



The countryside charity
Cheshire

Cheshire Viewpoint

Newsletter | Autumn/Winter 2020



The planning system under review again

The price and availability of housing for young people is clearly far too high so it is not surprising to see the government again looking at ways to provide more homes. However the recent proposal for the planning system raises concerns about both the quality of development and the involvement of local people and local knowledge. The current system of planning has become excessively complicated and it is good to see an attempt to simplify and speed up the process.

I would argue that the system can be significantly speeded up by returning power to the Elected Local Authority and residents rather than removing it. Local plans are often delayed by very high imposed housing targets which makes it impossible for the Authority to find politically acceptable sites, and which are not required as seen by the failure to build the houses. Local Authorities have to complete very complex plans running to thousands of pages, all under the attack of vested interests and their planning lawyers.

Rules such as the so called “5 year housing land supply” have resulted in land speculators being able to overrule the plan and result in high future costs to local taxpayers in providing the services and schools for unplanned housing remote from the agreed housing areas. Removing these ill-conceived ideas would simplify the planning system and make it more efficient.

There are already over 1 million planning permissions for homes in England that have not been built, the number

is constantly increasing so any initiative that relies only on making it easier to get planning permission will fail. If only one or two companies control the building of houses around a town the houses will be built out at a pace to ensure prices remain high with the understandable aim of maximising the profit for the organisations.

This is accepted by Government as can be seen by other initiatives to increase social housing construction through Housing Associations and encouraging smaller builders to re-enter the market.

The objective on reducing house prices is even more difficult. Houses need to be built because there is a clear need, but house prices are unlikely to come down simply by building houses. The market is overwhelmingly existing housing stock and prices therefore are more influenced by mortgage rates and availability of loans than whether newly built houses increase the supply by a fraction of a percent a year.

What is also worrying is the idea of reducing or removing the need for planning permissions in development zones. It is only by examining the details of what is to be built that we can ensure good design, infrastructure, and other local requirements are achieved. Buildings can last centuries and poorly planned and designed buildings are a high economic burden.

To end I would make the observation that we build now for the next generation; roads, houses, and schools can last a century or more. What is the higher priority: to build as fast as possible to solve today's economic problems or plan a low carbon sustainable future?

Peter Raynes, Chair

Local news

CPRE response to Wirral Local Plan

CPRE joined with the Wirral Green Space Alliance to respond to the Wirral Local Plan consultation.

We highlighted the importance of the Best and Most Versatile (BMV) farm land, which is vital for the rural economy and food security, as well as playing a key role in job creation and retention. CPRE is pleased that the Government has now recognised the importance of soil health in its new Agriculture Bill.

Our response to the Landscape Sensitivity Assessment highlighted the fact that the landscape is much more than just 'the view' - it reflects the ever-changing relationship between people, place and nature. We also highlighted the importance of site selection for local plan development being based on sound sustainable development criteria, whilst protecting intrinsic landscape qualities.

Piers Elias, an independent demographer, was employed to give his opinion on the assessed housing need for the period running up to 2035; his evidence justifies a reduction in housing need, which we hope the council will take into account, amending Council policies, which would in turn reduce the pressure on land supply on the Peninsula.

The full response including the demographic report can be found on our website.

Rail investment priorities consultation

CPRE Cheshire responded to the National Infrastructure Commission's call for evidence on rail investment priorities

in the North and Midlands, jointly with CPRE Lancashire and NWRG.

HS2 poses substantial and significant harms to the environment, to the extent that CPRE Cheshire cannot support it, despite longstanding campaigning for greater investment in rail and modal shift to rail. We would like to see the budget for HS2 spent instead on local rail projects, such as further electrification of the region's rail network, and routes such as the Middleswich line being brought back into use. We also called for a serious review of transport policy to respond to the Climate Emergency, with new road building to be a last resort. Download the full response from our website.

Our Journey to Sustainability

We were looking forward to the planned week-long exhibition at Chester Cathedral, 'Our Journey to Sustainability', which was to feature a range of environmental and religious bodies highlighting practical steps towards a more sustainable life. Unfortunately this event was cancelled owing to the Coronavirus lockdown, and is now on hold until things improve.

We hope that the event will take place in 2021, and would welcome members who are interested in the environment and climate issues to join us at the stall, either as visitors or as volunteers to speak with members of the public.

If you would like to get involved with our climate change committee, please phone or email our secretary Debbie Janney in the first instance (contact details on back page).

Colin, pictured here with Amanda Martin and Andrew Needham, volunteering with CPRE Cheshire at the Royal Cheshire Show, June 2019,

Colin Watson: an inspiration to us all

We are very sad to report the death at the age of 63 of our member Colin Watson. Colin was a keen walker, cyclist and yachtsman and a committed and effective environmental campaigner. He was involved in work to highlight the climate emergency with the Branch, representing CPRE Cheshire at the Cheshire Show and attending our national CPRE conference.

A great organiser, communicator and leader

Colin's involvement with CPRE began with input into our response on fracking, following his involvement with the Frack Free Upton and Dee groups. He campaigned

tirelessly with a range of environmental organisations in the Chester area and was the driving force behind the planned week-long sustainability event to have taken place at Chester Cathedral in May 2020.

Colin's work on improving life in Cheshire and the world is an inspiration to others and his untimely death is a great blow to all who knew him.

It will take many of us to replace him and all of us to achieve his ambitions.

James Cameron



A threat to farm viability

From Direct Farm Payments to the Environmental Land Management Scheme

Brexit will bring to an end the Direct Farm Payment (DFPs – an EU scheme under the Common Agricultural Policy). The Government are going to replace this with the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) which offers some advantages in that payments will be made for works for the ‘public good’: those that protect or improve soil, water and air quality, provide carbon savings, benefit wildlife and/or improve access. On the face of it, there is the potential for this scheme to deliver clear benefits.

The scheme can include aspects such as improved management of nutrients, livestock, pests and soil; efficient water use, and improved management of field margins and use of cover crops. Additionally, farmers could be rewarded for tree, shrub and/or hedge planting, habitat creation, restoration and management, river and on-land interventions to mitigate flooding, species management; improved access, navigation and recreation infrastructure and education infrastructure, events and services.

CPRE has a particular interest in aspects such as peatland restoration and forest and woodland creation, restoration and improvement, with the caveat that outcomes must be clearly defined in the latter situation.

4-year delay before scheme introduced

However, it will be another four years before the ELMS scheme is up and running. A major concern is that of farm viability: DFPS have been vital for the survival of many farms, and there is concern in the sector that the payments will be phased out well before the ELMS payments will be available, leaving some farmers at risk of bankruptcy because of the sudden, sharp drop in income, even if their business would qualify for ELMS payments.

Only 25% of farms are viable without their budget being subsidised by DFPS, and for many types of farm, around 70% of income is made up of the payment.

Now farmers are concerned that the long lead-in time for the ELMS scheme to come into force could lead to the loss of many farms in different sectors, from small tenant farmers to larger operations which have invested heavily in machinery to improve their efficiency.

The long planning time in farming also needs to be considered, as grain crops, for example, need about 9 months or more before being ready for harvest, and livestock much longer to be bred and prepared for market – at present, it seems that farmers will have less than six months’ notice of any cut in DFPS with the ELMS not likely to be in place for four years.

CPRE has responded to the National consultation on the ELM scheme.

Andrew Needham

Local Food update

CPRE has long championed local food for its many benefits to communities. There is a clear gain in eating locally and seasonally in terms of transport costs and related emissions, and money spent on locally-produced food tends to have a direct benefit on the local economy.

We’ve also heard stories at the Branch about local suppliers and producers who rose to the challenge of Lockdown, when the national ‘just-in-time’ supply chain used by supermarkets could not keep up with the increased demand from customers, and companies who would usually supply the hospitality industry began delivering veg boxes, or local grocers started up delivery rounds to vulnerable customers who were shielding.

We would like to highlight those local businesses who provided a vital service during Lockdown, so that those who wish to support local producers and suppliers can continue to do so now that things are returning to normal.

If you would like to recommend a local supplier for inclusion on our map, we would love to hear from you. Please contact the Branch Office (details overleaf) to propose a local business to include on the map. We look forward to hearing from you!



Events in Covid times

We were reluctant to cancel our planned AGM at Willington Hall Hotel, as it's a great opportunity to catch up with our members and hear your views. However, it soon became clear that it would not be possible for the AGM to take place in person, so we began to investigate virtual options.

Meeting via Zoom

We expect that many of you are now familiar with Zoom and Skype, and have chosen the former platform for our AGM. If you would like to take part and are not familiar with Zoom, but have a computer and internet access, we will be offering support to members to help them to take part where necessary. If you would prefer to vote by proxy, the form has been enclosed. We would be very grateful if you could exercise your proxy vote if unable to attend, to ensure we reach a quorum to enable us to carry on with our charitable work. Full details are enclosed but please contact the Branch Office with any queries.

Meeting with the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government

Our Chairman Peter Raynes took part in a national CPRE meeting with the Secretary of State, Robert Jenrick, to raise concerns about proposed changes to planning law. The meeting was held over Zoom, and there were a number of positive outcomes, including the continuation of brownfield land being prioritised, and a proposed 75% reduction in carbon emissions from new housing. We will continue to engage with the proposals.

Star Count results

The nights are drawing in again, and the winter

constellations starting to fill the skies. Many thanks to all the members who took part in our Star Count in February. The results showed that a shockingly high 70% of respondents in Cheshire were in an area of severe light pollution, counting ten or fewer stars in the constellation Orion. A truly dark, starry sky is a spectacular sight, and by adopting measures to reduce light pollution, local councils could also save energy and money.

Planned events

We are working on a virtual talks programme to enable us to connect with Members online when it is not possible for us to meet in person. If you would like to be kept up to date with plans for virtual sessions, talks and/or workshops, please email the Branch Office with the subject 'talks email list', and please send your name and contact details in the body of the email.

We hope that in spring 2021 we will be able to meet again in person for a socially distanced walk, but plans have not yet been finalised.

Lastly, we plan to publish a monthly e-newsletter with articles on CPRE-related matters written by members - with less of a focus on news and more a focus on personal stories. If you would like to receive this email, please sign up on Mailchimp via the link below, or by scanning the QR code - you will be able to unsubscribe at any time. And if you would like to share a story about the countryside or local food in your neck of the woods in Cheshire, we would love to hear from you!

Get in touch: info@cprecheshire.org.uk

Sign up here: <http://eepurl.com/ddgAb1>

Or scan the QR Code:



Join in.
cprecheshire.org.uk

© CPRE Cheshire, Victoria Buildings, Middlewich CW10 9AT
Tel: 01606 835046 | Email: info@cprecheshire.org.uk
www.cprecheshire.org.uk
Registered charity number: 248304



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