

BEDFORDSHIRE MATTERS

Alarm at inflated housing figures for Bedford Borough

CPRE Bedfordshire has been alarmed at the hike in projected housing numbers that Bedford Borough Council (BBC) claims it needs between now and 2032. It has been consulting on its Local Plan 2032, which once adopted will inform the housing and development policy in the Borough - identifying the number of houses needed and where they go.

BBC claim that they need a massive 17,367 new homes to be built over this period – a figure we believe is greatly inflated and not reflective of local need. This includes 900 new homes in Clapham (doubling its size), 500 more in Bromham and 500 in Great Barford with hundreds more in other villages across North Bedfordshire.

The vast majority of the house building in the Council's Local Plan

2032 is planned to take place on open countryside. So if this plan goes ahead, we feel that the quality of life of present and future generations will be irreversibly damaged.

CPRE Bedfordshire recognises the need for new homes and we have been generally supportive of Bedford Borough Council's current Local Plan 2021, but there is no demonstrable local need for this scale of housing development. Around 40% of these new homes are being built for people moving into the area, rather than Bedford Borough residents, prompting fears that Bedford Borough is becoming a building site for London.

Continued on page 3



Green Belt around Harlington

North of Luton Green Belt Parishes Group

CPRE Bedfordshire is bringing together a partnership of parishes impacted by the now approved North of Luton Framework Plan. The Plan includes a new major road - A6 to M1 link - and a Rail Freight Interchange and warehousing site at Sundon Quarry (J11A), which threaten the AONB at Sundon, the SSSI at Sundon Quarry and the ancient woodland of George Wood.

CPRE Bedfordshire has brought local parishes together to form a Green Belt Parishes Group, to better co-ordinate our responses to these and other threats posed by the Plan. The parishes of Sundon, Harlington, Chalton, Chalgrave, Toddington and Streatley have had an initial meeting, and it is hoped that the residents of these villages will feel able to become more involved in actions to defend their communities and the broader countryside.

What now for Planning in Central Bedfordshire?

With the Development Strategy withdrawn and a crucial five-year housing land supply yet to be defended, Central Bedfordshire is in a weakened position to refuse hostile development. We have asked Jason Longhurst, Director of Business and Regeneration at Central Bedfordshire Council for his views on where we go from here. Go to page 6 to read more about CBC's planning issues and Jason Longhurst's responses to our questions.

Editorial

Nicola Scholfield



Welcome to the latest edition of CPRE Bedfordshire's magazine, which highlights the work of your local CPRE branch over the last six months.

Our committed team of volunteers continue to be very active in standing up for our beautiful countryside, in large part monitoring and responding to local planning issues.

In 2016 we'll be bringing back our ever popular Living Countryside Awards, which recognise the people and projects making a positive difference to Bedfordshire's countryside.

Most of this work is done by our friendly team of volunteers. If you've ever been interested in getting more involved in the branch, 2016 could be a great year to begin. On page 10 we have details of volunteer positions we need filling, plus details of our forthcoming events.

Wishing you a wonderful year ahead!

Nicola Scholfield

Do we have your email?

CPRE Bedfordshire sends out a monthly e-bulletin with news of our events and activities to our members and supporters in Bedfordshire. At the moment we only have email addresses for about half of our members. It's a great way of keeping in touch – to be added to our e-bulletin list please email us at

info@cprebeds.org.uk

Report from the Chair

Gerry Sansom



As we enter the New Year we are faced with the unusual situation that all three Local Authorities in Bedfordshire (Luton, Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough) are in the process of developing new Local Plans, as well as neighbouring Milton Keynes. These Local Plans are very important because they will set out, among other things, the number and locations of new homes Local Authorities would like to see built in their areas over a 20 year period.

The Local Plans are developed over a period of around two or three years.

At various times during the production process the Plans are presented for consultation with local residents, Parish and Town Councils and other interested parties such as ourselves. This eventually leads to a final Plan which is then submitted to an Independent Inspector for an Examination in Public. The Inspector will then either agree to the Plan or refuse to accept it.

CPRE Bedfordshire recognises the need for new homes and we will be commenting on all four Local Plans and where necessary campaigning to ensure that our precious countryside and green spaces in towns and rural areas will be protected for current and future generations. The comments we have made to Local Plans will be posted on our website.

There are huge pressures on Bedfordshire to build more new homes in order to cater for London overspill. We believe London should do more to house its own citizens before looking to build on our precious countryside.

But concern is growing among CPRE branches across England regarding the influence of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) on the planning process and in particular on new housing numbers and infrastructure projects.

Bedfordshire is in the South East Midlands LEP (SEMLEP). It is now in control of budgets worth £100s of millions from Transport to European Funding. LEPs are run by Boards chaired by and made up of private sector organisations together with the Mayors and Leaders of the Local Authorities in their areas. Their meetings are held in private and minutes, if issued at all, are scant in content. Recently SEMLEP decided to consider applying to government for Devolution (i.e. seek devolved powers and funds from Westminster to themselves). They felt that one of the key attractions they could offer government was "the potential to deliver significant numbers of new homes".

We wonder how many elected councillors or residents are aware of exactly what is happening at SEMLEP or of the decisions being taken. For example, are the residents of Bedfordshire being informed of the implications of Devolution and what it might mean to them? Have they been asked for their views?

CPRE say that LEPs should be publicly accountable, with LEP boards or committees considering planning issues consisting primarily of, and led by, elected councillors. They should meet regularly, formally and in public, have their full minutes made publicly available and they should be liable to Freedom of Information requests in the same way as any other public body.

In our view there is a growing democratic deficit in local government and it needs to be tackled urgently.

Gerry Sansom

Around the County

Bedford Borough

Bedford Borough Council Local Plan 2032

Cont from front page

CPRE Bedfordshire believes that the figure of 17,367 new homes proposed by BBC is completely unsustainable, and will have serious impacts on our already congested transport systems, schools and healthcare facilities, along with putting further strain on our pressured regional water supply.

According to its own figures, the Council has already allocated sufficient land (with outline or full planning permissions) to enable the building of around 13,000 new homes – more than sufficient for Local Need and that number would also cater for a very much more reasonable proportion of Inward Migration until 2032.

The Council's consultants who derived the 17,367 new homes figure provided two scenarios for the Council. The first is the Official Population Data scenario

– based on the Official Population Data from the Office of National Statistics and drawn from the latest 2011 UK census information. However, the Council had told its consultants that it was concerned these official population estimates were too low. As a result of a review, a second scenario was provided, which gave the higher number of new dwellings required – which has an average increase of +15% over the first Official Population Data scenario.

We have not been able to ascertain the reasons why this second, higher population scenario was chosen to provide the final forecast of housing need for Bedford Borough of 17,367. We would like Bedford Borough Council to explain why official population data from the Office of National Statistics have been overlooked and a higher “adjusted” population forecast has been used instead.

Harrold Solar Farm – CPRE wins planning battle

Last year, CPRE Bedfordshire joined together with a local campaign group to fight off a planning application for a solar farm in the parish of Harrold.

The proposed site was on elevated land that would have been almost impossible to screen in a very sensitive landscape close to Odell Great Wood, a SSSI of great importance. The site was also in an area with long uninterrupted views across a largely unsettled landscape.

The land chosen for the solar farm was classed as Grade 3a. This is “the best and most versatile agricultural land” and the Government has recently changed their advice on the siting of solar farms

requiring that this sort of land can only be used for solar farms if “justified by the most compelling evidence”. No compelling reason could be put forward by the developer and so it was largely for this reason that the application was refused.

This change of government policy has been the result of pressure by CPRE and others who have been very concerned by the loss of high grade agricultural land that should be used for food production and is absolutely essential to feed our country's growing population.

Interestingly, Harrold Parish Council held a referendum to determine the views of their residents. The result was that a small majority of residents were also against the construction of the solar farm. This is the first time that

New Homes Bonus

The New Homes Bonus is a grant paid to Local Authorities for every new home built.

Bedford Borough is one of the largest recipients in the country of New Homes Bonus despite being one of the smallest local authorities, indicating just how many new houses the Council has built so far.

Government figures recently released show that in the four year period to the end of 2014/15 Bedford Borough Council received £12.7m in New Homes Bonus. For the latest 2015/16 financial year alone a further £6.7m has been allocated to Bedford Borough Council bringing the total to around £20m.

We believe that this may be influencing the inflated housing numbers in the BBC Local Plan 2032.



Proposed site for solar farm in Harrold

such a referendum has been held in Bedford Borough that we're aware of. The referendum result also had an impact on the outcome of the planning application.

CPRE Bedfordshire recognises the need for renewable energy in the right places and has supported the development of solar farms on low grade agricultural land or on brownfield sites during the course of this year for example near Chelveston in the north of Bedford Borough.

Central Bedfordshire

Development Strategy withdrawn

CBC's Development Strategy was formally withdrawn in November, with the intent to begin immediately on developing a new Local Plan.

For the time being, therefore, CBC is 'Plan-less', the existing South Beds District Council and Mid-Beds District Council (MBDC) Plans being now well out-of-date. This means CBC's defences against opportunistic and unwelcome planning applications are currently very much weakened, particularly in the ex MBDC area where the countryside is almost entirely outside the special protection afforded to southern Bedfordshire by its Green Belt status.

Several such unwelcome applications within the ex-MBDC area, involving the pushing of development into open countryside outside existing settlement boundaries, have already been received. In the current 'planning vacuum', outcomes to date indicate that CBC is having to concede them almost without exception.

The Government has stated that local Councils must produce Local Plans by 2017, or they may have a Plan imposed upon them. CBC is going to have to work very hard and fast to bring its planning position back under proper control, and avoid that ultimate sanction.

As Central Bedfordshire resets its Local Plan process, we've asked Jason Longhurst, Director of Regeneration and Business at Central Bedfordshire Council, to provide some answers.

Why has the draft Development Strategy been withdrawn?

The Development Strategy was submitted to the Secretary of State for examination last October. Following initial examination hearing sessions, the Inspector concluded that the Council had not met the 'Duty to Cooperate'. Though the Council disagreed with this assessment and launched legal proceedings, the matter was overtaken by events as the Government went on to introduce both significant changes to national planning guidance and revised household projections. Faced with this change in circumstances the Council took a pragmatic decision to withdraw its legal action and the Development Strategy and embark on a new plan making process which could respond to these changes in circumstances.

Has CBC got a five year supply of housing land?

The Council has got a five year land supply and recently defended this position at a Public Enquiry on a site in Henlow. It is acknowledged and was not unexpected that this position



Jason Longhurst

was challenged by the Appellant and we will need to continue to reinforce our position to ensure that going forward we are able to present the most robust case we can. We will of course review this position in light of the decision that we receive from the Inspector on the Henlow Appeal.

What safeguards are in place to ensure development happens in a controlled way between now and the adoption of a new Local Plan/ having a defensible five-year housing land supply?

At present the Council will use the policies in the adopted development plans for the north and south of Central Bedfordshire alongside national planning policy to determine each application on its own merits. We are continuing to monitor the position with regards five year land supply and this will be an ongoing process.

Why having a five year supply of housing land is crucial

CBC is required to have a five year deliverable supply of land to meet the future housing needs of Central Bedfordshire. Without it, national policy states that sustainable developments should be approved. This means that developers can put plans in for large housing developments outside village

settlement boundaries and as long as they are deemed sustainable, CBC has little chance of defending a position to refuse it.

In the past six months, CBC has lost appeals to developers for developments in Langford and Shefford, after the Planning Inspectors ruled that CBC

did not have a five year housing land supply and that the developments were sustainable.

In October, the chair of CBC's Development Management Committee, which makes decisions about planning applications, reminded his committee that as the council has not got a five

year housing land supply, development would be granted permission unless deemed unsustainable:

“The Council is required to have a five year deliverable supply of land to meet the future housing needs of Central Bedfordshire.

If it does not, policies which are relevant to the supply of housing are considered out of date. In such cases the National Planning Policy presumption in favour of sustainable development is applied (para. 49 NPPF). We have recently lost two appeals where both Inspectors concluded that the Council did not have a five year supply of deliverable housing land. The appeals were allowed because the developments were shown to be sustainable with few adverse impacts.

The issue of 5 year housing land supply is a key material planning consideration based on fact and must be given significant weight in any Council decision.

For decision making this means that development shall be granted permission unless the adverse impact of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the scheme.”

We have seen this put in practise recently with development of houses being granted approval by CBC in Cranfield and Houghton Conquest, despite opposition from local communities. Plans for large housing developments have been received for greenfield sites in Sandy and Flitton &

Greenfield, plus there are pre-application consultations taking place for housing development on greenfield sites in Stotfold and Clophill.

CBC expects to hear whether it has successfully defended its five year housing land supply position at a Public Inquiry held in late 2015 relating to plans that CBC refused for 93 homes on a greenfield site in Henlow. CBC is expecting the decision in late February.

It is crucial that CBC are able to establish and defend its five year housing land supply as soon as possible. Without this, and without an up-to-date Local Plan, there would seem to be little that the Council can do to refuse plans from speculative developers, and the developers know it.

Green Belt Developments

It is a paradox within the present planning situation in Central Bedfordshire that not only were almost all the key development sites proposed under its Development Strategy located within the Green Belt – the area supposed to be under the greatest protection - most of them have already received planning approval anyway.

The DS case was based on the inevitability that, in the face of growing housing and employment need, some surrender of Green Belt territory around the urban edges of Leighton Buzzard, Houghton Regis and Luton was inevitable.

The current situation with each of the major Green Belt development sites in Central Bedfordshire can be summarised as follows:

Eastern Leighton Buzzard Urban Extension (2500 new homes & 16ha of Employment Land) – Following approval by the Secretary of State (S.o.S.) in Autumn 2014 and completion of the necessary S. 106 negotiations, consent for all four of the planning applications involved was finally issued in August 2015.

Houghton Regis North, Phase 1 (4700 new homes & 32ha of Employment Land) – Following approval by the S.o.S. in 2014, further progress was then held up by legal challenges from Luton Borough Council. These challenges were finally rejected in June 2015, and the Houghton Regis Development Consortium expects to commence on-site enabling works by the beginning of 2016.

Houghton Regis North, Phase 2 (1500 new homes & 8 ha of Employment Land) – consent was given by CBC this Autumn subject to the approval of the S.o.S. The latter has seen no reason to involve himself, and the consent will be issued once negotiations on the accompanying S.106 agreement have been concluded.

Luton North Urban Extension – the Framework Plan for Luton North, on which we commented extensively in last Winter's issue and which includes the proposed Sundon Rail Freight Interchange site and 4000 new homes, was formally adopted by CBC last Spring. This will form the basis on which Masterplans and Planning Applications for the area are expected to be drawn up.

It should be noted, however, that one Planning Application within the Framework Area – for warehousing development on land NW of the Vauxhall Motors site at Luton Road, Chalton - has already been submitted and approved by CBC, subject to the S.o.S.'s confirmation. It seems unlikely that his decision will be any different from any of the other recent cases on which his approval has been required

Land at Thorn Turn, Houghton Regis – three applications for development of this CBC - owned area of land adjoining the A5 at Thorn Turn have recently received planning consent, the Sec. of State offering no objection. The applications – by 'CBC Assets' - were for a Waste Transfer Station, a Highways Winter Maintenance Depot, and a Class B1/B2/B8 Light Industrial/ Warehousing development. CPRE objected to all three on the grounds of their impact on the setting of the Chalk Hill escarpment and the wider landscape, but these arguments did not prevail.

Gypsy & Traveller sites

Recent Government advice indicates that Plans for Gypsy & Traveller provision should no longer be worked up separately from the main Local Plan, but incorporated within it. We can expect, therefore, that in working up its new Local Plan CBC will take account of this advice.

The Draft Plan for Gypsies & Travellers which CBC had prepared for submission to the Planning Inspector in 2014 was withdrawn before any hearing took place; consequently, the current 'Plan-less' situation CBC is in extends to G & T provision as well. Meanwhile, of course, applications for new sites or additional pitches continue to come forward, but these for the most part involve locations in Southern Bedfordshire where national Green Belt policy requires a case of 'very special circumstances' to be made out for any development impacting on its openness.

Solar farms

In the last issue, we reported that further applications had been received for solar farm development in the Green Belt, one at Chiltern Green to the south of Luton and one in the same vicinity at Lawrence End on the Beds/Herts border.

CPRE Beds objected strongly to the Chiltern Green proposal, and it is gratifying to note that we received

excellent support from CBC's Landscape Officer, in the face of which the applicants withdrew their application.

The Lawrence End site lay primarily in Hertfordshire, and opposition to it was led by CPRE Herts. However, the adverse landscape impacts were not as great as those for the Chiltern Green site and North Herts District Council (supported by CBC) has granted the application.

With the ending by the Government of generous subsidies for Solar Farm development, the tidal flow of applications for them appears now to have significantly ebbed away.

Housing

Flitton & Greenfield

Flitton and Greenfield, two small villages near Flitwick with a large Conservation Area and abutting Flitwick Moor, are some of the most recent villages to have faced 'hostile' applications for development - a total of more than 40 houses. These houses are proposed in an area outside of the village envelope and in 'open countryside', and would result in an amalgamation of the two villages in a way that contradicted the intentions expressed in their emerging Neighbourhood Plan.

We have challenged the application on the basis that the sites did not constitute sustainable development within the terms of the NPPF for environmental, social and economic reasons.

We maintain that these sites would be damaging to the environment and the countryside - one of them falling within the protected site of Flitwick Moor and the other on the site of an ancient orchard and important habitats for wildlife. There is a lack of transport within the village and no suitable footpaths to the nearby town of Flitwick: this would lead to reliance on cars for all purposes, including commuting to and from work. There would also be no economic benefit to Flitton and Greenfield from such an expansion of housing, particularly as CBC has no Community Infrastructure Levy in place.

Maulden

In June, a planning application was submitted by a local architect for a large house of a striking and novel design just N of Maulden, on the top of the Greensand Ridge. At 60 ft, it was of a height and size comparable to the concrete "Pepper Pot" water towers so common in Bedfordshire. An exemption was claimed under paragraph 55 of the National Planning Policy Framework because of "the exceptional quality or innovative nature of the design of the dwelling". The application was strongly opposed by many local residents and CPRE on a number of grounds but mainly on being out of keeping with the surrounding area - CBC planners have rejected the application.

Luton Borough

Luton Borough Council's 'Pre-Submission' version of its Local Plan for the period 2011 – 2031 has been the subject of consultation this Autumn. The key concern for CPRE is the level of housing need which Luton claims it has to meet, but is unable to achieve within its own boundaries.

The Draft Plan indicated that Luton was looking to adjoining Authorities (primarily CBC) to provide around 6,700 homes to help it meet its needs. We challenged that figure, querying whether Luton had done enough to minimise the call it was making on other Authorities, and it is noteworthy that the Pre-Submission version of Luton's Plan reduces the 6,700 assessment to 5,700. But that is still a very large figure, and we are continuing to register our concerns in the responses made to the latest consultation.

Concerned about a planning proposal in your area?

Please let us know! We have a small team of planning volunteers and letting us know about an application of concern lets us consider and respond to the application in good time - and possibly support you and your community in responding too. Please send notification of any concerning planning applications to info@cprebeds.org.uk.

Milton Keynes

Early in 2016 Milton Keynes will be consulting on their Strategic Development Directions document as part of their new Local Plan process - Plan:MK – to inform future development of the Borough. The options for future development include the expansion

of the city east of the M1 into Central Bedfordshire. This has led to concern by parishes in Central Bedfordshire including Aspley Guise and Cranfield who could be impacted enormously by MK's expansion.

Do you live in a village close to MK and would like to be involved in protecting Bedfordshire's villages from MK expansion? We need a planning volunteer in this area – please contact Nicola on 01234 353331 or email Nicola.scholfield@cprebeds.org.uk

National Updates

CPRE launches its Green Belt campaign

To mark the 60th anniversary of Green Belt policy last August, CPRE launched a national campaign to call on government to strengthen Green Belt policy in the wake of unprecedented erosion of Green Belt across England.

To show our decision makers how much support the Green Belt has from the public, a website - **ourgreenbelt.cpre.org.uk** – was launched for people to share their images and stories of the Green Belt. It's simple to upload the images onto the site and we'd encourage you to do so!

To counter the increasing anti-Green Belt commentary in the press this year, CPRE have also put together an excellent myth-busting webpage and pdf to challenge the misguided idea that building on the Green Belt will solve the housing shortage and create economic growth. If you'd like a copy of this, please let us know at info@cprebeds.org.uk

Here are some top facts in challenging this argument.

- CPRE research shows there are enough derelict (brownfield) sites available and suitable for building 1,494,070 new homes - and the supply of these sites is steadily increasing.
- We have housing plots waiting to be built on. According to their own annual reviews, England's major house builders are sitting on huge areas of land with planning permission which could provide over 280,000 new homes.
- The Government has admitted that the number of long-term empty houses is a scandal which if addressed, could provide homes for over 300,000 families.
- Strong protection for Green Belts helps the economy by promoting urban regeneration and keeping housing and business close to services and transport links.



Image from Sundon Hills sent to ourgreenbelt.cpre.org.uk by Ann Collette-White

CPRE Report - Set up to fail

New research from CPRE has found that Strategic Housing Market Assessments (SHMAs) produced by local authorities are inaccurate, inflated and unreliable. The housing figures produced by SHMAs are not being balanced with sensible planning for infrastructure, consideration of environmental constraints, and realistic assessments of what housebuilders will be able to deliver.

The report identifies a vicious circle - unrealistic housing targets are set; councils are forced to allocate large amounts of land to meet the targets; developers cherry-pick the most profitable sites – usually greenfield, ignoring brownfield; building rates are kept slow by developers to keep prices high; so the housing targets are missed; councils are forced to allocate more land for building; developers again target the most profitable sites; ...and round we go again with building rates staying low and our countryside being needlessly lost.

CPRE Bedfordshire is sending all Parish and Town Councils that are members of CPRE a copy of this report – please contact us if you would like a copy. The report can also be found online at www.cpre.org.uk.



Neighbourhood Planning – What's the picture in Bedfordshire?

Community-led Neighbourhood Plans (NPs) have become an important part of the planning landscape since The Localism Act of 2011, enabling local people to influence how their neighbourhood is developed.

Over 1,650 communities in England and Wales have begun the journey to a NP, with just over 100 communities now having adopted NPs. As well as influencing the location and type of development, NPs can also have policies about woodland and designating local green space, new provision of recreation areas, affordable housing, design of development, pedestrian and cycle routes, parking standards and the promotion of local distinctiveness.

Although national policy and an area's Local Plan needs to be followed when developing a NP, there is also a deliberate lack of prescriptive guidelines that ensures that NPs can be locally distinctive, arising from the unique characteristics, aspirations and aims of each neighbourhood.

In Bedfordshire, 21 parishes (47%) in Bedford Borough Council (BBC) and 19 parishes (24%) in Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) have embarked on the first step of establishing a Neighbourhood Area - or are very close to doing so. We expect the first NPs to be adopted in Bedfordshire in 2016.

In November, CPRE Bedfordshire

spoke to a sample of Parish and Town Councils (PTCs) in Bedfordshire to better understand the experience and views of councils in deciding to proceed with the NP process.

Despite the support and involvement of BBC and CBC, undertaking the NP process can be costly in terms of time, volunteers' efforts and resources for a community – the process takes most PTCs at least two years to complete.

For this reason, deciding to undertake a NP is not taken lightly. Quite a number of communities simply feel they are too small to start the process - without the capacity to go ahead with NPs.

Others are unsure whether the effort in putting together a Neighbourhood Plan is worth it for their community. Harlington PC, for example, has decided not to go ahead with a NP since it is already constrained by Greenbelt and feels it has no room for development on any scale, focusing instead its efforts on CBC's Local Plan process.

A clear driver for many PTCs to begin a NP is the desire to influence development in their communities, often in the face of the threat of unwanted development. This is the case with Shefford Town Council who has been the focus of unwanted speculative developments in the last couple of years. It has begun the NP process to have a greater say in the development

of housing and infrastructure, and sees it as a continuation of its Town Plan process.

Others hope to influence the type of development, for example, Pavenham parish hopes to include more affordable housing in its NP than is specified in the Local Plan, to ensure young people are not forced to move away from the area.

The joint Neighbourhood Plan of Caddington and Slip End was established initially in response to the threat of proposed housing expansion on to land west of Luton. Ward Councillor and NP supporter Richard Stay says that what started out as a legitimate defensive measure is now seen as a proactive opportunity for the community to have a say in shaping the development of their environment – such as the location of new development and the proportion of new housing made available to younger and older residents.

Encouraging local people in the process is absolutely key to beginning a NP, as is a committed and pro-active leadership to bring people on board and to ensure the process doesn't stall.

Oakley PC has been pleased with the level of community involvement and participation from villagers experienced in the process so far, with over two thirds of the NP working group being residents not on the parish council. It has also been pleasantly surprised how keen the villagers have been to fill in the lengthy consultation questionnaire and it has been able to use the data to provide useful statistics to help justify the proposals made in the NP.

However, other communities have been unsure about whether to embark on a NP given that the local authorities – both CBC and BBC – are in the process of updating their Local Plans.

Louise Ashmore from the Bedfordshire Association of Town and Parish Councils

PTCs with designated Neighbourhood Areas in Bedford Borough

Bletsoe, Bromham, Clapham, Colmworth, Cople, Dean & Shelton, Felmersham, Great Barford, Great Denham, Milton Ernest, Oakley, Pavenham, Roxton, Stagsden, Stevington, Stewartby, Thurleigh, Wilden, Willington, Wootton, Wyboston Chawston & Colesden (all one parish). (Total = 21)

PTCs with designated Neighbourhood Areas in Central Bedfordshire

Arlesey, Barton-le-Clay, Caddington, Clophill, Eaton Bray, Fairfield, Flitton & Greenfield, Henlow, Hockliffe, Kensworth, Marston Moretaine, Northill, Pulloxhill, Slip End, Stondon, Studham, Toddington, Totternhoe, Wrestlingworth & Cockayne Hatley (all one parish). (Total = 19)

supports the view that now is a good time for town and parish councils to establish plans.

Although councils are experiencing some delays because both CBC and BBC have no adopted Local Plans, she feels it is an ideal time to produce a NP as it could be used as evidence which could actually inform the Plan itself, as well as becoming statutory guidance alongside the Plan once adopted.

She says funding is currently available which may not be there in the future and that the community participation involved is a great way for PTCs to enhance their community engagement.

So does a Neighbourhood Plan make a difference?

As the threat of unwanted speculative development looms large, there is some evidence that adopted NPs can be a powerful tool against this.

Over the last two years, the Buckinghamshire town of Winslow has seen one national developer put in three speculative development planning applications in conflict with the town's NP. One of the key reasons

the Planning Inspector refused it's most recent appeal was that the proposal went against Winslow's Neighbourhood Plan – by being in an area not allocated for housing development and that it failed to meet the 35% provision of affordable dwellings set out in the NP.

It is too early to say whether NPs are the powerful community tools we hope they will be. However, early indications are very encouraging and they are seen not only as a tool to influence local planning decisions but also as an extremely positive way of encouraging people's participation in their local community and giving them a voice in decision making.

2016 should see the adoption of the first NPs in our county and it will be interesting to gauge their effectiveness as time progresses.

Thanks are due to our volunteer Helen Greer for her research on NPs in Bedfordshire and to everyone who contributed their thoughts to this research. Her full report on Neighbourhood Planning in Bedfordshire will be made available to CPRE local PTC members early in 2016.

The 8 Stages of Neighbourhood Plan Formation

Stage 1: Define the area for your plan and involve the wider community – some PC have joined together eg Slip End & Caddington

Step 2: Identify the important issues eg local transport links, affordable housing, green spaces

Step 3: Generate a vision and objectives for the next 15-20 years.

Step 4: Suggest options for achieving objectives set in Stage 3.

Step 5: Draft detailed policies.

Step 6: Consult the public and respond appropriately.

Step 7: Draft Plan is evaluated by an independent examiner.

Step 8: Local referendum held - over 50% in favour enables adoption of the Plan.

Book Review

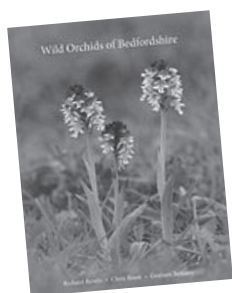
Wild Orchids of Bedfordshire by: Richard Revels, Chris Boon and Graham Bellamy.

Available from: www.bnhs.co.uk

Price £20 + £3.75 p&p

It is very rare to come across a locally produced book that is of such beautiful quality. It is clear from the outset that this book has been a "labour of love" from the writing to the production. If you'd like to know all there is about wild orchids and in particular those to be found in Bedfordshire then you need search no further. This is a very readable book produced by experts in their field. You can learn more about the fascinating way in which wild orchids germinate and develop, the areas of Bedfordshire in which they may be found and all this is supported by the most superb photography of every variety of orchid, insect pollinators and young plants.

This is a book to read now that the winter is with us in readiness for a new season in search of the wild orchids of our county – you'll be truly surprised by what can be found in Bedfordshire.



Easyfundraising.org.uk

Are you using easyfundraising.org.uk for your online shopping yet? If not, please do!

There are nearly 3,000 retailers including Amazon, John Lewis, Aviva, thetrainline and Sainsbury's, who will donate a percentage of the amount you spend to CPRE Bedfordshire to say thank you for shopping with them. It's really simple, and doesn't cost you anything.

All you need to do is go to www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/cprebeds and sign up for free, get shopping and your donation will be collected by easyfundraising and sent to CPRE Bedfordshire. It couldn't be easier. There are no catches or hidden charges and CPRE Bedfordshire will be really grateful for your donations.

Thank you to those of you who have started to use the site - you have helped us raise almost £100!

easyfundraising
.org.uk

CPRE Bedfordshire People

We're delighted to introduce our newest volunteers:



Chris Fone

Chris lives in Biddenham and has been helping us to archive the many photos that the branch has collected over the years. He saw our Photo Archivist volunteer position in the Volunteer Centre in Bedford and

thought it looked interesting in broadening his skills and it appealed to his interest in the countryside.



Chris Hall

Chris is our newest trustee and joins our board as our Honorary Treasurer. He is a recently-retired Chartered Accountant who has worked in industry, Central Government, and more recently not-for-

profit organisations. He is also Treasurer of the charity 'National Energy Foundation', based in Milton Keynes, and Churchwarden and Treasurer of Northill Parish Church. Married with four grown-up children, he has lived in the village of Northill for 25 years and has grown to cherish our beautiful countryside.



Larry Stoter

Larry lives in the south-east corner of Bedfordshire, in Stotfold, and has had a lifelong interest in and love of the British countryside. Following recent retirement from selling scientific instruments, he has

become a key member of the branch's planning team in Central Bedfordshire, working actively to protect the Bedfordshire countryside.



Mary Walsh

Mary is one of our newest trustees and has become a key member of our planning team in Central Bedfordshire. She has been a CPRE members and a parish councillor in Harlington for a number of years and has been heavily involved in opposing CBC's

intentions to develop the Green Belt. She became involved with the branch because she wanted to make a contribution to its aims and was keen to develop skills, though she's enjoying working with the team and sharing her own enthusiasm to preserve the countryside that we all benefit from.

Volunteer opportunities

CPRE Bedfordshire relies on its team of volunteers to do much of its work. We currently have vacancies for the following volunteer positions, and can provide full role descriptions for each position.

Branch Secretary – Can you help to organise us? We are looking for someone to join our Executive Committee this year as our Branch Secretary as Suzanne Yates steps down from the role. This would include organising and attending evening meetings every couple of months, plus arranging our AGM.

Press & Communications Volunteer – Can you help us raise our profile in Bedfordshire? We're looking for someone with some experience of working in marketing or similar who can improve the way we get our messages across.

Planning Volunteers – Want to influence how our countryside develops? We're looking for people to get involved with our planning work across the county and especially in the areas bordering Milton Keynes and in Bedford Borough. No experience is necessary but an enthusiasm for making a difference and willingness to learn something new would be helpful.

Living Countryside Awards Volunteer – Want to help run Bedfordshire's most prestigious awards scheme? We're looking for someone to help us to run our Living Countryside Awards in 2016. The scheme recognises the people and projects making a positive difference to our countryside and we need a good organiser to help make this scheme happen.

If you'd be interested in getting involved with the work of the branch in these positions, or if you can offer us other skills, we'd love to hear from you. Please contact Nicola on Nicola.scholfield@cprebeds.org.uk or call 01234 353331.

We bid goodbye to Joyness Hazal

Best wishes to Joyness Hazal who bid us goodbye in October. Joyness has volunteered her time as our assistant Treasurer for over a year and made a very positive contribution to the branch. This included sorting out all the direct contacts with HMRC to enable us to register and claim for gift aid, and liaising with the Pensions Regulator on compliance with the automatic enrolment process, plus investigating ideas to bring more income into the branch – notably setting up our easyfundraising.org.uk page.

To recognise her work with us, she has been presented with a CPRE Making a Difference award signed by CPRE Chair Su Sayer.



Joyness being presented with the Making a Difference Awards by Gerry Sansom and Alan Apling

Branch news & events

Tower Tour, Clophill

A big thank you to the wonderful folk at Clophill Heritage Trust who have hosted two recent events for us.

Members met on July 3rd for a Tower Tour, where Ali Bradbury and Richard Hudson of Clophill Heritage Trust gave us the history of the site before those with a head for heights ascended the ancient staircase to the new steel platforms above. These allow unspoilt panoramic views of countryside from the centre of Bedfordshire. Clophill Heritage Trust offers members of the public the chance to go up onto this Observation Tower from £3pp donation.



Congratulations to the Trust for opening their Eco-Lodges this September. They were built as a relaxing retreat for those visiting the Greensands Ridge. CPRE Bedfordshire's Executive Committee made use of the main room in November for a strategy review. The venue worked beautifully, and floor to ceiling windows giving wonderful views of the surrounding countryside certainly helped the inspiration to flow!

You can find out more about arranging a tower tour or hiring the Eco-Lodges at www.clophillecolodges.org.uk



Dates for your diary

CPRE Bedfordshire AGM –

April 23rd, 2pm, Parkside Hall, Ampthill

Please join us at our AGM this April, which will be followed by a talk on the future of Bedfordshire's countryside.

The event will conclude with a walk in neighbouring Ampthill Park, where we will take in the stunning views it offers of Bedfordshire from the Greensands Ridge.

Please note: the CPRE Beds Workshop – Getting Involved advertised in our December e-bulletin has been postponed until further notice.

CPRE Beds Quiz Night

Wednesday 27th April, 7.30pm for 8pm

Join us for our annual evening of fun and fundraising at The White Horse, Newnham Avenue, Bedford, MK41 9PX.

Teams of up to 6 people, £7.50 per person, which includes a ploughman's supper. Please book your team by contacting us on 01234 353331 or info@cprebeds.org.uk

Last year the quiz night raised £460 for our charity. We hope to see you there – especially some new faces – so please come along, and bring your friends!

CPRE Bedfordshire's Fighting Fund

Thank you so much to everyone who has contributed to our Fighting Fund Appeal, which we launched a year ago. This was to provide CPRE Bedfordshire with the long term financial security to continue the fight for the protection of our countryside – essential during these very difficult times when the pressures for development in the countryside right across our county are immense.

We're really pleased to be able to tell you that due to the amazing generosity of our members and supporters across Bedfordshire we have raised the tremendous sum of £7,336.

Many, many thanks to those of you that supported our campaign.

If you haven't done so yet but would still like to contribute, please send your donations by cheque payable to "CPRE Bedfordshire" to: The Treasurer at CPRE Bedfordshire, 5 Grove Place, Bedford MK40 3JJ or call 01234 353 331 for a bankers order form.

Living Countryside Awards

2016 sees the return of our popular Living Countryside Awards, which recognise the people and projects making a positive difference to Bedfordshire's environment. We are currently looking for a volunteer to help us run these awards – please do let us know if you'd be interested.

New website

We're looking forward to launching our new-look website in 2016, which will reflect a similar look and feel to the national CPRE website. Please bear with us while these changes are happening, since it means that our current website is not being updated as frequently. Once we have our new website up and running, we'll be giving more focus to this and our use of social media – we are looking for a volunteer who can help us with this so please do let us know if you'd be interested.

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What I love about Bedfordshire...

I moved to Bedfordshire for its location not its countryside. Fantastic transport links (M1, close to M25; 3 railway lines west coast, east coast and Midlands; and an Airport) meant I could undertake several jobs over the years and be back home almost every night. My colleagues who tended to live around London never seemed to enjoy the ease of getting home that I enjoyed.

It was only when I arrived that I started to realise how this small county packed a real punch when it came to countryside. We have real variety, the 'Cotswolds' villages in the north; the ridges across the centre with their longish walks; the Chiltern Hills in the south and the river valleys around Bedford, Leighton and Biggleswade. There's such huge variety in a small county.

I think I have walked all the registered county walks, some more than once, but it's the variety and proximity to

my town home, mixed with the ability to travel across the country and overseas, that adds the real value. Now retired I spend weeks abroad, and am currently attempting to walk all the canals in England, a challenge made easier by living in Luton. Walking Leeds to Liverpool, Wolverhampton to Nottingham and Bristol to London has all been achieved on day trips because of the fantastic connectivity of Bedfordshire.

I walked over Warden Hill today with the dog, just 90minutes but it's only five minutes from my front door. All possible because we have Green Belt, designated footpaths and people with a passion for the countryside and willingness to maintain them. Let's hope we don't lose it to the crazy plans from Central Bedfordshire Council to turn five square miles of Green Belt into unwanted housing.

Geoff Lambert

Campaign to Protect Rural England is a national charity that exists to promote the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of rural England by encouraging the sustainable use of land and other natural resources in town and country.

We have 60,000 supporters, a branch in every county, eight regional groups, over 200 local groups and a national office in London. CPRE is a powerful combination of effective local action and strong national campaigning.

Our Patron is Her Majesty the Queen. Our President is Sir Andrew Motion.

Bedfordshire Matters is the biannual magazine of Bedfordshire's CPRE branch. CPRE Bedfordshire is a local independent charity who works to protect and promote the countryside and green spaces of Bedfordshire.

MEMBERSHIP

To join CPRE, from £3 per month and help increase its power to protect our precious countryside, contact the County Office OR go to 'How to Join' at: www.cprebeds.org.uk



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CPRE Bedfordshire



BRANCH DETAILS

CPRE Bedfordshire

5 Grove Place

Bedford MK40 3JJ

Registered Charity No: 1023435

Tel: 01234 353331

Email: info@cprebeds.org.uk

Website: www.cprebeds.org.uk

