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CPRE South East e-Bulletin Winter 2022

Welcome to the Winter 2022 issue of the CPRE South East e-Bulletin. This is a quarterly digest of the latest news and views on land-use planning and development in the south-eastern counties of England. The e-Bulletin highlights current threats to the region's countryside and how these are being countered by CPRE branches in the region, as well as the positive initiatives undertaken by CPRE branches to reinforce the role that the countryside has to play in food production and biodiversity and in contributing to physical and mental wellbeing. This e-Bulletin is published by CPRE South East as a service to all of CPRE's branches and local groups in this region, and for other countryside-campaigners.

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LATEST NEWS

Defeat in battle for Windsor Forest

The fight to protect England's countryside – as we are all aware – has its ups and downs. Sadly, we must give prominence to a setback for our cause. But it follows a fantastic fight by the undeterred campaigners of CPRE Berkshire.

The Supreme Court's decision to reject objections to the planned expansion at Legoland in Windsor Forest, which is part of Windsor Great Park and located in the London Metropolitan Green Belt, comes after a long campaign by local CPRE activists to prevent this inappropriate development.

CPRE argued that the proposal is contrary to the NPPF 2021, namely that the proposed development is detrimental to the ancient woodland, and that it contravenes the government's policy to protect the Green Belt.

David Over of CPRE Berkshire gives some important pointers and observations on this landmark case: "The Judicial Review and Appeals process remains a robust and necessary mechanism for controversial planning applications. We were granted leave on three grounds at the Judicial Review stage, and five grounds at the Appeal stage. In both instances the arguable point of law was sufficiently high for the courts to consider the application."

David continues: "In addition, the High Court and the Appeal Court recognised some of our arguments. Importantly, the Appeal judgment clarified that the width of the buffer for the ancient woodland that lies around much of the site *must* be 20 metres. Despite this welcome clarification, we have little confidence that all trees associated with the site will be adequately protected."

Although the Legoland site is on land privately owned by the company, the land on which the new development will take place is a much-loved area of local greenspace valuable to people and wildlife. There are a high number of mature/veteran oaks, an iconic tree known for its critical support of 2,300 wildlife species of which 326 are dependent on oak trees for their survival.

Defeat at the Supreme Court is a significant blow but it is a warning of the scale and seriousness of the current threats to our Green Belt countryside and precious ancient woodland, and highlights the need for all CPRE branches in the South East to re-double their efforts to defend our green spaces. More info here: www.cpreberkshire.org.uk

Local Plan withdrawn

Hertsmere Borough Council in Hertfordshire has withdrawn its draft Local Plan after receiving more than 20,000 objections in the public consultation. This is a recognition that the borough's target of 12,000 homes, 9,000 on Green Belt land, are unachievable. The council leader made the announcement to a meeting of the full council on 26 January, admitting that the council could not continue with a Plan which had provoked such strong public opposition.

NEWS FROM THE COUNTIES

'Greenbelt TV' gets acres of coverage

A new Youtube channel called Greenbelt TV, launched by former BBC producer Daniel Markham, is gaining many viewers and attracting media coverage in Kent. Based in Daniel's home-village of East Malling (a community currently battling against plans for a 900-house development by Berkeley

Homes), several programmes have been made and broadcast in recent months, each highlighting an aspect of what these Kentish villages stand to lose, and why access to the countryside and green spaces is so essential for the wellbeing of local people.

Interviewing residents and local representatives, including East Malling and Larkfield Parish Council chairman David Thornewell, Greenbelt TV works as an increasingly effective medium in rallying residents and challenging the disproportionate allocations of housing, which local councils either too easily agree to or are forced to accept.

Filmed in the beautiful countryside to the south of East Malling (an area of ancient holloways, mediaeval lanes and hamlets), Daniel has specifically highlighted the problem of how a viable fruit-growing area is likely to be concreted over. The Broadwater Farm area currently provides local employment and is a further example of how food security and self-sufficiency are being compromised by over-development.

Currently in a state of limbo, with its Local Plan rejected by the Planning Inspectorate (for allegedly failing in its duty to cooperate with neighbouring boroughs) and without a five-year land supply for housing, the borough of Tonbridge and Malling is currently under huge pressure from developers.

Daniel also points out how a local health centre, intended to provide services to 10,000 people, will now face a significantly higher burden. He also explains to viewers a nightmare scenario of the borough having to empty another 1,800 bins, not to mention transport and roads facing gridlock. To see Daniel's first film, featuring TV naturalist Mike Dilger, visit: [Mike Dilger visits East Malling to discover a hidden nature reserve.](#)

Developers lose appeal

A scheme for 800 houses in the Green Belt, at the former Broke Hill Golf Club in Sevenoaks in Kent, has been defeated. The developers appealed Sevenoaks Council's rejection of the application but in a decision issued by the Planning Inspectorate on 31 January the appeal has been dismissed. This is a major victory for Sevenoaks Council, the local community and environmental groups including CPRE Kent.

Artisan Festival

The Surrey Hills Artisan Festival will be held during the weekend of 21-22 May 2022. Run by Surrey Hills Enterprises, the event will celebrate the very best of local food, drink, arts and crafts, all in the stunning surroundings of the Denbies Wine Estate near Dorking. Book your ticket now at www.surreyhills.org/events/surrey-hills-artisan-festival-2022/

Pocket parks for London living

Small parks and recreational spaces must be encouraged and promoted across the capital as a matter of priority, says CPRE's London branch, which also reports a worrying under-use of some existing parks.

This is because only half the green space needed for the city's population exists – research showing that less affluent people are deprived of close access to a park or garden. A five-step plan has been put forward by CPRE London to remedy the situation:

Establish 'pocket parks' – small parks and play spaces in areas with little or no green space.

Create Ten Major New Parks from London's neglected green assets – thanks to earlier

appeal donations, CPRE London is already reporting significant progress with this campaign initiative.

Improve our parks – CPRE London is working with park friends groups across the capital to help them press for and deliver better green spaces.

Promote the wonderful parks Greater London already has through CPRE's 'Go Parks London' project: London has over 4,000 parks but many are not well used.

Protect our parks – we support local groups who are campaigning to save their local green spaces from loss or damaging development.

Read all about CPRE London's campaign for parks at: www.cprelondon.org.uk

Supporting endangered crafts'

The Sussex Heritage Trust has a programme of funding and bursary opportunities for people in Sussex in partnership with the Heritage Crafts Association and the Weald and Downland Living Museum. Grants of up to £2,000 are available to help craftspeople in Sussex working in endangered crafts. The deadline for applications is 22 February 2022 and funding is available throughout the year. For further information, visit the Trust's website: www.sussexheritagetrust.org.uk

Water, water everywhere?

With no coast and only the sleepy River Thames to worry about, water is probably not on the minds of many Oxfordshire residents. Yet, the problems of flooding, water shortages and pollution are serious challenges to the county, according to a new report from CPRE Oxfordshire. In an extensive survey, town and parish councils across the county were

contacted by local CPRE activists on a number of water and sewage issues. The findings have been carefully assembled and now feature in a useful interactive county map.

More than 30 geographical locations have been identified by the survey, which now appear on a map, designed for both reference and community resilience planning. Surprisingly, a fifth of the county's towns and villages are currently expressing some form of concern with water; concerns about higher-than-usual levels of water collecting after rainfall; and sewage management.

Findings show that at least 17% of towns & parishes in Oxfordshire experience actual flooding problems and at least 20% of towns & parishes experience issues with sewage/sewerage infrastructure. Details: www.cpreoxfordshire.org.uk

Island under threat

A haven of downland, red squirrels and a slower pace of life - but could this atmosphere now be changing? CPRE Isle of Wight has issued some stark warnings about the impact of housing targets on the Island's quality of life. Under pressure to build 1,045 new houses every year on the Island, compared to the 348 homes delivered on average over the last three years, the new figures have already attracted criticism from the Isle of Wight Council and, as reported in the last South East eBulletin, from the Island's MP Bob Seely.

The situation looks set to get even worse. CPRE Isle of Wight chairman Al Haig-Thomas says he is also worried about the Government's proposed planning reforms: "In removing local democracy from the planning system, both individuals as well as councils are set to lose their right to object to specific developments. Planning should be both local and democratic,

and voices such as the hundreds objecting to the destruction of Westridge Farm must be heard."

He adds: "Given both our unique Island infrastructure constraints as well as the nature of our externally driven housing demand, we've long argued that top down targets are not suitable for the Island. The new proposed method of calculating housing need continues to fail to account for the Island's housing demand being driven almost exclusively from people looking to move here to take advantage of our already lower house prices.

"By setting unrealistic targets that can't be met, it's likely the supply of more affordable town centre units most demanded by young Islanders will actually be reduced, as developers are able to cherry pick only the most profitable greenfield developments under the Government's presumption in favour of development. We are delighted to support Mr Seely who is standing up for the Island against the proposed reforms, and welcome the council's intention to join him in seeking an exception from national planning policy."

For more details on how the Isle of Wight is countering excessive housing targets, go to: <http://isleofwight.cprelocalgroups.org.uk/campaigns/housing-and-planning/planning/item/2223-gov-housing-targets-2020-1>

Hampshire's hedgerow heroes

CPRE Hampshire is emphasising the importance of the county's hedgerows, describing them as "the vital stitching in the patchwork of our countryside." Not only are hedgerows beautiful, with shifting seasonal colours, but they also provide homes and corridors for wildlife. And all the while they

help tackle the climate crisis by capturing carbon from the air and storing it in plants, slowing climate change.

CPRE Hants encourages other branches in the South East region to recruit volunteer 'Hedgerow Heroes'. Working with local partners, drawing on local expertise and using it as an opportunity to educate and engage the local community on the enormous value of the humble hedgerow, there are a number of benefits to the hedgerow project.

Hampshire's project has been running for a year now, and will not just enhance the county's hedgerows but also support local jobs and offer great opportunities for the local community to connect, understand and enjoy the landscape around them. To find out more about Hampshire's hedgerows campaign, visit: <https://www.cprehampshire.org.uk/what-we-care-about/hedgerows/>

REGION-WIDE

South East leads the way in organic food

CPRE members in the South-East must make it their New Year resolution to spread the word about our region's organic food and drink, especially following the Covid pandemic's legacy of cancelled food fairs and real-ale festivals.

Far be it from us to advertise different producers, but from Kent breweries such as Musket near Maidstone to Mereworth Wines near Tonbridge; and the superb Eden Greens Urban Farm in Woking, Surrey, there are numerous local businesses producing sustainable, fresh and indoor-grown microgreens for home cooks, restaurants, pubs, chefs and caterers. The potential for

growth of organic production in the South East of England is enormous.

Local brewers and producers sustain village pubs and restaurants, and jobs for local people – so the economic importance of this industry is vast. Take Ruth's Little Kitchen in Brockham, Surrey: here artisan bread is made, and thanks to the Duke of Edinburgh's Scheme, many young people are now involved in local food production and education.

Unfortunately, many members of the 'Farm to Fork' movement have seen huge reductions in orders from their wholesale customers because of cancelled restaurant and party bookings. So, CPRE can play an important role in promoting local food by highlighting local food producers and encouraging members to look out for local food options.

One such business is Hill House Farm, which specialises in providing locally-sourced, sustainable farm-to-fork meats, home-reared on its 17-hectare farm in the Surrey Hills AONB. Produce is available to buy online (free delivery to RH, KT and GU postcodes). For further details, visit: www.hill-house-farm.com)

CPRE members and volunteers can do much to spread the word about such great English producers, which give us so much more variety in our diets, our shopping habits, and our way of life.

Back to the future: time to revive our Green Belts!

Communities across the South East continue to face an onslaught of new development threats thanks to excessive and unsustainable housing targets. Campaigners in Oxfordshire are fighting attempts to shrink the already-narrow Oxford Green Belt, and at the other

end of the region local residents in East Malling, Kent, are trying to get the countryside around their village, which is just outside the London Metropolitan Green Belt, protected from housing sprawl by bringing it within the Green Belt.

The concept of a Green Belt is sometimes thought of as essentially a 20th Century concept, the LMGB having been created in 1955. But in fact the idea of establishing some sort of an 'open zone' around large cities can be traced back at least to Roman times. In 17th Century England, one proponent of the same idea was John Evelyn, the celebrated diarist, scientist and gardener.

In his pamphlet, *'Fumifugium'*, published in 1661, Evelyn railed against the "inconvenience of the air and smoke of London" and recommended the removal of all 'noxious' industry from the city. He also made the case for the areas around London to be made into fields, surrounded by hedges, to be planted with shrubs and flowers, herbs, and fruit and vegetables which could be sold in London.

Furthermore, he argued that these should be places for the recreation of the city's inhabitants. His 'tag line' promoting the concept was "Health, Profit and Beauty". Not so distant from the arguments that CPRE continues to promulgate to protect and enhance the Green Belts around London and other major cities!

You can read all about the health and wellbeing benefits of Green Belts in the London Green Belt Council's 2019 report "A Positive Case for London's Green Belt": www.londongreenbeltcouncil.org.uk

Gatwick: a flight from reality

GACC (Gatwick Area Conservation Campaign) has submitted its response to the consultation

on Gatwick Airport expansion plans. It shows that the economic and employment benefits Gatwick claims for the project are 'illusory'. Even the airport's own consultants say there would be no employment benefits at a national level.

The airport's wider assessment of economic benefits is based on unsupportable or out-of-date assumptions, omissions and errors, GACC states, and it is likely that the scheme in fact has a negative economic value. Gatwick expansion will increase the airport's CO₂ emissions by nearly 50% from the 2018 level. Emissions attributable to Gatwick would grow from less than 1% of total UK emissions in 2019 to over 5.5% by 2038.

Apart from the increase in airport noise, there have also been increases car travel to the airport (up by over 40% compared to 2019) causing congestion and impacting air quality. Most worryingly, GACC also reports that the consultation itself is "not fit for purpose" because it gives a misleading impression of the need for the development and uses projections that are not consistent with the Airports National Policy Statement. www.gacc.org.uk

NATIONAL NEWS

CPRE's brownfield report discussed at ministerial level

"The proportion of brownfield housing units with planning permission is the lowest since records began – down to 44% in 2021 from 53% in 2020 – and the actual number, at 506,000, is the lowest for four years."

Important CPRE research on brownfield development was discussed recently at a private roundtable meeting with Housing Minister Chris Pincher MP. The Minister was

informed that there is land available for 1.3million new homes in England, all in previously developed sites across the country. Yet, despite this fact, development of greenfield sites for housing is increasing, and the proportion of brownfield land being used for housing has shrunk in the last 12 months. For the full text of National CPRE's brownfield report, go to: www.cpre.org.uk

Reimagining where we live

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee is asking for evidence for their enquiry on placemaking and the levelling up agenda. Specifically, they are looking for:

- How can culture reanimate our public spaces and shopping streets?
- How can creatives contribute to local decision-making and planning of place?
- How can the Government support places without established artistic infrastructure to take full advantage of the opportunities that the levelling up agenda provides?
- How might changes to the UK's broadcasting landscape affect investment in cultural production outside the capital, and what could the consequences be for artists and communities?
- How should Government build on existing schemes, such as the UK City of Culture, to level up funding for arts and culture?

The deadline for responses is 18th February. Visit the following website for contact details: [Reimagining where we live: cultural placemaking and the levelling up agenda - Committees - UK Parliament](https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/cultural-placemaking-and-the-levelling-up-agenda-committees/)

National CPRE releases major new report on green spaces

The importance of green spaces in our increasingly fractured and denatured South East has been emphasised by National CPRE in a major new report.

The report sets out the health and wellbeing benefits of local green spaces and their positive contribution to tackling the climate emergency but highlights the evidence showing the huge inequality of access to these much valued green spaces, particularly for poorer communities.

The coronavirus pandemic, and our reliance on nearby nature, has made these inequalities even more stark. Bridging this 'green space gap' and levelling up access to nature should be a key priority for any government that cares about people, climate and the environment.

In this context, the Local Green Space (LGS) designation, as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), is an important planning policy tool, linked to Neighbourhood Planning, with which local communities can protect the local green spaces they value most and feel confident that they will not be lost to development. The significant extent to which it has been used so far confirms how much people who are aware of the designation value this opportunity.

Maintaining, improving and also broadening the use of the LGS designation should be seen as a critical part of levelling up. In particular, the designation can help secure a thriving natural environment that supports our wellbeing and the fight against climate change.

The full report can be downloaded from the National CPRE website: www.cpre.org.uk

CPRE County Branches Forum

We are delighted to report that Cllr Catherine Sayer, the Leader of Tandridge District Council, has agreed to give a talk to the CPRE County Branches Forum on the subject “From CPRE Trustee to Leader of the Council.”

Catherine who is an Independent Councillor representing a local residents’ group, became the Tandridge leader recently when the Independents became the largest party in the Council. The Independents achieved this success after campaigning against development in the Green Belt.

She will be giving her talk via Zoom on Thursday 24 February at 6 pm. For details please email hilary.newport@cprekent.org.uk

STOP PRESS

Government delays

The Government’s long-awaited ‘Levelling-up’ White Paper is due to appear as this e-Bulletin goes to press, and it will be interesting to see what if any implications there are for the South East. By all accounts this will be a major publication and we will need to go through it with great care!

We have also been waiting for some time and for the publication of the Planning Bill that has evolved from last year’s highly controversial and much-criticised Planning Paper. This had originally been expected by the end of 2021 but the continuing Covid-19 pandemic put paid to the Government’s original timetable and it appears that, with Whitehall somewhat distracted at present, the revised publication schedule means that we might not see the Bill until at least the Spring.

Watch this space!

CPRE SE e-Bulletin

CPRE South East e-Bulletin is edited by Andy Smith, an independent writer, on behalf of the SE regional group of CPRE. Andy can be contacted on 07737 271676 or email wordsmithreviews@yahoo.co.uk. Views expressed in this e-Bulletin are those of the editor and do not necessarily reflect the policies of CPRE. You can subscribe to this e-Bulletin by emailing wordsmithreviews@yahoo.co.uk with the title SOUTH EAST BULLETIN in the subject line.