

CPRE Bedfordshire

Annual Review 2021



The countryside charity
Bedfordshire

“Protecting Bedfordshire’s countryside and urban green spaces for present and future generations.”

CPRE Bedfordshire, the countryside charity, is passionate about making Bedfordshire a better place for everyone to live, work and enjoy. We are the only environmental organisation that stands up against threats to our Bedfordshire countryside and urban green spaces from unsustainable and unsuitable development of all types. We are affiliated to the national CPRE charity and our powerful combination of local knowledge and national influence make us very effective.

The pressures on our countryside and urban green spaces from housing and other developments such as new roads and warehousing, continues to grow across the county reflecting an increasing population and the growth of the surrounding area including Milton Keynes and Cambridge. Bedfordshire is already one of the most densely populated counties in England (ranked 13th of 47). This pressure makes the work we do to protect our countryside even more important.

We promote the recognition of the intrinsic value of the countryside and urban green spaces which are so important to our quality of life. The Covid-19 pandemic has brought this into sharp focus and highlighted just how essential our countryside and urban green spaces are to our physical and emotional wellbeing.

Responding to the hugely important issues of the Climate Change Emergency and of Biodiversity Loss are also at the forefront of all the actions we take to ensure our vision of a beautiful and thriving Bedfordshire countryside that enriches all our lives.

CPRE Bedfordshire Trustees 2021

Martin Christopher – Chairman

Juliet Ware – Treasurer (Joined October 2021)

Gerry Sansom – (Retired April 2021)

Paul Jenkins – Vice Chair

Chris Hall – (Retired October 2021)

John English

Mary Walsh

Susan Lynch

Fred Motson (Joined October 2021)

Staff

Lois Wright, Director

Shelly Dennison, Digital Engagement Officer

Charity Name: Bedfordshire Branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England

Name used: CPRE Bedfordshire

Charity Number: 1023435

Registered Address: 43, Bromham Road, Bedford MK40 2AA

Our Year – Our Chairman and Director reflect on 2021

Martin Christopher, Chairman



Even though for much of the past year we have been constrained once again by the restrictions necessitated by the Covid pandemic, CPRE Bedfordshire has continued to pursue its objectives of securing our countryside and urban green spaces. As an organisation CPRE nationally is almost a hundred years old and yet it must be acknowledged that the reason for its foundation – the erosion of our dwindling green spaces – is still of concern today.

The good news is that there is a greater understanding now of the challenges that the countryside faces and a recognition that concerted action is needed to ensure its protection. This is the reason why CPRE exists and through the years it has campaigned with some success to promote and support the idea of a living countryside for the benefit of all.

It is often tempting to identify the things that we are against, but it is more important to emphasise the things that we are for. These include such things as sustainable agriculture and farming, clean air and water, affordable and appropriate housing, striving for a low carbon world and ensuring that everyone can benefit from access to green spaces. Nationally, 2021 saw CPRE campaigns that contributed to the achievement of these objectives. They included proposals for a more joined-up approach to infrastructure and transport planning, better provision of rural bus services, a 'brownfield first' strategy for housing development and a campaign to ensure the protection of our hedgerows. Locally, as well as supporting these initiatives, we have assisted several local action groups and parish councils in their attempts to have a greater say in developments that could have a deleterious impact on their communities.

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

Lois Wright, Director



Empowerment and engagement have been the themes of the year as we work with more local groups and communities to help protect and celebrate our countryside and greenspaces. The highlight of the year was undoubtedly the Living Countryside Awards. Despite some restrictions still being in place we were able to get out and meet the wonderful people and groups who entered their projects. Having spent so long in lockdown and only seeing people virtually, it was a treat to be outside and finding out about the inspiring work these people are doing across Bedfordshire. Each one of them is making a difference to their local community, the Bedfordshire countryside and having a positive impact on climate change. The next Living Countryside Awards are in 2023 and we look forward to seeing what these bring.

Lockdown has really shown how important our green spaces and countryside are to mental and physical wellbeing and now more than ever, people want to preserve these. With the ever-increasing pressure for more housing sees the loss of greenbelt, countryside and the expansion of villages and towns, people are prepared to stand up and fight for these precious areas. We are pleased to have supported several local action groups and provide guidance on how they can campaign and get their voices heard.

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

Making connections

This was a year for engaging and empowering. Below we share some of the ways that we've been working with local campaigners, celebrating grass roots action and much more in 2021.

Living Countryside awards

The Living Countryside Awards recognise community led projects and local initiatives, helping them to reach new audiences and giving a boost to their teams.

- For the first time we worked with a local film maker to create videos telling the stories of the winning entrants, making them available via our new YouTube channel.
- We introduced a Bedfordshire Choice Award – voted for by you! Over 3,000 votes were cast, with many of the entrants taking to social media to rally their supporters.

We will continue to engage with all the projects that entered and provide opportunities for them to publicise their work and raise awareness. As a follow up we identified a need for a workshop on developing and maintaining wildflower meadows and this is planned for 2022.

In October, CPRE Bedfordshire Director, Lois Wright, joined an expert panel at the national CPRE conference to share how the Living Countryside Awards evolved in response to the challenges of the pandemic – sharing our learnings with other local CPREs to help them develop their own awards programmes.



Abbey Fields Roundabout Group

Local action groups and parish councils

Throughout the year our work to raise awareness of local issues has empowered local communities to get involved. We've done this through our social media channels, briefing papers and website features.

- We've worked closely with local action groups and parish councils to enable effective campaigning and the sharing of knowledge and practical advice including BFARe, Say No To Greenwoods New Town, Ridgmont Parish Council and the Church Road Action Group in Flitwick.
- We started working on a toolkit for local action groups to help them get started.

Consultations and responses

We have shared our responses to consultations and planning applications to help others feel confident in making their own submissions. Major consultations in 2021 included:

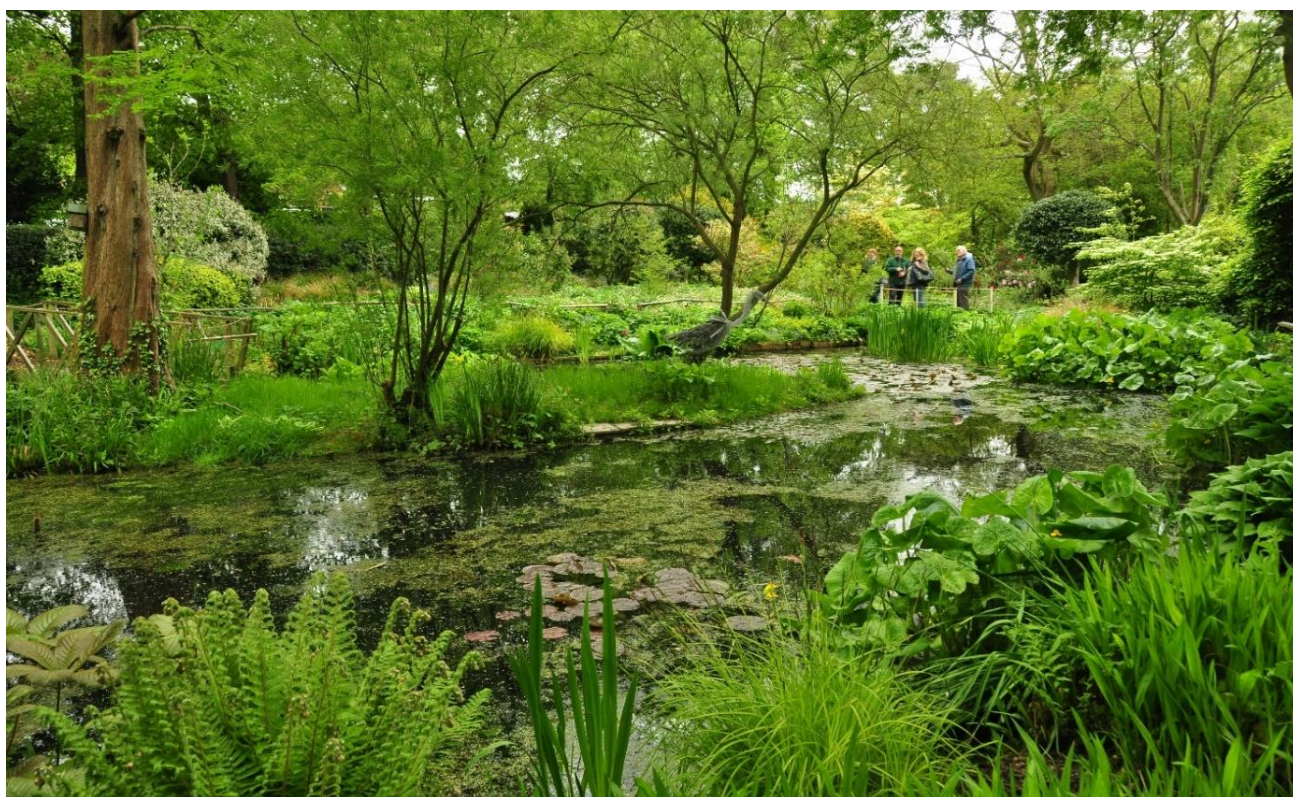
- Oxford Cambridge Arc: Creating a Vision
- Bedford Local Plan 2040 Consultation
- East West Rail route alignment consultation

Citizen science

Bedfordshire residents joined in with Star Count, a national CPRE campaign to monitor dark skies.

Blog

This year's best of the countryside blog has focused on regeneration. 'Regenerate our countryside, regenerate ourselves'; a post-covid manifesto which understands the ways that the economy, the environment, and our physical and mental health are all linked. We explored a diverse range of topics from mental health and tranquillity to urban green spaces. Along the way we've highlighted community projects and shared ways to enjoy the countryside



Kings Arms Garden, Ampthill

Planning and campaigning

Oxford – Milton Keynes – Bedford – Cambridge Arc

In February 2021, the government published a policy paper that set out how they intend to develop a Spatial Framework to help realise their ambitions for accelerated economic growth in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc.

A consultation was launched in July seeking views on what the vision for the future growth of the Arc should be to 2050, to be delivered through the Spatial Framework. The CPRE response to the consultation was led by National CPRE and supported by the branches in the Ox Cam area.

Although CPRE supports the concept of strategic spatial planning and its potential to deliver better, more sustainable, and more integrated outcomes, we have concerns that the Arc as currently proposed appears at risk of doing the opposite. In particular, detracting from the levelling up agenda and missing a crucial opportunity to rise to the climate challenge. We also have concerns about how the Spatial Framework will ensure proper community engagement and transparency. In view of these concerns, CPRE were unable to support the Arc Spatial Framework.

The area where campaigning activity has been greatest has been regarding the proposals for the routing of East West Rail in Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire. Whilst CPRE Bedfordshire supports the concept of EWR in principle, we are strongly opposed to the preferred route chosen by EWR Co which goes through an area of quiet countryside and rural villages north of Bedford, instead of the route option that we support to the south, along the A421 corridor. CPRE Bedfordshire have been pleased to join the Bedford for a Re-consultation (BFARe) campaign group, a coalition of Parish Council representatives from the northern villages, to oppose this route choice.



The group has attracted substantial support from residents and been very actively engaged in lobbying for a re-examination of the route choice. We have been successful in maintaining an ongoing dialogue with EWR Co to present the case. We have also been supported by Richard Fuller MP to have access to meetings with the rail minister and in putting a written submission of our case to the Prime Minister. As a result, EWRs timetable for publishing its response to the last consultation has been significantly delayed and there is a strong prospect that our messages have been getting through.

CPRE branches in the Arc have also supported and endorsed campaigning activities undertaken by the Stop The Arc (STARC) Group. The broad aims of the group are to challenge the concept of the Arc as an economic entity or as a basis for planning.

During 2021 doubts have grown about the government's commitment to leading and supporting the Arc strategy. There has been an absence of any indication of the government's intentions to support the strategy with significant funding and there was no mention of it in the levelling up White Paper. Since

Michael Gove was installed as secretary of state, it has been reported that the government no longer wishes to see the Ox Cam Arc as a project driven by central government. As a result, it now appears to be left to local leaders to identify the priorities they wish to support across the Arc. It is not yet clear how local authority leaders will react to this new situation.

Local Plans

CPRE Bedfordshire believes in a democratic planning system and Local Plans are the cornerstone of this. They allocate and designate land for various uses over the next 15 or 20 years so it's vitally important that we use our resources to influence Local Plans positively to ensure the long-term protection of our countryside and urban green spaces. Local Plans set out the types of development that should take place and the locations as well as identifying areas that should be protected from development.

CPRE Bedfordshire fully recognises the need for new homes in both urban and rural areas - especially affordable homes - and for areas of employment but getting the balance right is important.

As well as engaging in the Local Plan Consultation process, CPRE Bedfordshire's other principal objective has been one of communication to improve local democracy and ensure that members, town & parish councils, and the general public are informed of the detail of the plans and how they will impact on the Bedfordshire countryside and urban green spaces. In 2021 our planning volunteers spent many hours researching issues on the Local Plan and attending various meetings and hearings.

Luton Borough Council Local Plan 2011 – 2031 and Luton Airport Expansion

In January 2021 London Luton Airport ran a consultation on the proposal to change the arrival flight paths into Luton airport. This involved creating a new holding stack for incoming flights above the Huntingdon / Grafham Water area and changing the routes planes approach the Airport. CPRE Bedfordshire strongly objects to the proposed London Luton Airport (LLA) arrivals changes. Our main concerns are over: -

- Loss of Tranquillity through Noise Pollution
- Noise and impact on Health
- Prematurity
- Climate Change and Air Pollution

Central Bedfordshire Council's Local Plan 2015-2035

At the end of July 2021, 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 fought hard to protect the countryside and spent thousands of hours researching the plan, commenting on its contents, and attending hearings.

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.

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.

CPRE Bedfordshire continues to be concerned about the following:-

- Unsustainable development within the Green Belt
- The A6-M1 Link Road that will slice through the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), damage ancient woodlands and is entirely in the Green Belt
- Large scale housing developments proposed without any detailed analysis of the impact on infrastructure

or evidence of need

- A proposed review of the Local Plan which would have increased housing numbers by a further 20,000 homes

Bedford Borough Council's Local Plan 2040

In 2021 Bedford Borough Council (BBC) started preparing a Draft Local Plan which went out to consultation in June.

We commend Bedford Council's commitment to maintaining an up-to-date Local Plan and the efforts they have made to open up the plan making process for the involvement of local people. Nevertheless, we do have concerns about the consultation process running over the summer months. Whilst the consultation timescale has been extended over a 12-week period, we do feel that this is less than ideal and should be avoided in future. There are many aspects of the draft plan that we support. However, the context for the draft plan in terms of national planning policy is complex and problematic. The key objections that CPRE Bedfordshire expresses in this consultation response are very much focussed on the following aspects of national planning policy;

- The government guidance on the Standard Method for assessing housing need and calculating the housing target upon which the plan is based puts Bedford in an anomalous position. The government is insisting that local planning authorities calculate housing targets through a formula that uses out of date data from the Office for National Statistics. This has a huge impact on the calculation of housing need for Bedford Borough and results in a massively inflated and unjustified target for future housing growth in this draft plan.
- The government's announced intention to deliver a Spatial Framework for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc by January 2023 undermines the credibility of Bedford's 2040 plan making process. The government's intention is to use the Spatial Framework to plan for the 'right level of housing growth' in the Arc and to 'identify the most sustainable locations for new homes.' It surely makes much more sense to attempt to get special dispensation from the government to delay the required submission date for the 2040 plan so that the timescale can be properly aligned with the development of the Spatial Framework.



Marston Vale from Houghton House

Area development

Covid impact

The pandemic continued to impact our lives during 2021 but less so than the previous year. We returned to the office when possible but continued virtual meetings which are now becoming the norm. With his hybrid approach to working, it was agreed that we could manage with a smaller office which would also reduce costs so we moved into another space in the same building at the end of December.

With the relax in restrictions we were able to hold a proper Annual General Meeting (for 2020) and it was lovely to get together with members in October. We welcomed local author Brian Kerr who gave a fascinating talk based on his latest book, *How to Value a Skylark: The Countryside in a Time of Change*.

Growing the team

In 2021 we expanded our team so that we have more capacity to work on the important issues and support the local community. Volunteers are the lifeblood of CPRE Bedfordshire, and all our volunteers make a huge difference. We are grateful to everyone who gives their time to CPRE Bedfordshire, ensuring that future generations will be able to enjoy our beautiful Bedfordshire countryside and urban green spaces.

- We welcomed two new trustees, Juliet Ware as Treasurer and Fred Motson.
- We recruited new volunteers to diverse positions including working in our planning team, assisting with the Living Countryside Awards and looking after membership.
- We were delighted that one of our volunteers, Jess O'Sullivan, landed a job at National CPRE in London, after helping organise the Living Countryside Awards.
- We said a fond farewell and a big thank you to Chris Hall who has been with CPRE Bedfordshire for many years as Treasurer.
- A huge thank you to Gerry Sansom who stood down as Chairman after 7 years. He has overseen some big changes to CPRE Bedfordshire and will be a great loss to the executive Committee. We are delighted he will remain as a Planning Volunteer and continue to use his wealth of knowledge to help protect the Bedfordshire countryside.



Raising awareness of our work

Making the public aware of our work is always a high priority for CPRE Bedfordshire and in 2021 we continued to develop our online presence through our website and social media. We also produced our local magazine Bedfordshire Matters that is mailed out to members.

In 2021 we saw an increase in engagement across all digital platforms with followers on both Facebook and Instagram growing by 45%. The re-branded website is clearly appealing to a wider audience with a growth of 189% in visitors during 2021! Popular pages included the Living Countryside Awards, Changes to the flight path at Luton Airport and the Greenwoods campaign.

The Days Out section developed to include the popular blog on “Regeneration” and a series of walks. The second lockdown inspired people to get out into the countryside our feature “Walking through History” proved very popular in the new year. This looked at twelve places that shone a light on our local and national history.

Subscribers to the month e-newsletter continued to grow and the newly establish CPRE Bedfordshire YouTube channel – set up to showcase the Living Countryside Awards – had over 1,600 views.

Representing our members

CPRE Bedfordshire representation on important regional and government organisations

During 2021 CPRE Bedfordshire Trustees and volunteers attended meetings of the following organisations in order to ensure that the aims and objectives of our members are taken into consideration in their decision-making processes:

- **South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (PDIIDG Group)**
- **Highways England, Stakeholder Group Meetings – with regard to highways developments in our county and those impacting on our county**
- **England’s Economic Heartland – Strategic Transport Forum**
- **London Green Belt Council – Member**

Financial Report

The total income for 2021 was £26,099 which was less than planned. Covid-19 made funding more difficult as much of the funds were directed to front line services and also meant some income generating activities were cancelled. We are extremely grateful to all the members, donors and grant makers who supported CPRE Bedfordshire during this time. Total expenditure for 2021 was £30,871. This was less than predicted due to savings on cancelled events and workshops but does mean there was a deficit of £4,772 which will come out of reserves.

We continue to be vigilant in monitoring costs and ensuring we achieve value from the income we receive. As always, we aim for a mix of income to ensure our charity is sustainable, so we are not reliant on one source. Nevertheless, Covid had an impact and this will likely continue for some time to come. We already operate in a very cost-effective way producing a high level of work on a very small budget but continue looking at ways of cutting costs. Following a review, we will be moving to a smaller office in January 2022 which gives a saving of about £2,000.

Our Independent Examiner has agreed the financial summary on page 15 as being consistent with the full financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2021. These were prepared in accordance with the applicable Charities SORP (Statement of Recommended Practice). The accounts were approved by the Executive on January 2022 and have been submitted to The Charity Commission.

| Year ending | 31st December 2021 | 31st December 2020 |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|
| INCOME | £ | £ |
| Branch Shares | 8848.90 | 8,686.19 |
| Restricted Grants, Donations & Legacies | | 371.00 |
| Fighting Fund | | 370.00 |
| General Grants, Donations & Legacies | 11984.45 | 18,324.01 |
| Living Countryside Awards Grant | 5000 | |
| Business Account Interest | 1.74 | 16.99 |
| Event/Presentation Revenues | | 285.00 |
| Neighbourhood Planning Workshop | | 1,536.00 |
| Reclaim of Legal Fees Retainer | | 1,666.80 |
| Gift Aid income tax refunds from HMRC | 263.50 | 1,440.50 |
| Total income | 26,098.59 | 32,696.49 |
| EXPENDITURE | | |
| Postage | 367 | 528.00 |
| Beds Matters Printing | 694 | 1,682.38 |
| Printing, Photocopying | | 19.38 |
| Travel Expenses | 34.56 | 0.00 |
| Room Hire/Refreshments | 175 | 0.00 |
| Adverts, publications & presentation | 300 | 286.00 |
| Workshop Expenses | 56 | 694.13 |
| Events Charges | | 628.60 |
| Staff Salary costs | 18858 | 19,610.76 |
| National membership subscriptions | 25.00 | 25.00 |
| LCA Costs | 4717.68 | 0.00 |
| Miscellaneous | | 10.80 |
| Sub total | 25227.24 | 23,485.05 |
| Costs of Bedford Office | | |
| Rent | 5167.92 | 5,195.45 |
| Insurance | 346.67 | 327.67 |
| Office Consumables | | 30.58 |
| Telephone/IT | 129.51 | 283.28 |
| Total Office costs | 5644.10 | 5837 |
| Surplus/(Deficit) | (4772.75) | £3,374.46 |

| Year ending | 31st December 2021 | 31st December 2020 |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| ASSETS & LIABILITIES | | £ |
| Cheque Account | £1090.97 | 1,865.46 |
| Business Account | 19361.27 | 23,359.53 |
| Cash in Hand | 8.25 | 8.25 |
| Total | 20460.49 | 25,233.24 |
| BRANCH FUNDS | | |
| Brought Forward from Previous Year | 25233.24 | 21,858.78 |
| Income over Expenditure | (4772.75) | 3,374.46 |
| Carried Forward | 20460.49 | £25,233.24 |