special to us and we are thrilled to report that a large clean-up project led by Rural Revolution managed to remove 70 abandoned vehicles from the site. We are so grateful to everyone that helped us to achieve this amazing goal. The site is now a more welcoming and safer place for the local community and our precious wildlife neighbours.

Promoting a greener, cleaner way of life is very important to Rural Revolution. We are therefore very happy to report that we managed to grow and distribute over 700 free plants and trees within the local community. The response was incredible, and we are proud that we have inspired so many people to grow their own produce, and to nurture so many wildlife friendly plants.

2021 proved to be a fun and highly successful year for Rural Revolution. We look forward to continuing and expanding our work in 2022.

<https://www.facebook.com/Rural.Revolution.UK>

## Planning Refused! Success in Central Bedfordshire

Our team of planning volunteers work hard to protect Bedfordshire's countryside from inappropriate development. Often this is by working with or supporting parish councils and Local Action Groups through the planning process. Where no such groups exist or Parish Councils cannot be impartial, we will still submit an objection of our own. So far in 2022, two plans we have objected to have been refused.

**Meppershall** - demolish 100 High St and build 34 homes on land behind. Refused.

CPRE Bedfordshire worked with and supported Meppershall Parish Council and the Local Action Group to campaign against this planning application. The proposed development was refused because it would result in harm to the character and appearance of the site and the area through the urbanisation of the countryside. It would also create a poor relationship between the site and the built-up area of Meppershall. In addition, the close proximity of the site to Bury Farm would mean that



Photo - Abigail Oliver

future residents would be subject to noise and disturbances and any legal agreement to reduce this would have a negative impact on the business operations of the farm.

**Henlow** - Land adjacent to 1 Clifton Road, the B& B, 40 dwellings. Refused

CPRE Bedfordshire submitted an objection to this site and were pleased that some of our concerns about the impact on the surrounding countryside were taken on board. In particular the lack of recognition of the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and that the proposal would not enhance the natural

environment by providing satisfactory net gains for biodiversity. This was due to the proximity of the proposed housing and car parking spaces to hedgerows and the impact of light spillage disturbing nocturnal wildlife. It is good to see the importance of hedgerows being recognised by planners especially in light of CPRE's ongoing campaign to increase the hedgerow network by 40% by 2050.

Find out how CPRE Bedfordshire works with local communities on planning and countryside issues at [www.cprebeds.org.uk/working-with-you/](http://www.cprebeds.org.uk/working-with-you/)

### Could you be a Planning Volunteer?

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 planning team. Planning volunteers engage with the local planning system and campaign on local planning issues to influence how Bedfordshire's countryside and rural communities are developed.

This includes working with local communities, town and parish councils and local action groups to advise and support them when their local countryside and green spaces are under threat.

For more information - [www.cprebeds.org.uk/get-involved/volunteering/](http://www.cprebeds.org.uk/get-involved/volunteering/)



Warehouse



## The true cost of mega warehouses

Local authorities in Bedfordshire are earning millions of pounds in retained business rates from these warehouses. But what impact are these huge structures having on our local towns, villages and countryside?

From Freedom of Information requests, CPRE Bedfordshire has established that in the year 2020/21 Bedford Borough Council expected to earn around £9 million from the retained business rates paid by warehouse businesses across the borough. We expect that Central Bedfordshire Council will be gaining similar levels of funding from new warehouses that they have encouraged to be developed in their area.

The trend for huge warehouses is fuelled by third party logistics companies and online retailers responding to consumer demand for home deliveries but there is another reason local authorities have encouraged companies to locate to Bedfordshire. In 2014 as part of the government's austerity programme, there were swingeing cuts to the funding that Central Government made to local authorities for a range of services. To compensate for these cuts local authorities were permitted to retain 50% of local business rates that previously had been returned to Central Government. This was also an incentive for local authorities to attract new businesses to their area.

However, business rates were not increased in line with inflation, or they were reduced for specific sectors such as retail that benefitted from government "holidays" on business rates which subsequently reduced the income to local authorities. Eager to replace this lost funding and seek additional funds to offset the austerity cuts, local authorities looked elsewhere to generate additional business rates.

With e-commerce businesses soaring, companies in the sector were desperate for more warehouse capacity close to the important London conurbation market and good transport links and Bedfordshire fitted the bill perfectly. The benefit of warehouses is that they can be built

relatively quickly compared to other forms of industrial development such as factories and offices. Once built they can be operating and paying business rates very quickly.

While this helps fund council services CPRE Bedfordshire has a number of concerns about the impact these huge warehouses have on the local area.

- Mega warehouses are being developed on green field sites destroying local wildlife habitats rather than on previously developed (brown field) land because it's cheaper for developers to build on such land.
- They are adversely impacting areas of important landscape such

as the Greensand Ridge in Central Bedfordshire and the Chilterns AONB.

- The land on which they are built is often close to homes causing noise and disruption to local residents 24 hrs a day, 7 days a week (a previous issue of Bedfordshire Matters featured a story about new warehousing very close to the Wixams housing development south of Bedford.)
- The warehouses bring with them a considerable increase in HGV traffic on local roads both in urban and rural areas increasing the air pollution, carbon footprint and congestion.

- Compared to the size of the building new mega warehouses offer very few additional jobs per square metre of floor space compared to offices and factories and in future, as the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) grows in the sector, employment will be substantially reduced. The jobs themselves are often low paid and on zero hours contracts.

It is time that the true cost of e-commerce is understood – there is a growing realisation that unchecked growth in the sector comes at a very substantial cost to the environment and to people's quality of life.

## Luton Airport publishes latest expansion plans

Luton Airport have now unveiled their latest expansion proposals via a new public consultation which runs from February until April.

Despite Luton Council having rebranded their company which owns the Airport as Luton Rising and a heavy emphasis in the consultation material on community benefits and sustainability, the proposals still look remarkably similar to the heavily criticised plans produced by the Airport Company in 2019.

They involve nearly doubling of pre-Covid passenger numbers to 32 million a year by 2043.

This is likely to mean a 60% increase in the number of flights a year and thousands more cars on the local traffic network

The proposals include a new terminal, new aprons, holding areas and over 5,000 additional car parking spaces.

This expansion means including and destroying the most ecological sensitive areas of the neighbouring award-winning Wigmore Valley Park and adversely impacting the Green Belt and the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Whilst the airport is and should remain an important economic and employment generator for the region the scale of expansion and impact on the surrounding area is huge. We like many others have already expressed our serious concerns over: -

**Climate change:** How these proposals fit with the reality of the Climate Emergency particularly as increases in aviation are the fastest growing source of greenhouse gas emissions.

**Noise and air pollution:** The expansion will cause substantive and further harm to the surrounding countryside and towns by increased noise and air pollution.



**Traffic:** Significant congestion will be caused by increases in traffic on all the approach roads and local road network. Additional road building is proposed as well as the provision of many additional parking spaces.

**Damage to the environment and landscape** by loss of countryside, recreational land and increased light pollution.

This is likely to be the last consultation before Luton Rising submit their proposals to the Government for approval. We will be continuing to make our views known and working with others to oppose an expansion of this scale.

## Meet our new Trustees



### Juliet Ware

**Role at CPRE Bedfordshire :** Trustee/  
Treasurer

**One thing you hope to achieve in your first year:** Learn more about the operations of charities

**Born in Bedfordshire or blown in:**  
Live across the border

**Favourite local eatery:** Was Oliver's in Woburn (now closed). Prefer independent restaurants to chains.

**Favourite Bedfordshire green space:**  
Rushmere Country Park



### Fred Motson

**Role at CPRE Bedfordshire :** Trustee

**One thing you hope to achieve in your first year:** Understand all the important work that CPRE Bedfordshire already does, and identify where I can help expand on this

**Born in Bedfordshire or blown in:**  
Blown in, although not too far up the railway line having been born in St Albans

**Favourite local eatery:** It's hard to beat a Sunday Roast at the Red Lion, Milton Bryan

**Favourite Bedfordshire green space:**  
Favourite view is the Dunstable Downs; most appreciated local green space is Marston Vale

## Could you be a CPRE Bedfordshire Trustee?

We are currently looking for two new Trustees to join our team.

Joining our board is a fantastic way to help us champion environmental issues such as the climate emergency, renewable energy, biodiversity and sustainable transport. As a trustee you'll have an essential role in contributing towards the direction of our charity. Trustees also help to provide continuity, govern the charity and guide our future work.

We are keen to hear from people with knowledge related to the environment, biodiversity, climate change, farming, income generation, governance or IT.

We're passionate about making the countryside in Bedfordshire a better place for everyone to enjoy. If you share our passion and have the skills to help our small charity develop, we would love to hear from you! **Contact Lois. wright@cprebeds.org.uk for more information.**

**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.

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The countryside charity  
**Bedfordshire**

Registered Charity No: 1023435