

Beeston Station

Achieving the re-opening of Beeston Station was a particular passion of the late, much-missed George Bramall.

Although 'Beeston Castle and Tarporley Station' was closed in 1966, a keen band of local people have been pressing for the reinstatement of a stop on the Chester-Crewe line and were successful in persuading the County Council to finance a Consultants' report into the proposal.



The Consultants considered a passenger catchment area comprising just 9 parishes and undertook a weighted community consultation exercise in the area. This study found that the

community survey indicated a much greater number of potential journeys than the number estimated by the consultants' normal modelling, but the consultants still based most of their analysis on their standard model. However, they also calculated that the community survey did not prove a solid case to justify the capital and running costs for a rebuilt station.

In short the Consultants concluded that a station was not viable in terms of the requirements of both Network Rail and the DfT and that unless there is a significant increase in residential development within the catchment area there is little need for a further appraisal in the future.

CPRE feels that insufficient weight was given to the community survey and to the tourist potential when combined with integrated feeder transport options and we are very disappointed that the conclusions were not more positive.

The full report will shortly be available on the County Council website:
www.cheshire.gov.uk/transport

With thanks to Councillor Doug Haynes



Campaign to Protect
Rural England

CHESHIRE

CHESTER DISTRICT

Autumn/Winter 2006



From your committee

In the past I have used the Newsletter to make a plea for help and involvement from our District members. I make no apology for doing so again.

You should have had a letter from CPRE Cheshire Branch which sets out the very serious problem arising from the resignation for personal reasons of our recently appointed Chairman.

The Branch urgently needs someone to come forward who has enough time to provide management and leadership so that volunteers working at District, Branch and Regional levels are able to fulfil the aims and objectives of CPRE.

I am only being realistic when I say that without the appointment of a Chairman of the Branch before the end of the year, its future existence and therefore that of Chester District is in real jeopardy.

If you feel that you may have the necessary skills, experience and above all time to take on this important role, please get in touch as soon as possible.

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Regional Spatial Strategy

The RSS may sound very remote, but it will shape the development of our area for decades to come – and it contains some proposals which CPRE is deeply concerned about.

As always, Chester is a very attractive location for developers and is therefore under significant pressure. The main threats come from two proposals:

1. The vastly increased housing figures for Chester district (7,500 over the plan period). Although we welcome the 80% target for brownfield land, sheer scale means that Green Belt and the city's historic character are threatened.
2. The proposed new business park "in the Chester area", which may well be located on Green Belt land.

Chester is targeted for growth "as a sub-regional centre for shopping, leisure, culture and tourism" (policy LCR4), and while this policy also refers to the need to "ensure that any development is compatible with the conservation and enhancement of the historic city and its setting", we believe that the proposals noted above are not consistent with this.

This is one of the main problems throughout RSS: there are admirable general statements about sustainability and environmental protection & enhancement, but the detailed policies often undermine them.

The West Cheshire/North East Wales sub-regional spatial strategy, to which the overall RSS is closely linked, places a particularly strong focus on Chester for economic and housing growth - indeed this is where the proposed business park comes from - even though the Liverpool City Region Development Plan notes that Chester is pretty much at full capacity already.

Green Belt across the North West in general is under threat from a weakened Green Belt policy, and may be further threatened by the proposed giant City Regions that cover half the North West. These 'City Regions' tend to be referred to as if they were fairly homogenous urban areas that should be the drivers for growth, and insufficient attention is paid to the varied patchwork of urban/rural areas and different types of settlement that make them up. CPRE's fear is that their overwhelming emphasis on economic growth above all else will damage efforts at greenfield, Green Belt and countryside protection - as well as undermining efforts to regenerate deprived urban areas.

The next stage of the process is that the RSS is subject to an Examination in Public (EiP), which runs from the end of October until early 2007. CPRE is one of the leading organizations presenting the environmental case, contributing on nearly all the subjects covered in the EiP.

This is a major commitment, but the RSS is a key to the future of our area.

With thanks to Andy Yuille (Regional Policy Officer)

Green Belt campaign

Over 13,000 residents in and around Chester have been finding a message from CPRE on their doormats through our National Lottery-funded campaign to save the Chester Green Belt.

The campaign generated much awareness of the importance of Chester's Green Belt and of the threats it faces. At the end of the campaign we met with two of the local MPs to highlight the importance of the Green Belt to Chester's character.

We received many comments showing strong support for preserving our precious Green Belt for future generations.

Some examples are:

"I want my children to grow up seeing wildlife in its natural surroundings, not only from books."

"Living in a city, the surrounding countryside is important for residents and their families to appreciate the peacefulness and freedom of open space.... Please do not take that away from future generations. Let our children play!"

"I have seen many areas built on. Some areas could be redeveloped instead of cutting into valuable green belt – once it's gone, it's gone!"

"It is a beautiful area of countryside. I enjoy walking and cycling through with my children. If we build on it, where will our children spend time with their parents? Presumably, they can look it up on the Internet & see how it used to be!"

"Coming from Holland, I don't want England to become like my country – 16.5 million people all living on top of each other!"

"The narrow green belt on the northern side of the city is critically important in preventing any merger of Chester with the built-up part of Ellesmere Port and Merseyside."

"It provides an opportunity to escape the noise and pollution of the city and to experience the true beauty of nature. It's absolutely brilliant. Please help to preserve it."



The Cheshire Branch website, www.cprecheshire.org.uk, is a great source of information on what's happening in the Branch and in our District, including the latest news and information on our campaigns. It also contains brief summaries of our policies, all our press releases, copies of our newsletters and other publications, handy links to other sites which may be of interest, details of how to get in touch with us, and lots more besides.

So, if you haven't looked at it recently, don't miss out.

Planning Update

Ince Marshes Resource Recovery Park

The title sounds rather grand and "green", but this would be a massive built development covering over 200 acres of the Ince Marshes, a greenfield site containing exceptional landscape and important wildlife habitats.

The development would include storing waste, recycling and incineration. The capacity of the site is so vast that the majority of material would be imported from outside Cheshire, and even from abroad, with potentially immense implications for our transport system and environment.

Chester City Council and Ellesmere Port and Neston Council have submitted similar objections to ours.

At the time of writing Cheshire County Council has refused the application, describing it as premature pending finalisation of the Waste Management Plan and contrary to the Regional Spatial Strategy. It appears that the first round may have been won, but it is far too early to declare the battle over.

West Cheshire College / Handbridge Campus

CPRE objected to an application to build a large housing development on the 11-acre site in the Green Belt at Handbridge. The proposal is contrary to National and Local Plan Green Belt policy, and would also result in over-intensive development of the proposed new site at Northgate.

The Planning Board unanimously rejected the plans and the full Council confirmed the refusal by an overwhelming majority.

The Countess of Chester Health Park

So far no planning application has been submitted since the Council approved a Development Brief which would open up the Northern part of the Green Belt Countess land for houses and a business park.

CPRE has been pressing Councillors and Officers to prepare a tree and landscape survey which would identify the many significant healthy and mature trees which are well worth retaining on the whole Health Park.

Chester Railway Station

CPRE was invited to comment on proposals for changes to the forecourt at Chester Railway Station.

We supported proposals for an increased pedestrian area in front of the station and the re-location of the mini-roundabout to the end of Brook Street, but we regretted that there is still no overall plan for the station as a whole. The changes do not recognise that that space must be provided for car parking, buses, cycles, taxis etc. if the station is to achieve the goal of becoming a Regional transport interchange.



CPRE supports the Government policy that promotes improved and increased car parking at railway stations to encourage more travel by rail for the major part of the journey as a more sustainable alternative to the car. It is therefore particularly disappointing that the City Council has published a prospectus offering the two existing car parks for commercial or retail development.

North of Chester: "COSTCO" and Deeside Park Junctions Road Scheme

The Secretary of State made the final decision to allow the giant COSTCO wholesale and retail warehouse to be built on land at Chester Gates (Dunkirk). CPRE opposed this development on Green Belt grounds and because the change of use to retail could lead to the whole 34-acre Chester Gates site becoming an out-of-town shopping centre. Building has already started.

Work is also starting on the Deeside Park junctions road scheme. This involves the widening of the A5117 between the roundabout at the end of the M56 at Chester Gates/Dunkirk and where it meets the new road widening already completed in Wales. The scheme involves 3 new separated junctions.

CPRE took part in the early decision-making of this Government scheme and helped influence the choice of the least environmentally damaging and least land-hungry option.

Ann Jones

If you would like more information on any of these items, or would be able to help with our campaigning on Planning matters, please get in touch using any of the contacts listed on the front page. We'd be delighted to hear from you.