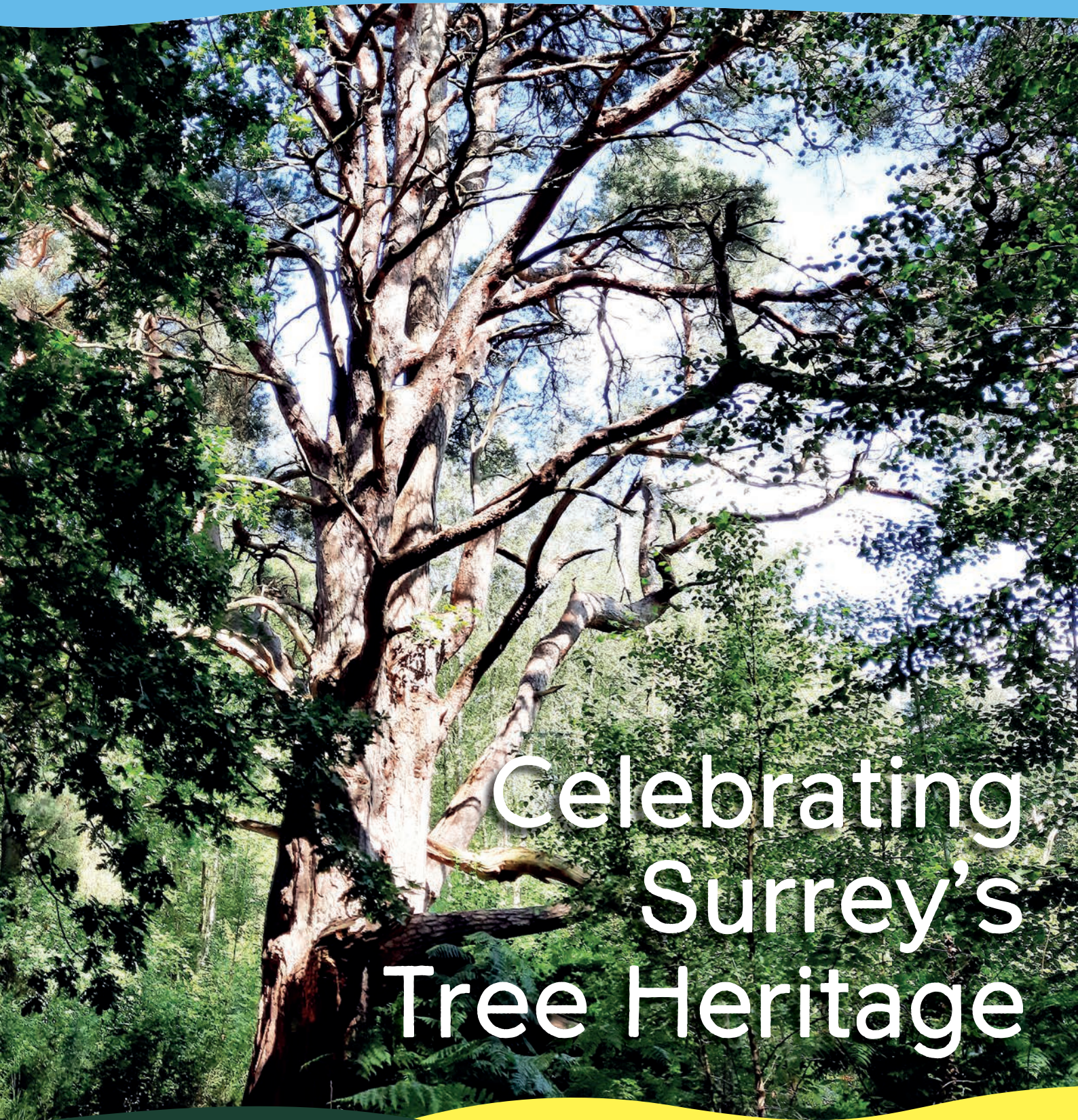


SURREY VOICE

Magazine of the Surrey Campaign to Protect Rural England | Winter 2022



Celebrating Surrey's Tree Heritage



The countryside charity
Surrey

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FROM THE CPRE SURREY CHAIR

This edition of the Surrey Voice very much has a tree theme. Surrey is England's most wooded county, with woodland covering nearly a quarter of the county. A quarter of these are recorded as ancient woodland, areas rich in wildlife that have been part of our landscape for centuries. This is an important part of why Surrey is a popular place to live, work and visit. We champion trees, and the many organisations across the county that work to protect and maintain them.

The political landscape in the last few months has been extraordinary, and it is hard to keep up with the Government's thoughts on whether they would like to protect or destroy the countryside. We hope that Rishi Sunak's Government will take a responsible approach to growth and development; one which ensures we have a coherent plan to protect our

green spaces and encourage development on brownfield sites rather than the Green Belt.

The signs so far look good, as Michael Gove is back in charge, and although we don't agree with everything in the resurrected white paper, it is a good deal better than what Liz Truss was proposing.

The Prime Minister's immediate priority has to be the cost-of-living crisis and a big part of that is the cost of energy. With war in Europe we are rightly striving for an independent energy strategy, and an independent food strategy, but in doing this we cannot ignore the climate crisis, indeed, we should prioritise it. We need to focus on renewable energy and nuclear, not going back to ways that have proven risky to the country and the planet.

Rishi Sunak too has said many positive things recently about planning and the environment. He wants to protect the green belt and "automatically reject plans to allow local authorities to change green belt boundaries and release land to developers". He proposes a major shake up of planning rules to require developers to act on their planning permissions within a set timeframe or face losing them to councils. Delay is a real problem in Surrey where developers sit on landbanks, sometimes letting them decay to unsightly scrubland in order to promote their plans for urbanisation. He wants to relax the requirement of councils to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply – another regulation that has been used in the wrong way to build in green spaces across the county where no one wants building. We would like him to do all these things, but also take matters further still.

Developers should be made to make genuinely affordable housing at the centre of any new development, and focus on brownfield regeneration. We would like a new National Planning Policy Framework that prioritises protecting our green spaces and building properties that communities need in areas that make sense. Our National branch are doing a good job, lobbying the government with a prudent and measured voice that ensures we stay at the table and are heard. We must now wait and see what the new government proposes to do. Watch this space.

Join us in sharing our open letter to Surrey's MPs on pages 8 and 9.

John Goodridge, CPRE Surrey Chair

Front Cover Image: Trees in Witley Common, Surrey by Leimenide at Flickr (www.flickr.com/photos/24350382@N07/51407834271/in/photostream/)



John Goodridge hedge laying

NEWS ... NEWS ... NEWS ... NEWS ... NEWS ...

September 2022 AGM

We welcomed over thirty CPRE Surrey members and guests to our AGM on the 10th September at the wonderful Buckland Park Lake and Estate, a site dedicated now to outdoor sports, yoga, and nature.

As well as the formal business we enjoyed two guest speakers; Wayne Thornton, Operations Manager, gave an introduction to Buckland Park Lake, Betchworth, near Reigate; followed by Ben McCallan, Chair of Zero Carbon Guildford, and Senior Climate Officer on the Greener Futures team at Surrey County Council, speaking on 'Community-Led Action on a Changing Planet'. Really informative. More of the work of Surrey County Council's climate team can be found at: www.surreycc.gov.uk/community/climate-change/what-are-we-doing.

Trustees re-elected were John Goodridge, who takes on Chair, Matt Mallinder as Deputy Chair and Craig Freeman. Newly elected were David Allen, who replaces John as Treasurer, Jennet Eyre and Susan Briant. Standing down: Kristina Kenworthy, Alivia Kratke and Sonya Dixon.

Special thanks to outgoing Chair, Kristina Kenworthy

We would like to pay special recognition and thanks to our previous Chair, Kristina Kenworthy. Kristina has been a member of CPRE Surrey for 27 years and has been Chair of the board for the last six years. She has worked tirelessly to ensure that we are at the forefront of the movement to protect our

countryside alongside having to make tough financial cuts so we can continue to do the work we do. Her legal background has been indispensable to us as we have fought against unreasonable development in Surrey. Kristina has also represented CPRE Surrey on the local ANOB Board as well as at CPRE National level contributing to their review of their governance structures.

100 Club

The Summer draw main prize for the 100 Club was for £369.60 and was won by Mrs Rose Brion. The runner up prize of £92.40 was won by one of our Vice Presidents, Mrs Gillian Hein. Congratulations to you both. There will be another draw in January. Half the subscriptions to the draw go back to the charity and half go to the prize pot, so please consider becoming a stakeholder. We would like to encourage you to buy as many stakes as possible (the price per stake remains at £12 per year). If we get 500 stakes, our target, then there will be one prize of £1,200 and one runner up prize of £300, drawn twice per year. If you want to join, please email jgoodridge@cpresurrey.org.uk and we will keep you in touch with the size of the club, and of course the size of the prizes!

GET INVOLVED

Is anyone interested in joining a small national-led fracking group to fight against fracking. We are at risk here in Surrey, so it would be good if we had some representation on this group. If you are interested, please get in touch with either jgoodridge@cpresurrey.org.uk or Anna Mathieson at annam@cpresurrey.org.uk.

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Surrey's Tree Heritage

By Colin Hall, CPRE Waverley Committee Member

Surrey is the most wooded county in England and has an extensive and impressive range of trees in its woodlands, hedgerows, wood pastures, parklands and private estates and gardens. Colin Hall, CPRE Waverley committee member and trustee of The Tree Register gives us an overview of what makes Surrey so special.

Surrey has many Champion Trees, the tallest or fattest in the British Isles, which are recorded on The Tree Register (www.treeregister.org), which also lists the Surrey County Champions.

The really iconic trees in Surrey are, however, the ancient trees and the veteran trees. Ancient trees and veteran trees are of considerable interest biologically, aesthetically and culturally because of their age, size, or condition. Many of these will be recorded on the Ancient Tree Inventory maintained by The Woodland Trust (www.woodlandtrust.org) and also on The Tree Register.

An ancient tree is one that has passed beyond maturity and is old, or aged, in comparison with other trees of the same species. Its canopy may be small. It will probably have a very wide trunk relative to other trees of the same species and it is very likely that it will be hollow. It has been said that an old oak grows for 200 years, stands still for 200 years and takes 200 years to decline and die. Ancient oaks would be likely to be in those last 200 years (or maybe more), so rest assured that, if left to its own devices, it is likely that it will outlive you and me.

A veteran tree is one that will be old but normally not as old as an ancient tree. It will be starting to show some of the characteristics of an ancient tree such as significant decay features with branch death and hollowing.

Ancient trees are exceptionally valuable for biodiversity. They are particularly special for their fungi, deadwood, invertebrates and lichen, as a result of significant wood decay and the habitat created from the ageing process. Veteran trees also have considerable biodiversity value.

All trees, but particularly ancient and veteran trees, benefit from an important symbiotic relationship with the mycorrhizal fungi in the soil. The tree gets from the fungi enhanced nutrient uptake efficiency, disease resistance and improved drought tolerance. The fungi get the products of photosynthesis from the tree i.e. carbohydrates. Mycorrhizal fungi can be damaged by fertilisers and trampling which in turn can threaten the health of ancient trees.

Ageing of trees can be difficult. It is impossible to age a tree accurately without counting the rings after it has been felled or without taking a core sample (which can damage the tree). Alan Mitchell, the tree guru (who lived near Farnham and worked at Forest Research) estimated that a healthy fully crowned tree reaches a point in middle age when the girth increases by one inch for each year of growth; he estimated that a tree grew in early life at an inch and



The Polecat Copse, Douglas fir
(Photo: Aiden Champion)



Waverley Abbey ruins © Christopher Hilton (cc-by-sa/2.0 – www.geograph.org.uk/reuse.php?id=2219487)

a half a year but that from 80-100 years it would slow down to less than one inch.

Many of our ancient oaks are estimated to be over 500-600 years old. Birch trees, for example, are, however, fast-growing, and could be classed as ancient at 150 years old, while a yew tree might receive the same accolade at 800 years of age.

The Fortingall Yew in Perthshire, Scotland is considered the oldest tree in the UK. Experts (www.ancient-yew.org) estimate it to be between 2,000 and 3,000 years old, although some think it could be far older – maybe even 5,000 years old.

The oldest tree in Surrey is considered by the Tree Register to be the yew in Crowhurst Parish church, which may be over 2000 years old.

The Tree Register shows the tallest tree in Surrey to be a Douglas fir at 58 meters at Polecat Copse, Haslemere and the thickest trunk to belong to a sweet chestnut at 3.37 metres in Betchworth Park, Dorking. This year Surrey's ancient yew at Waverley Abbey was voted tree of the year in the Woodland Trust's survey.

Some Ancient and veteran trees have tree preservation orders or may be in Conservation

Areas but they are otherwise unprotected. They are supposed to receive some protection under our planning laws when development requiring planning permission is sought for a development but nothing stops pre-application felling by a developer or landowner.

They may be felled at the whim of a landowner or sometimes because a landowner or his insurance company, advised by an arboriculturist, advise that it is unsafe and must be felled because of some of the very features described above which make these trees so special.

The Woodland Trust has long campaigned for full protection to be given to all ancient trees and established its Ancient Tree Inventory for this purpose.

There is a great number of ancient trees not yet recorded on the AWI, so look out for ancient trees in your local countryside or park or town and let The Woodland Trust know by recording it on the Ancient Tree Inventory on their website.

TREE WARDENS

The Surrey Tree Warden Network – What does it do?
Liz Ramsey, Surrey Tree Warden tells us all about it...

The clue is in the name. Tree Wardens are run nationally by the charity The Tree Council, and have been operating for over thirty years. For almost as long, the Surrey Tree Warden Network has been bringing together individuals and groups in Surrey who volunteer to care for trees in their local communities. It doesn't just mean planting trees and hedges, though that is important. It means anything and everything to do with trees.

Here are some of things Surrey Tree Wardens have been doing. Street tree planting has never been more important, and there are groups organising and promoting it in Bookham, Ashted, Fetcham, Epsom and Ewell, and Tadworth and Walton.

In Epsom, a booklet and Tree Trail was produced celebrating the splendid old trees in the local Rosebery Park. Dormansland used to be known for its cherry orchards. That history was recognised with new cherry trees going in around the village. The new Elmbridge group operates out of its own centre, has been planting hedges and trees, and organising guided tree walks.

In Nutfield, a new two and a half acre wood has been planted, and named Jubilee Wood. The Nutfield group also produced a survey and map of ancient and veteran trees in the parish. Spelthorne have been running their own Tree Nursery for many years, and have planted hundreds of street trees in the borough.



The Crowhurst yew (Photo: Krzysztof Borkowski) which could be over 2000 years old

In Surrey Heath, the group has brought back to life Warren Wood, a small woodland overgrown with laurel, created Forest School areas in a local school, and is now working with MoD Sandhurst to restore some woodland areas. Stoke d'Abernon tree wardens have run out of places to plant more trees – any ideas anyone? And they have restored the original tree planting around the War Memorial. The Lingfield group worked hard with the local council to set up the now flourishing Lingfield Nature Reserves.

National Tree Week at the end of November is a focus for tree planting. But just as important is the Tree Care campaign. New trees need aftercare if they are to survive and grow, as this summer's drought has shown. Tree Wardens are there to help ensure new trees flourish. Then there's Seed Gathering season: New trees grown from locally gathered seed helps to counter imported diseases.

Trees are remarkable living things. The Surrey Tree Warden Network has organised an exhibition now showing at Epsom Library simply called *The Remarkable World of Trees*, and is a celebration of art, craft and photography. It runs until January 7th, and it's hoped, may then transfer to other Surrey Libraries.

The Network has also produced a booklet, **Remarkable Trees of Surrey**, which is available to buy online at £4.99 via the website: www.surreytreewardens.org.uk. And that's where anyone interested in becoming a Tree Warden can go for further information about the network. The website also has details of the training Sessions that are available to anyone who signs up as a member.



Ancient Yew © Richard Croft (cc-by-sa/2.0 – www.geograph.org.uk/photo/726976)

'The Remarkable World of Trees' and the Tree Warden Network

Epsom Library are holding a lovely and informative exhibition until 7th January 2023. It has been arranged jointly by the Tree Council and the Surrey Tree Warden Network with the aim of increasing knowledge on the importance of trees. The exhibition is accompanied by a programme of events, tree related items for sale and a display of artwork also with the theme of trees.

The exhibition includes information on the importance of trees for biodiversity, tree coverage in Surrey and the important work of the Tree Council in promoting knowledge of trees, encouraging new planting and coordinating the national Tree Wardens network.

After the Great Storm of 1987, in which about 15 million trees were lost, the Tree Council saw the need for a network of local groups. In 1990 it launched the Tree Warden scheme and by 1995 this had reached 65 local authorities. With over 8000 Tree Wardens now, it organises training and events to assist them.

Their 4 basic tasks are to:

- Act as the eyes and ears for the benefit of trees in local areas
- Collect data on local trees
- Be a contact for the community
- And carry out practical projects.

The Tadworth and Walton Tree Wardens is an example of a local group. It was formed in 2016 under the umbrella of the local residents' association. During this time it has worked to protect local trees and encourage new planting. A major success has been organising the planting of some 150 trees. More will be planted this winter, including some under the auspices of the Queen's Green Canopy initiative.

If you would like to form a new Tree Warden's group or see if there is an existing one in your area or just find out more (Epsom has an active group), please contact secretary@surreytreewardens.org.uk.

Further information can also be found at www.treecouncil.org.uk and www.surreytreewardens.org.uk.



We believe in working together for the love of trees.

The Tree Council brings everyone together with a shared mission to care for trees and our planet's future. We inspire and empower organisations, government, communities and individuals with the knowledge and tools to create positive, lasting change at a national and local level.

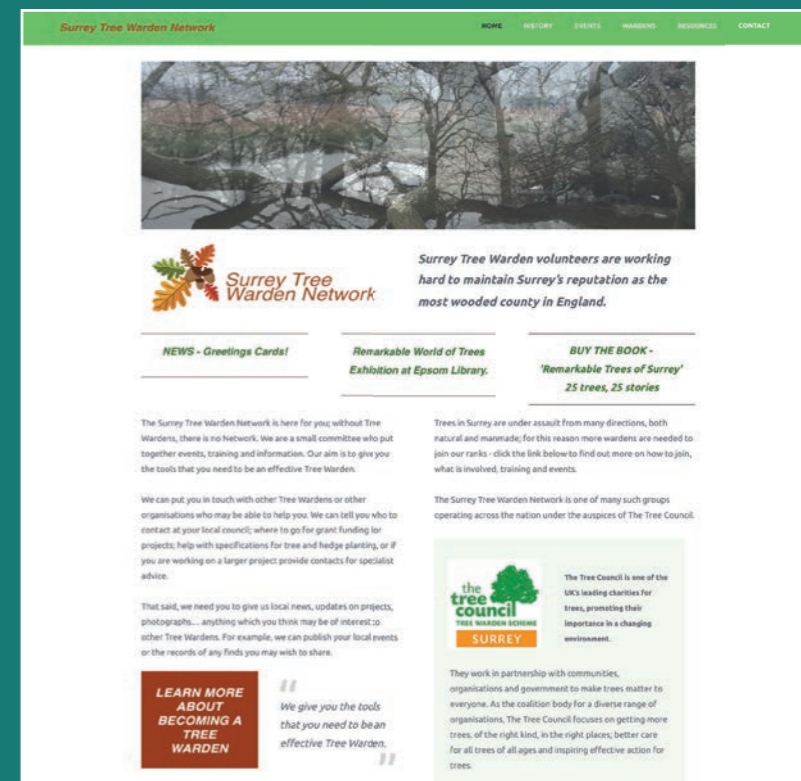


THE TREE PLANTING SEASON BEGINS

Thank you!

For celebrating National Tree Week with us and helping us reach our Orchards for Schools target! The week goes on now to carry out good quality planting up and down the country, filling our nation with carbon-busting, wildlife-protecting and purifying trees. You can catch up on the week below.

[VIEW OUR BLOG](#)





The countryside charity
Surrey

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December 2022

Dear Surrey MP,

I am writing to you today to put forward the thoughts and concerns of the members of our charity, the Surrey branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England. As we all know, the environment and planning in the county is very high on the minds of most Surrey voters and we at CPRE would like to see change for the better.

We need a coherent, sustainable and independent energy strategy, new investment in our water infrastructure, and an independent food strategy. We have war in Europe and most importantly, a climate crisis.

It is a challenging time, but that does not mean our decision makers should revert to past and outdated ideas of how we should structure our environment, and not move forward with the times. The decisions we make now will have huge ramifications for years to come.

The last government, just a few short weeks ago, were musing incredible and potentially disastrous change. We are pleased that the new government under Rishi Sunak has moved the dial back towards a more sensible approach of growth whilst protecting the Environment.

We are pleased that the ban on fracking has been reinstated, but would urge the government to rethink the consent for oil and gas drilling in one of the more picturesque parts of our county in Dunsfold. This will cause irreparable damage to the environment and also damage to other businesses in the local area (there is a successful wedding party venue within 200 yards of the site). It is completely at odds with fighting climate change.

Further afield, we also challenge the decision to grant permission for a new coal mine in Cumbria, which is making climate activists, your voters, and the world scratch their heads and wonder what this government stands for in relation to the environment.

We are pleased that the new investment zones that were previously allocated across the country are now being specifically refocussed on universities, but would maintain that any such development could and should be respectful of the countryside and its designated areas.

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CAN YOU HELP?

Please circulate this letter. We are looking for residents from each of Surrey's districts to contact their MP. If you live in Spelthorne, Runcy, Surrey Heath, Woking, Elmbridge, Guildford, Waverley, Mole Valley, Epsom and Ewell, Reigate and Banstead, or Tandridge and you are willing to contact your MP please contact jgoodridge@cpresurrey.org.uk so that we can co-ordinate responses. Thank you!

We have a planning policy that is not fit for purpose and needs reorganising. We are pleased that Mr Gove wants to allocate the housing need in a fair way that takes into account the changes in population. We have long been calling for the population growth estimates used in calculating this need to be the most recent. The 2021 Census has reaffirmed that population growth in Surrey is considerably lower than forecast in 2014, and this should be taken into account. We are pleased that the new Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill has the aim of making planning a quicker, fairer and easier process for all.

We want to see local communities at the heart of decision making. In Surrey, we would like to see well-designed, high density, genuinely affordable housing built on brownfield sites at first. Developers should not be allowed to sit on sites they have permission to develop and wait. This only makes councils fail in their drive to achieve planning targets, but also allows other developments outside Local Plans to be given the go ahead against the wishes of all local inhabitants. This is happening across the country and notably in our county in Waverley and Spelthorne.

Ahead of day 2 of the report stage of the new bill, we would urge you to support the proposals of Theresa Villiers, MP for Chipping Barnet, who together with a number of her colleagues, would prohibit mandatory housing targets and abolish the five-year land supply rule; ensure that the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) no longer contains a presumption in favour of sustainable development in all circumstances; and that the NPPF must provide the right to object to individual planning applications.

We hope you agree with what we are campaigning for. We need change to the system, as unpopular and unfair developments are being granted planning permission in our most beautiful places (including the Green Belt and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty). We need to take the power away from the building companies, whose sole aim is for profit.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

John Goodridge
Chair
Surrey Campaign to Protect Rural England
jgoodridge@cpresurrey.org.uk

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Surrey Planning Spotlight – Local Plans

By Keith Tothill,
CPRE Surrey Vice-President

Three Local Plans in Surrey are progressing towards their final stages and Adoption. They are Mole Valley, Elmbridge and Spelthorne. Each is taking a different approach.

Mole Valley

The draft Local Plan went out for final consultation late last year. The Council decided that it could not reach the Standard Method housing figure for the Plan period (7,750 dwellings or 456 pa). Even though the reduced housing figure was 6,000 or 353pa, the housing allocations still included 28 housing Green Belt of which only 11 comprised 30 or more dwellings. The Green Belt losses (0.7% of total) are half that what was contained in the earlier consultation which CPRE Surrey very heavily criticised.

CPRE Surrey again responded in detail to last year's November consultation. It strongly supported the Council's case that it could not reach the unreasonable housing 'targets' and the majority of the Spatial strategy. We did however strongly object to the proposed Green Belt housing allocation for 200 dwellings plus 3 traveller pitches at Little Bookham.

We considered that unlike some of the other Green Belt allocations there were no exceptional circumstances allowing release. We also objected to some of the indicative residential densities on residential allocations which we felt could have been higher.

The Examination has just concluded having been held in June, September and October.

Elmbridge

The draft Local Plan consultation concluded on 29 July 2022. The Council, like Mole Valley decided it could not reach the Standard Method housing figure of 9,705 dwellings or 647 per annum without unacceptable Green Belt losses. Instead, the Council decided that their housing figure should amount to at least 6,785 dwellings (some 70% of the SM figure) over 17 years or 452 per annum. This would be achieved without any Green Belt losses at all and therefore no housing on Green Belt land.

CPRE Surrey in their extensive representation strongly supported the Council's Strategy a stance that the Council's Planning Portfolio Holder had requested. Elmbridge intends to submit their Plan to the Secretary of State before the end of 2022. The Examination details are not yet known but will be in 2023.



Yew, All Saints' Church, Little Bookham © Ian Capper (cc-by-sa/2.0 – www.geograph.org.uk/more.php?id=5911955)

Spelthorne

The final pre-submission Consultation concluded in September. Unlike Mole Valley and Elmbridge, Spelthorne has decided to produce a Plan and strategy that includes a housing figure in line with the Government's Standard Method housing figure. In order to achieve that figure, it was necessary to include some Green Belt sites for housing. The Draft Plan, over 15 years, provides for 9,439 dwellings or 629 per annum and 15 Green Belt housing sites. There are 13 Green Belt sites totalling 24.8 hectares and providing 855 dwellings, a college and a community centre and 2 for 18 traveller/gypsy pitches. The Council considers that the Green Belt sites do not perform Green Belt functions and so can be released, although others do not agree with that judgement. No date has yet been set for the Plan's Submission or the Examination.

Winter rambles

Want to work off the Christmas Turkey or use the holidays to see more of our beautiful county with friends and family then inspiration is at hand on the Surrey Hills walking, cycling and Horse riding trail map at www.surreyhills.org/discover/walks/. The interactive map has routes across the county with links through to short circular routes or longer point to point routes. Immerse yourself in local history such as the Tillingbourne Gunpowder Mills near Chilworth, or climb to the tallest point in Surrey at Leith Hill. The routes have additional information including route description, maps and points of interest.

INTRODUCING...

Jacquetta Fewster has been appointed as the Coordinator for the Surrey Climate Commission. The Commission is a Community Interest Company which supports organisations across Surrey to contribute to the climate target. Surrey County Council has awarded a grant of £15,000 to support the Surrey Climate Commission's work in 2022-2023, enabling the Commission to appoint a Coordinator. You can read all about their latest activity at tinyurl.com/2p9admhu.

Jacquetta is passionate about the Surrey countryside and is a member of CPRE Surrey. Her role at Surrey Climate Commission is to support community groups active on the climate. She brings experience from organisations including the Active Travel Academy, the Graduate School of the Environment, and the Transition Town Movement.

Her current priorities include supporting local groups to publicise climate projects and events and apply for grants from the Climate Action Fund. Is your local group taking action on the climate? If so, Jacquetta would love to hear from you. Contact her on jacquetta@surreyclimate.org.uk or call 07404 757 870.

New Targets?

Recently reports appear to suggest that the Government is seriously considering a cancellation of what it calls 'Top down' housing targets and a reappraisal how housing figures should be calculated with more emphasis on local input. Additionally, it is likely the most up to date population and household figures would be used in calculations rather than the retention of the out-of-date 2014 household projections. As more recent projections and figures indicate considerably lower housing figures than those of 2014, it is likely that most Local Authority housing targets will be lower than those in place today. Whether the eventual change will benefit the three Surrey Council's Local Plan must be in doubt however.

Housing development in Hamsey Green, Surrey © Dr Neil Clifton (cc-by-sa/2.0 – www.geograph.org.uk/reuse.php?id=58812)



Population growth

The population of England and Wales in the 10-year period since the last census has increased by 6.3%. Listed below are the 2021 Census results for the population increases for the 11 Districts in Surrey which differ widely:

Reigate & Banstead	150,900	9.5%*
Runnymede	88,100	9.4%*
Epsom & Ewell	80,900	7.7%*
Spelthorne	103,000	7.7%*
Elmbridge	138,800	6.1%*
Tandridge	87,900	5.9%*
Waverley	128,200	5.5%*
Surrey Heath	90,500	5.1%*
Guildford	143,600	4.7%*
Woking	130,900	4.7%*
Mole Valley	87,400	2.4%*

(* increase since the 2011 Census)

Mixed fortunes for Effingham planning

Berkeley Homes has had a partial win with an inspector, GD Jones, allowing an appeal against Guildford Borough Council's refusal of 114 homes on the north side of Lower Road, Effingham, Surrey, in April 2022. Guildford's original determination and refusal was because it created a mid-level of harm to green belt and a conservation area. GD Jones in allowing the appeal said the benefits were sufficient to demonstrate that the "very special circumstances" required to justify permission in the green belt existed.

However, the inspector refused Berkeley's appeal of 99 homes on the south side for their potential impact of a listed church and conservation area.

Worthing Local Plan with 74% housing shortfall found sound

Whilst outside of our area but newsworthy and potentially precedent setting, an emerging local plan at the centre of a Court of Appeal battle has been found sound despite proposing to deliver just a quarter of its objectively assessed housing need, after an inspector found the authority had "done everything it realistically could" to identify potential housing sites.

LONDON SET TO LOSE 48,000 ACRES OF ITS LOCAL COUNTRYSIDE

Scale of development planned for Green Belt doubles in just six years.

Local councils in London and the Home Counties are currently planning to allow building on more than 48,000 acres of Green Belt land, despite the vital role that open countryside plays in flood prevention and climate change mitigation.

Research by the London Green Belt Council – a coalition of more than 100 civic and amenity societies, residents’ associations, parish councils and local community groups across London and the Home Counties (LGBC) shows that the amount of London’s local countryside targeted for development has more than doubled in the last six years, reinforcing concerns expressed by both Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak during the Conservative Party leadership campaign about the growing threat to the Green Belt.

It represents a 21% increase in development threats in just one year, according to new research by the LGBC. Altogether the amount of ‘protected’ countryside earmarked for development has more than doubled in only six years, despite its enormous importance to nature and to people’s quality of life.

According to a major new report by the LGBC, *‘Safe Under Us’? The continued shrinking of London’s local countryside, 2022*, there has been a 21% increase in development threats in the last year. The report details the extent of Green Belt loss under current ‘Local Plans’. It points out how all of the region’s housing needs could easily be met by building on brownfield (previously developed) urban sites instead.

The new report highlights the fact that many councils are still using housing figures based on out-of-date (2014) population and household projections from the Office for National Statistics when more recent and more accurate figures are available which show a marked slowing-down of population increase. In short, far fewer houses are actually needed than are currently being planned for.

According to the report, councils in Outer London and the Home Counties are currently planning to allow developers to build on some 75 square miles of ‘protected’ Green Belt open spaces – London’s vital ‘green lung’. This is a totally unnecessary loss



of countryside, the report’s authors argue, as more than enough brownfield land is available to meet all of the region’s genuine housing needs, and the number of brownfield sites continues to increase.

Altogether the amount of Green Belt land offered up for development has increased by 21% since 2021, and a massive 127% since 2016 when the London Green Belt Council first started tracking threats to London’s local countryside. The counties of Hertfordshire, Essex and Surrey account for two thirds of all current development threats to London’s Green Belt.

The report’s authors make a series of recommendations to save the Green Belt which they hope the next Prime Minister will take up:

- The Government must direct local authorities to keep all new development away from London’s Green Belt and to prioritise regeneration of brownfield sites;
- Local councils must look for opportunities to relocate housing developments currently planned for Green Belt land to urban areas, building at higher densities.
- The Planning Inspectorate must deem Local Plans ‘unsound’ if they are not adjusted for the latest population and housing projections and if planned housing densities are too low.
- Councils must be more proactive in identifying brownfield sites within their areas, and must look at opportunities to build above surface car parks and other space-wasting sites.
- Central and local government must work together to protect Green Belt countryside for the sake of people’s health & wellbeing, to fulfil the UK’s nature recovery and climate-change goals, and for water retention and mitigating urban flooding.

Copies of the new report are available to download at www.londongreenbeltcouncil.org.uk.

Hedges and Trees Activities – Present and Future



CPRE Surrey held our first Coppicing and Hedge-laying session, in early November, professionally led by Surrey Hedge-Layers. The weather couldn’t have been kinder, on the Friday. In places, the location on Leith Hill gave sweeping views towards the South Downs – “If it wasn’t for the hazels in between”.

Our gang of a dozen CPRE members learnt to clear a safe workspace, ‘pleach’, lay, stake, bash down and top. The laid branches grow up through the horizontal mass, knitting into a very solid, natural, tidy hedge to contain livestock and exclude deer. Historically, hedging and ditching was the key winter task for farmers and landowners – before high wages and wire.

Good hedge-laying is not only an effective livestock fence, but also a carbon sink, and perfect natural highway and habitat for hundreds of creatures, including insects, small mammals, reptiles and birds. These in turn support the raptors and predators higher in the food chains. Compared to the Climate Change Mitigation and Bio-Diversity gains of hedges, ‘convenient’ modern wire fencing does – nothing!

We enjoyed the time in nature, the learning, doing, achievement and good company. The less good weather on the Saturday, deterred none. CPRE Surrey will co-host, join and point to more such ‘Trees and Hedges’ activities, which contribute strongly to the Countryside and nature, and are fun.

We will circulate such activities by email, magazine, website and phone – do contact us if you want to join ‘the list’. Equally please contact us if you would like help to plant trees or hedges, create habitat, coppicing, pollarding, etc.

Contact: Phil Partridge (emerging hedge-layer) ppartridge@cpresurrey.org.uk | 07813 829 326

Possibly also of interest:

Surrey County Council aim to plant 1.2 million trees by 2030 (1 per Surrey resident). Contact: trees@surreycc.gov.uk.

Reigate and Banstead have lots on Tree-planting – see www.reigate-banstead.gov.uk/communitytreeplanting.

Brightleigh Farm

Regenerative farming in the heart of Surrey

By Jeremy Saunders CPRE Surrey Volunteer co-ordinator



In September CPRE Surrey's Volunteer co-ordinator, Jeremy Saunders visited Nigel and Penny Franklin at their beautiful 150 acre farm in Outwood, near Bletchingley. They specialise in 100% pasture fed beef, a rare beast in this high paced consumerist world.

Penny and her family have been on this land since 1959, when her father Jim Brunton built a dairy herd up over 40 years. However with market forces bringing the cost of milk down to unsustainable levels, in 1999 they gave up dairy and went into producing beef.

For the last 10 years they have been producing organically and their herd of mixed Angus and Hereford are now 100% pasture fed. The family are passionate about producing healthy, nutritious and tasty in a regenerative way that doesn't harm the environment.

For their cattle they use a system called 'mob grazing'. This involves the cattle grazing small areas of the field intensely, and then being moved onto the next section later that day. This means the cattle get the best quality grass every day; it improves soil quality with less poaching (when cows make an area muddy); and the grass has a longer period of time to recover. Although labour intensive they can rotate the herd in a large field many times and keep the pasture far healthier.

Pasture fed beef has been shown to have higher levels of Vitamin A and E as well as other antioxidants and also has far lower levels of saturated fat, than grain fed beef. It also tastes superb and all their beef is dry aged for 21 days. They are also very involved in Pasture

For Life (www.pastureforlife.org) who champion the virtues of grass-based farming and meat production. They also keep pigs and chickens on the farm. Their pigs are a selection of rare breeds, including Tamworth; Saddleback and Gloucester Old Spot. They live outside for most of the year and are regularly moved to new spots to forage for their own food. When I visited they had a group of pigs in their woods doing 'pannage' (hunting for acorns) as well as the piglets pictured basking in the sun.

In addition they have a large flock of chickens, who live out in the fields in a large pen. This outdoor, properly free range approach produces eggs that are significantly higher in vitamins A and E, Omega 3, Beta Carotene and lower in cholesterol, as well as being delicious. To guard the chickens the Franklin's have two specialist helpers in the form of dogs. Two Maremma dogs from Italy guard each flock, and they haven't lost a single bird to predators since their arrival.

This low impact and regenerative approach to farming also extends to woodland and hedges, and they have done no hedge cutting for 5 years to encourage biodiversity and improve habitat.

Brightleigh Farm is a fantastic example of how to farm sustainably, protect the environment and produce fabulous food. Them and other farmers involved are producing positive impacts for bio-diversity and carbon; human health and wellbeing as well as animal welfare.

If you'd like to sample their delicious produce you can visit their farm shop on Saturday mornings, check the website – www.brightleighfarm.co.uk for details.



Did you know... commercial roof space could be the answer for solar energy?

Are solar farms the solution to climate emergency or a blight on our countryside? Charlotte Huguet, CPRE Surrey member explores the pros and cons of solar panels and shares her hopes that in Surrey we can work to help prevent the climate crisis through championing greater use of solar energy whilst avoiding the irreversible industrialisation of precious countryside.

Difficult choices need to be made to achieve Net Zero by 2050. Solar energy is one of the safest sources of renewable energy and can be part of the solution to meet this vital climate action pledge. Around 500 solar panel farms are in operation in the UK with the construction of the largest farms – known as arrays – coming under increasing local opposition. A proposal to build the UK's largest solar farm (around 2,800 acres in size) with the potential to power over 172,000 homes on the Cambridgeshire Suffolk border has faced strong criticism from Suffolk County Council, with Lucy Frazer MP and Matt Hancock MP publicly opposing the plans. The application is with the planning inspectorate for examination with the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy expected to make a decision in Spring 2023.

What about our rural landscapes?

Relinquishing thousands of acres of arable land used for food production and farming would change the character of our rural landscapes irreversibly. There are downsides to constructing more solar farms – particularly local habitat disruption that comes from reducing farmland.

Over the last decade, the price of solar electricity has fallen by 89% and with new innovations, energy output has increased by a third. Yet the government scheme to subsidise domestic solar panel installation has almost come to a halt, hence why it is more financially viable to build large scale solar farms. They're often developed by international companies, meaning local economies don't financially benefit with profits going overseas. Notably the Norwegian Government is backing Norwegian energy giant Statkraft's proposed development of two huge solar farms in Cornwall. CPRE Cornwall is campaigning against it, on a platform of Cornish farmland being kept for food and carbon capture not industrial-sized solar arrays blighting open countryside.

Unlike other renewable energy infrastructure, once the operational lifespan of a solar farms is up, they can be dismantled, and the land returned to its former use. However, a fear is the land, after 25 years of accommodating solar panels will be classified as brownfield and could be developed further. Recent guidance by the BRE National Solar Centre suggested that biodiversity gains from solar farms can be significant with only 25-40 percent of the surface covered by panels and over 95 percent of the site still accessible for plant growth and wildlife enhancements, such as the restoration of wildflower meadows, grasslands or hedgerows. Installing solar farms enables a break in the cycle of intensive farming that otherwise can result in the long-term degradation of soil and biodiversity.

Government policy clearly states, we should be turning to industrial and residential roofing; or condemned sites and contaminated land for solar power, not productive farmland.



According to the BRE National Solar Centre, if the 250,000 hectares of south facing commercial roof space in the UK was used for solar energy, approximately 50 percent of the UK's electricity demand could be met. Currently less than 6 percent of UK solar power comes from commercial roof units compared with over half in Germany. The UK's many hundreds of capped landfill sites are also ideal, especially those with a grid connection for electricity generation from landfill gas. These sites could produce electricity during the day and gas at night. Surrey County Council recently shared plans to build a solar array on a closed landfill site to offset its own energy consumption.

Site selection is a real cause for concern

Site selection remains a cause of real concern. The proposal for a solar farm at Gaywood in the Surrey Hills in an Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV) goes completely against government policy. Next to the beautiful Staffhurst bluebell wood, developers hope to build a massive facility with 48,000 large black solar panels up to 3m off the ground, surrounded by high security fences. This wood is much loved by the local community and is an extremely popular beauty spot that not only is a Site of Special Scientific Interest, but is being considered as part of the upcoming Surrey Hills AONB boundary review. Despite repeated attempts to protect the Gaywood site by planting more trees, its hillside location still puts it at risk. This development would also seriously harm the surrounding environment. Construction traffic would create busy polluted roads, and there could be an uptick in flooding in an already high-risk area. Very few local residents consulted about the plans.

Local resident Penny Gibson explains: "thousands of people come to walk around here and never more so than over the last 2 years with Covid, which I think clearly demonstrates the importance of natural beauty for the wellbeing of the community."

Residents also believe the developers to be ignorant of the fact that the area is classified as AGLV and lack understanding of the complexities of creating a meadow there. The local community, who are strongly pro-renewables, are worried that there is a greater interest in profit and convenience than care for the local environment and community in the choice of this site.

To summarise, investing in solar energy to tackle climate change is extremely important. So the government, planners, and developers must be careful to make sure it's done in the right way and in the right place to ensure they maintain public support for renewable energy. The Devon countryside serves as a painful reminder of where this can all go wrong; with many solar farms, some as big as 163 acres, destroying the rural landscape.

If you are interested in helping us protect and celebrate the Surrey Countryside, discover how you can get involved at www.cpresurrey.org.uk/get-involved/.

Oak Tree

Oh to be....

I would like to be..... a tree. An oak tree, big and strong. I would be the friend of the sun that gives me warmth, the rain that gives me precious water, the wind that gives me air to breathe, and the earth to give me life.

To be a tree is green and pleasant. In summer my leaves give shade to all living creatures underneath me, including people who find the sun too hot.

Beetles, squirrels, birds, snails and hundreds of other living things love me, because I love them by providing shelter and a place to live. I do not move but everybody and everything comes to me.

In winter I shed my leaves, but oak leaves make good leaf mould to help so many things to grow. My seeds, the acorns, provide food for pigs and other animals. My wood is very useful for making things.

I am a wonderful growing plant that man has not been able to make. I have my place in the world and form a useful part of it.

All this is why I would like to be a tree.
An oak tree, big and strong...

George (Shortfellow) Partridge (1924–2005)
Father of Phil Partridge, CPRE Surrey Administrator