OUR RURAL DISTRICT UNDER ASSAULT

In largely rural Tandridge District in the east of Surrey, the Council’s Local Plan proposals have encountered huge opposition and criticism. The Council claims 9,400 more houses are needed, that’s 470 houses a year and almost four times the current requirement. It would mean a likely rise of a third in the District’s population and the loss of large swathes of Green Belt as well as open spaces such as recreation grounds.

The increase is not to meet the needs of the local community but for massive and ongoing inward migration from London.

Deeply flawed

The local Tandridge group of CPRE, along with many other groups and individuals in the District, are extremely concerned about the poor quality of the Council’s Local Plan documents. Experts have made clear that the documents are deeply flawed and do not comply with national planning policy.

Legal, planning and demographics experts were commissioned to review the Local Plan documents and put together a representation to the Council’s consultation. This highlighted that the evidence base is flawed and contradictory, the housing need figure is inflated, and the Green Belt assessments have not been carried out properly. In short, the documents are not fit for purpose for developing a sound Local Plan.

The representation is supported by CPRE, the Oxted & Limpsfield Residents’ Group, 11 of the District’s Parish Councils and seven other community groups.

It is very worrying that despite the experts’ views, Tandridge District Council has recently insisted that its Plan documents are not flawed.

With regard to the housing need figure, demographic analysts found that the methodology and calculations shown in the District’s OAN (Objectively Assessed Needs) paper are inconsistent with the rest of the evidence base. As a result, the scenarios project inflated population and household growth increases that do not represent what could reasonably be expected to occur which is what is required by National Planning Practice Guidance. This means that the scenarios do not fulfil national policy requirements.

Pressure on services

Another flaw that has been highlighted is that no account has been taken in the documents – when national guidelines make clear it should have been – of current or future pressure on infrastructure. Schools, health services and other infrastructure in Tandridge is already struggling to cope with existing demand.

...continued on Page 2
... continued from Page 1

The panel of experts have found that there is a fundamental disconnect between the Council’s Issues and Approaches document and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the evidence base, the distinctive characteristics of Tandridge and the priorities of local residents. They say that: “In the Delivery Strategies, the distinctive characteristics of Tandridge – open countryside, high quality landscapes, small, rural settlements and long-standing local businesses, are marginalised to make way for a Tandridge that is a dormitory district where residents travel to jobs located elsewhere, mostly by car.

While the apparent conflict between the Delivery Strategies and the sustainable development objectives of the NPPF appears to be recognised in the evidence base, this has not been reflected in the Issues and Approaches document. The Delivery Strategies are not sound because they are based on documents which are not robust, conflict with the evidence base and are not consistent with national policy.”

They conclude that the consequence is that Tandridge’s emerging Local Plan documents do not reflect the distinctive characteristics of Tandridge, are not justified, and are inconsistent with national policy and so are not an appropriate basis from which to prepare a sound Local Plan.

It is not yet clear when Tandridge District Council will give its response to the consultation. It has said: “The number of representations received, particularly the amount received in non-electronic formats, is likely to take longer than was anticipated to properly analyse and provide reasoned responses.”

Catherine Sayer

GREEN BELT VICTORY IN EFFINGHAM

In a major victory for CPRE and its allies, members of Guildford Borough Council’s development control committee voted to refuse permission for a development by Berkeley Homes of 295 new houses on Green Belt land in Effingham.

This significant expansion of Effingham village was conceived as an “enabling development” to finance the expansion of The Howard of Effingham School, but was strongly opposed by CPRE, Effingham Parish Council and local campaigners who believed it would be an unsustainable and inappropriate development in the Green Belt. We argued that the scheme did not constitute the “very special circumstances” required for building on Green Belt land. Guildford Council’s planning officers had agreed with CPRE and therefore recommended refusal of the proposal, and in March councillors followed the officers’ recommendations and refused permission for the Berkeley Homes scheme. In April the Council issued its revised draft Local Plan for the Borough and we were relieved to see that the Howard of Effingham site does not appear in it. CPRE Surrey Director Andy Smith told the local press: “This is a great victory for countryside protection and for local democracy. Let us hope it lights the way for more victories by local communities against the power and money of the developers!”

NEW CHAIRMAN FOR CPRE MOLE VALLEY

Our Mole Valley district group has a new Chairman, in succession to Richard Bass. Max Rosenberg has been involved in CPRE since 2012, and has a particular interest in helping to strengthen CPRE’s ecological focus. Max has been a committee member for the past seven years of the Leith Hill Action Group (LHAG), who are continuing to campaign, with CPRE support, against the proposals by Europa Oil & Gas Ltd to explore for hydrocarbons at Leith Hill in the Surrey Hills AONB.

Max was a founder member of the steering group for the Capel Parish Neighbourhood Development Plan and is also a member of the Gatwick Area Conservation Campaign (GACC). He is a long-time member of numerous ecological charities such as Surrey Wildlife Trust, Bat Conservation Trust, RSPB and East Surrey Badger Protection Society. Additionally, he is very concerned over the scale of “landbanking” (currently at around 600,000 plots in England) that is so popular with so many of the country’s biggest housebuilders. Max says that he and his colleagues on the CPRE Mole Valley committee are “hoping to attract more members and participants for the local group. We also intend to add four more members to our current committee group of seven to enable us to step up our campaigning against inappropriate development in the District, and to save our countryside and landscapes for future generations to enjoy.”
Do you know what Local Enterprises Partnerships (LEPs) do? In fact, have you even heard of LEPs? And why are LEPs of any interest and concern to members of CPRE?

Up to a few years ago, the government promoted economic growth through Regional Development Agencies (RDAs). The activities of the RDAs were overseen by Regional Boards which included representatives from business, local government, trade unions and voluntary organisations. In addition, there were Regional Assemblies made up of local government and civil society representatives, which scrutinised the work of the RDAs and were responsible for the preparation of Regional Spatial Strategies. The RDAs and the Regional Assemblies had responsibilities across the range of social, economic and environmental policy and placed appropriate weight on countryside protection. Although far from perfect, this regional tier of government had more than simply an economic focus and allowed some involvement from civil society.

Both the RDAs and the Assemblies were abolished in 2010. The latter were not replaced at all, but Local Enterprise Partnerships effectively took the place of the RDAs. The LEPs were charged narrowly with promoting private sector growth and local job creation. They were intended, essentially, to be run by business and local council representatives. North-west Surrey is covered by the Enterprise M3 LEP based in Winchester; the south-east of the county falls within the remit of the Coast to Capital LEP, which is centred on the M23 and based in Horsham.

Focus on economic growth

LEPs, according to the government, decide on local priorities for investment in roads, buildings and facilities in their local areas. They are also a conduit for European funds. A Whitehall body, the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), supports LEPs in identifying growth priorities in the areas of housing, land and regeneration. Neither the LEPs nor the HCA appear to have any wider social or environmental objectives, nor do they have any remit to protect the countryside. Their purpose is narrowly focussed on development and growth. All LEPs are chaired by representatives of the business community.

The eighteen strong Enterprise M3 Board consists of eight members of the business community, just five local government representatives, including two from Surrey, and five others, who include two people linked to Surrey University, one of our county’s major developers. Of the seventeen members of the Coast to Capital LEP Board, nine are business people and again just five are local government representatives of whom two are from Surrey. There is, of course, nothing wrong with business having a significant voice in investment decision-making, albeit that it could be argued counties such as Surrey probably don’t need additional help to grow, given existing development pressures. What, however, is unquestionable is that, first, there needs to be an appropriate weighting of economic, social and environmental considerations when agreeing development and investment strategies, and, second, there needs to be proper scrutiny of the decisions made by government-sponsored development organisations such as LEPs.

Democratic deficit

It is evident that the existing arrangements for LEPs meet neither of these criteria. LEPs have far too narrow a remit – how can social and, particularly, environmental, concerns associated with development be reflected within organisations that are only charged with achieving unlimited growth? What kind of democratic responsibility can be exercised when, in the case of Surrey’s two LEPs, business representatives outnumber those from elected local councils by nearly two to one. As far as Surrey is concerned, we have just four elected representatives on our two LEPs including the Leader and Deputy Leader of Surrey County Council who, of course, have many other responsibilities.

LEPs either need to be replaced by more democratically accountable organisations with much wider briefs, or the existing LEPs need to be brought under direct local authority scrutiny. At the present time, crucial decisions about the future of our county are being taken by democratically unaccountable bodies whose work is hidden from the scrutiny of Surrey’s residents.

Tim Murphy
MAP HIGHLIGHTS HUNDREDS OF THREATS TO THE GREEN BELT

CPRE branches throughout London and the Home Counties have been working together with the London Green Belt Council on a joint project to research and tabulate current threats to the Green Belt and produce a new online map identifying these threats. The three counties under greatest pressure are Hertfordshire, Essex and, unsurprisingly, Surrey.

Altogther the map shows almost 200 sites under threat from development, across London and seven neighbouring counties (Surrey, Kent, Essex, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire) and proposals for building over 110,000 houses on supposedly protected Green Belt land, including, currently, more than 20,000 here in Surrey. This figure is set to increase dramatically in the coming months as more Surrey Districts find themselves coming to terms with new housing targets and as Local Plans take shape across the county.

Catherine Maguire, CPRE Green Belt Campaigner, said: “The Government’s pre-election commitment to protect our Green Belt is not being adhered to. David Cameron said the Green Belt would ‘safe with us’, but it is manifestly not safe. London’s Green Belt has saved our countryside. It is hugely valuable – more so now than ever, with more and more pressure being piled on the South East. If it had not been for the Green Belt preventing urban sprawl, London could have followed the example of Los Angeles, and would now spread from Brighton to Cambridge, with millions of people car-dependent and horrendous traffic and pollution problems.”

“The planning system has been weakened to the extent that even the ‘strongest protection’ afforded to Green Belt land is being ignored on a widespread basis. Even though the government has clarified that housing needs cannot ‘trump’ Green Belt, it has also piled pressure on councils to release land for new homes and does not take action when protected Green Belt land is released.”

Brownfield opportunities

She added: “What’s even more maddening is that there is categorically no need to release Green Belt for development. The London Plan identifies brownfield development opportunities in the capital alone that could provide 300,000 new homes. The developer lobby has been very successful in promulgating the myth that we must release Green Belt land if we want new homes. This is unsurprising given that houses in the Green Belt would make a tidy profit for developers, being in such nice locations. But they are expensive – not the affordable ones we need. If anything we now need to strengthen, not weaken, Green Belt land protections: we need to focus on building new homes in the right places, not in the Green Belt, not in the wider countryside, not in AONBs – Areas of Outstanding National Beauty – but on appropriate sites in already built-up areas.”

Catherine’s views are supported by Andy Smith, Surrey Branch Director of CPRE, who said: “Here in Surrey we are facing a tidal wave of new development schemes, and local councils seem to be increasingly willing to give up Green Belt land to make way for this development. But in CPRE’s view there is no justification to sacrifice these open spaces to meet arbitrary housebuilding targets and short-term political goals. The Green Belt has successfully held off inappropriate development for the past 70 years. We should not give up on it now.”

The full map is available online at http://www.cprelondon.org.uk/resources/item/2334-londongreenbelt.
We are facing a “double whammy” of attacks on the countryside in the Guildford area, from a revised draft Local Plan which proposes large-scale sacrifice of Green Belt land for housing, and from the continued weakening of planning rules and the abandonment of tried-and-tested planning principles. In recent weeks we have had a stream of statements from government ministers and from Guildford Borough Council who persist in claiming that they are defending the Green Belt when in fact they are trying to impose unjustified and unrealistic housing numbers on our Borough.

Altogether the new plan proposes 12,000 new houses, of which some 7,000 houses are to be on land that is currently in the Green Belt. This includes a major urban extension at Blackwell Farm on the Hogs Back, adjacent to the Surrey Hills AONB, and 2,000 houses at Wisley (despite the Council recently rejecting a planning application for housing at that same site). The proposed removal from the Green Belt of such large rural sites is completely unjustified, especially when local opinion is so strongly against giving up any Green Belt land for development. It appears that the Council is treating both the countryside and the local community with contempt, and CPRE urges local residents to register their objections to the Plan’s proposals to shrink the Green Belt in Guildford.

The countryside around Guildford is under sustained assault from developers and from politicians at all levels of government. The backbone of the national planning policy, which has served Guildford and the whole of Surrey so well since the 1940s/50s (particularly the Town and Country Planning Act 1947 and the introduction of the Metropolitan Green Belt in 1956), is under threat as never before. There is the very real prospect of urban sprawl spreading right across our rural landscape and precious green spaces and effectively destroying the very quality of life that makes Guildford and its surrounding villages such attractive places in which to live and work.

The revised draft Guildford Local Plan puts forward a string of proposals, both for the countryside and the town, to which CPRE members and many other residents have objected very strongly. Many of these proposals cannot in any case be viable as long as infrastructure issues remain unresolved. Most of these issues involve decisions over which Guildford Borough Council ultimately has little or no control. The Plan’s ambitions are also highly reliant on postponed national decisions such as airport expansion at Heathrow or Gatwick, and investment in the congested A3 and other major roads.

We were also very concerned indeed by the last-minute addition of proposals for development on Green Belt land between the villages of Normandy and Flexford, and at Garlick’s Arch adjoining the borders of Ripley and Send.

**Housing numbers**

We disagree with the housing figure of 693 new homes per annum, which we consider to be unjustified and unrealistic. Promises by the council that constraints, such as Green Belt, flooding, and lack of adequate infrastructure, would bring the numbers down have not been honoured. We also remain unconvinced that the Local Plan has addressed the issue of traffic congestion properly, as this situation is already bad and will grow exponentially with the level of new building and population growth that the Plan allows for. We believe that the reference in the Plan to a tunnel at Guildford – a proposal which we support as a way of reducing noise disturbance and air pollution – needs to be amplified and explained.

CPRE does not accept that economic growth should require the loss of our rural heritage. We should aim for solutions that provide a way forward for Guildford that protects and enhances both town and countryside in the interests of everyone. We should use urban land better, and in particular we should look at the provision of affordable housing and student accommodation on the University of Surrey’s campuses, a massively under-utilised piece of land, much of which is currently given over to surface car parking.

Tim Harrold
ARE “SPORTS HUBS” APPROPRIATE DEVELOPMENTS FOR THE GREEN BELT?

Local residents in Walton-on-Thames and neighbouring Sunbury have been given the go-ahead for a judicial review of Elmbridge Borough Council’s decision to grant itself permission to build a “Sports Hub” on a riverside site in the Green Belt land. CPRE is supporting the legal challenge because we believe the scheme represents inappropriate development in the Green Belt and we reject the Council’s view that there are “very special circumstances” to justify this costly development.

We believe that the Sports Hub would totally wreck the tranquillity and special character of the area. In the background is the shadow of new housing development. The Hub would be the home for several local football and athletics clubs, and the Council needs to move these clubs to the new site in order to be able to sell off the old and easily accessible Stompond Lane Sports Ground for over £20 million for housing. Elmbridge cannot do so without finding an alternative site for the clubs. CPRE is supporting local residents’ fundraising campaign for the Judicial Review through the CrowdJustice website.

Sports hubs seem to be popping up all over the place! In Egham we are supporting local residents who are up in arms about a proposal by Runnymede Borough Council to build sports facilities on an important local green space called Mrs Caddey’s Field. A recent well-attended public meeting saw a bewildered football club chairman trying to explain to local people why they should welcome astro turf, hard courts for netball and tennis, a clubhouse and changing rooms, together with floodlights and car parking on their precious field which, when not providing pasture for livestock, is home to the Egham Show.

Members and officers of the Council went home with a flea in their ear for putting forward this field in the Green Belt as a possible development site for a football club. With any luck Runnymede Council will think again and leave Mrs Caddey’s Field well alone.

Kristina Kenworthy

WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT!

Just like the countryside, CPRE Surrey is under unprecedented pressure! We are working flat-out to draw up our submissions on various Local Plans, and on the West Surrey Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) – the document that provides the basis for housing provision in the boroughs of Woking, Guildford and Waverley – and will soon be dealing with the North East Surrey SHMA (covering Mole Valley, Epsom & Ewell, and Elmbridge).

Although we have in-house planning expertise, in the form of several retired planning officers who work for us in a voluntary capacity, the scale of the challenge we currently face in Surrey is so great that the Board of CPRE Surrey took the decision to hire planning consultants to help guide our work on the SHMAs and Local Plans. In the months ahead we will incur thousands of pounds of additional expenditure – but remember that we are up against local authorities and developers with access to far greater financial resources, so it is absolutely essential that we wage these battles as professionally and expertly as possible. It is very much a “David and Goliath” struggle, and the odds are heavily stacked against us. CPRE Surrey needs your donations, so please support our “SAVE SURREY’S COUNTRYSIDE” appeal, using the enclosed donation form.
Published to mark the 90th anniversary of CPRE, 22 Ideas that saved the English countryside (co-written by former CPRE Chairman Peter Waine and Oliver Hilliam) tells the story of the visionary individuals who inspired the formation of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England in 1926. Examining the rise of countryside conservation in England – from the celebration of the landscape by Wordsworth and Constable, to the Victorian movement to preserve it – 22 Ideas reveals the forces that led to the creation of CPRE and shows how its campaigns became central to the successful efforts to protect the countryside in the 20th century.

This justifiably positive book shows how once-radical ideas such as National Parks, Green Belts, and Rural Planning have not only saved much of our countryside, but also remain hugely relevant solutions to the problems we face in 2016. Peter Waine, co-author, said: “We hope this book can offer an optimistic antidote to the ‘doom and gloom’ of much modern-day environmentalism. While threats remain, and there is no room for complacency, we take heart from the fact that these 22 Ideas have stood the test of time so convincingly. The fact they gained popular currency in the face of overwhelming opposition proves that the right combination of passion, principle, and not a little genius, can allow David to beat Goliath. We must continue to take inspiration from the pioneers who have handed down to our generation something which remains the envy of the world – the unique beauty of the English countryside.”

Each idea has been endorsed with an introduction from a leading public figure, and England’s leading landscape photographers have donated stunning imagery to complement an assortment of rarely-seen archives. The contributors and the ideas they have endorsed are as follows: Kate Adie on “Keeping Villages Alive” • Clive Aslet on “The Green and Pleasant Land” • Chris Baines on “Going Underground” (burying pylons) • Joan Bakewell on “Anti-Litter” • Melvyn Bragg on “Discovering the Landscape” • Julia Bradbury on “The Right to Roam” • Jo Brand on “Cutting the Clutter” (roadside advertising) • Nick Crane on “The Coast is the Countryside” • Jonathan Dimbleby on “Taming the Octopus” (ribbon development) • Terry Farrell on “Urban Regeneration” • Max Hastings on “Democratic Planning” • Simon Jenkins on “The National Trust” • Satish Kumar on “National Parks” • John le Carré on “Preservation” • Virginia McKenna on “Nature Reserves” • Ray Mears on “Green Belts” • Andrew Motion on “The Sense Sublime” • David Puttnam on “Creating CPRE” • Caroline Quentin on “The Country Code” • Fiona Reynolds on “Rural Planning” • Tony Robinson on “A Countryside Worth Fighting For” • Jeanette Winterson on “Saving Our Forests”.

Finally, the 22 of the title is inspired by the number of constituent bodies who united to form the Council for the Preservation of Rural England on 7 December 1926 (including The National Trust, the Women’s Institutes and the Commons and Footpaths Preservation Society). The Spectator found a good omen in the number: “22 – the length of a chain or cricket pitch, the unit of the square acre – is quite the most English of all the numbers.”

Ordering details for CPRE members
22 Ideas is published by Frances Lincoln (rrp £25) but CPRE members can claim a 40% discount by ordering copies for £15 with free UK p&p. Telephone 01903 828 503 and quote offer code QPG420, or send the code with your name, address and a cheque payable to “Littlehampton Book Services Mail Order Department” to: Littlehampton Book Services, PO Box 4264, Worthing, West Sussex BN13 3TG.

RICHARD BASS

We are very sorry to report the sudden death of Richard Bass. Richard had been a CPRE Surrey Trustee since 2010 and he was for almost 10 years the Chairman of our Mole Valley District Group. His kindness, integrity and wisdom were much valued. In addition to campaigning on many local issues, he instituted a series of well-attended Supper Seminars on topics of interest to CPRE members. Before moving to Surrey, Richard and his wife Christine lived in Cheshire where they set up a successful travel business which reflected their love of the countryside; for two years Richard chaired the Cheshire Branch of CPRE. Our thoughts go out to Christine and her family at this time.
Our team of CPRE volunteers had a busy day at the Surrey County Show on Bank Holiday Monday, 30 May, answering questions from members of the public about the current threats to the Green Belt and countryside in Surrey. A number of new members were recruited.