



The countryside charity
Gloucestershire

Gloucestershire Views Spring 2020

www.cpreglos.org.uk



Greetings from the Chair

We are living in unprecedented times, times that are hugely worrying and difficult for everyone. But as we look out of our windows, we can be reassured that the regular cycles of the seasons are continuing. Spring is just as bountiful this year as ever and our beautiful countryside is coming alive once more. Snowdrops and primroses in our hedgerows herald this wonderful season when the earth suddenly bursts with pent up life.

As we battle with the exigencies imposed by the Covid 19 virus, our countryside has a special part to play. It offers time for peace and reflection at this strange time when so many aspects of our normal lives are denied to us. Indeed, we may find that we have more time to enjoy the bounties of nature, be that in our garden, a local green space or if you are fortunate to have fields and woodland on your doorstep. As the daffodils begin to fade, the fruit trees are bursting into blossom and the skies are alive with the song of swallows returning.

Since our last newsletter, CPRE Gloucestershire has been very busy on your behalf in pursuit of our commitment to protecting and enhancing this precious countryside. In the Autumn, we were delighted to host a celebration of



Prof. Patricia Broadfoot CBE,
County Chair

our annual Rural Excellence Awards for really inspiring community led projects which you can read about in this newsletter. We continue to fight inappropriate developments of all kinds in our countryside. We have plans to support Parish Councils to plant hundreds of trees to replace those threatened by ash dieback. We are getting together with other local organisations to work to combat climate change.

At a national level, CPRE is ratcheting up its ambitions and its campaigning as we become the Countryside Charity. And so are we here in Gloucestershire. With our new Director, Louise Williams, and our new office manager, Lesley Painter, the whole team will continue to be working hard - albeit from home. We will continue to do everything we can to help protect our countryside so that it is still there for future generations to enjoy and to promote greater understanding of the importance of farming, of our rural industries and of supporting rural communities.

Thank you for your support of CPRE Gloucestershire. Whilst we won't be able to hold our normal events for a while, we can still be effective as champions of your countryside with your continuing support. Thank you so much.

District Activity

Berkeley Vale

Prue Vernon

Berkeley Vale District has been fairly quiet on planning applications but busy responding to the proposed changes in the Stroud District revised local plan, discussing these changes with Stroud District Council officers and with the inhabitants of areas most involved. The Severn Vale, and Berkeley Vale in particular, are being allocated large green field development due to the motorway, A38, and Cam and Dursley station not being in the AONB. Slimbridge has got a very active group going. Naturally there is a lot of concern at the huge numbers of houses involved and their impact on roads, transport, employment and schools. Gloucestershire County Council has produced a draft plan to try and cope with the inevitable increase in traffic while reducing carbon emissions. It is heavily dependent on national rather than county funding. There is a large development planned for 107 houses to the west of Station Road, Berkeley. Building will be on the higher part of the field leaving the lower land as open space.

The proposed football stadium at Junction 13 of the M5 was given outline permission by Stroud DC Development Control Committee and the request to have this 'called in' by the Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing has been refused. What a pity.

We are planning our AGM to be held in June and shall be at Frampton Country Fair. If anyone would like to help representing CPRE on the stand please let me know.

Cheltenham, Gloucester and Tewkesbury

Tom Hancock

Following its examination by a planning inspector early in 2019, 'Major Modifications' to the Cheltenham Plan were issued for consultation in the Autumn. The only issue of real concern to CPRE was, as expected, the confirmation of the new secondary school at Leckhampton, sited on land formerly allocated as Local Green Space (LGS). But otherwise most of the important areas designated as LGS have emerged largely unscathed. The Inspector has recently issued her final report, making a few further presentational adjustments but otherwise pronouncing the Plan to be 'sound'. It will come into effect once the Borough Council has met and approved it.

Pre-submission versions of both the Tewkesbury Plan and the Gloucester City Plan were issued for public consultation in Autumn 2019 and CPRE has submitted detailed comments on each. While we supported most of the policies in both plans we raised a number of objections to housing and employment proposals in Tewkesbury Borough, in particular at Staverton Airport where further land was to be removed from the Green Belt.

We have also commented on outline proposals for the 'cyber city' at West Cheltenham. While we strongly support its principles of creating a sustainable, well-integrated, environmentally-friendly, carbon neutral, well-connected and well-designed community, we expressed concern over how this can be achieved in practice.

The district continues to deal with a small number of planning applications and appeals. An appeal seeking a development of 24 houses in an isolated and unsustainable

site close to the AONB on the edge of Winchcombe parish has been dismissed but those for 850 houses at Fiddington and for 215 houses at Stoke Road on the edge of Bishops Cleeve have both been allowed.

Forest of Dean

Simon Murray

The Forest of Dean district have been working hard behind the scenes opposing the 5,000 homes 'eco-village' proposal. Wedged between the A48 and the A40 south-east of Gloucester, set in rolling open countryside and adjacent to the internationally recognised nature hot-spot, Walmore Common, the 'eco village' justifies its title through its proposal to open a new railway station on the existing Chepstow to Gloucester line. Of course, the reality would be very different. Thousands of additional cars would be added to an already overloaded road system.

When news of this proposal leaked out, there was local uproar. A meeting was called in Westbury village hall and over 250 local people turned out to protest. People were understandably angry at the idea of 5,000 new homes on their doorstep: they worried about the traffic, about the schools, about the doctors' surgeries and they worried about the impact on Walmore Common.

We are also concerned to see no solutions or mention of the traffic congestion on the A48/A40 in the Local Transport Plan and have added our thoughts about this via the consultation exercise.

Stroud

Pippa Schwartz

While commenting on the review of the Stroud District Council Local Plan has taken some of our time over the last few months, there have also been some interesting planning applications.

We were especially concerned about one application for an exceptions site in Chalford, which aroused a lot of negative feeling in the community. It was large for an exceptions site (31 houses) and while most such sites are predominantly for affordable homes this had a larger number of free-market houses. Sadly this was approved.

Another application that caused concern was for a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) with an artificial surface and high fencing immediately abutting Minchinhampton Common. The committee felt that this was inappropriate development so close to the SSSI with its delicate ecosystem. An additional worry was the high likelihood of the introduction of lighting that would pose a threat to nocturnal animals and birds. Again this aroused negative feeling locally and the hope is that an alternative, more environmentally friendly use may be found for the site.

South Cotswolds and Tetbury District.

Nicholas Dummett

We have continued to keep a watchful eye on planning applications and particular proposals which have been withdrawn but we suspect will re-appear in due course. All are small such as a single dwelling in an inappropriate location and so of great local importance. Otherwise we are gearing up for our first members event a visit to Kemble Airport which will be held later on this year.

Message from the Director

This is my first newsletter for CPRE – I hope you find it useful and informative. I have joined CPRE at a really exciting and transformative time where we are looking to recruit new volunteers and members to support our busy efforts. So much goes on behind the scenes and our unsung heroes of the countryside, CPRE Volunteers, always go the extra mile to make sure that each planning proposal is carefully interrogated.

This year our focus is for the countryside to be accessed as much as possible by those that perhaps haven't been before. We will be starting a series of Mindful Walks to improve emotional health and wellbeing, and engaging with young people, the future guardians of our countryside.

Louise Williams, Director
CPRE Gloucestershire



Rural Excellence Awards 2019

Below is a brief description of each project, a photograph and the citation. You can find details of all the projects that have received an Award over the years on the website (www.cpreglos.org.uk/awards) by clicking on Awards recipients 2008 to 2019.

1 Bells Field, Coleford

A new 9 acre park, designed in consultation with the local community, catering for all ages, with high quality landscaping and enhanced biodiversity



• **Citation:** For an ambitious project, well planned and designed for a wide variety of community activities, incorporating a flood defence scheme and enhancing biodiversity

2 Chesterton Obelisk Project

The setting of the obelisk transformed through a carefully thought out planting scheme designed with community input and implemented largely by volunteers



• **Citation:** For a community planting project which designed and created an attractive, biodiverse landscape setting for public access to the Chesterton Obelisk which had become a neglected relic, obscured by vegetation

3 Maisemore milestones restoration

The Maisemore Local History Society have carefully restored three milestones on the former turnpike road from Gloucester to Worcester.



• **Citation:** For the restoration of the three Maisemore milestones on the historic route into Gloucester by local people giving new life to a significant local feature

4 St Francis, Theescombe

A highly imaginative building project which has remodelled a Cotswold stone cottage and a garage at a lower level to create an outstanding, contemporary family home



• **Citation:** For the confidence to take on a very challenging development, and produce an elegant design solution that both takes advantage of and respects its setting, creating an elegant contemporary home

5 Scarr Bandstand, Sling

A restored bandstand where local brass bands played for over 100 years and the restarting of music performances, achieved through a local community group



• **Citation:** For the reinstatement of an historical site by volunteers with a vision for community gathering, surrounded by natural forest, used by all generations

6 The Barn at Severn and Wye, Chaxhill

A former agricultural building converted to high standards providing a new public area at the Severn and Wye Smokery with retail facilities and a restaurant on the floor above



• **Citation:** For the completion of a thoughtful and well-designed restoration of traditional farm buildings to accommodate an elegant contemporary setting for The Smokery's new restaurant and retail activities

7 Westbury on Severn church spire

An historic church spire successfully restored and re-clad in oak shingles sourced and clefted in the Forest of Dean after 10 years of tireless fund raising



• **Citation:** For the determination to complete a daunting conservation and repair project, bringing new life to this Westbury landmark, better management to the Church's setting, and securing stronger links to the local community

Farm Payments Public money for public good

Richard Lloyd

With the UK's departure from the European Union, the Government is no longer constrained by the requirements of the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

On 16 January an Agriculture Bill was introduced into parliament which will pave the way for a radical change in agricultural policy and in the way farmers will receive support from the public purse.

Under the CAP, farmers received direct income support through a Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) with the amount determined by the area of land managed. On top of that, money was available under Countryside Stewardship to fund measures to conserve and enhance the environment, but by far the majority of the CAP budget went into BPS.

In future, public funding for farmers will be focused on environmental protection and enhancement (public goods), for example supporting actions to improve soil health and water quality, increase biodiversity and enhance landscapes. An important element will be mitigating the impacts of climate change and meeting the commitment that the UK will achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Delivery will be through the Environmental Land Management System (ELMS). CPRE has welcomed this major policy shift and our national team will be doing their bit to try and get the details right.

A transition period

BPS payments are to be phased out completely over the period 2021 to 2027. A national trial of ELMS is planned from late 2021 leading to roll out from 2024. The overall agriculture budget is protected at least until the next general election and anyone in an existing Countryside Stewardship Scheme will be moved into ELMS.

What will ELMS look like

ELMS is still in the early stages of development and nothing is set in stone. However, a tiered system is likely – Tier 1, to encourage all land managers to adopt more sustainable practices with actions that are simple to deliver; Tier 2, more sophisticated focussing on delivering enhanced environmental outcomes but still open to all; and Tier 3, targeted participation to deliver transformational land use change at a landscape scale, such as peatland restoration and woodland creation.

Tests and Trials in Gloucestershire

A great deal of hard work is going on to design ELMS with a series of 44 Phase 1 Tests and Trials across England of different approaches and likely elements of the system. Gloucestershire is in the forefront of this with three tests and trials in our area.

Trial 1 Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, working in partnership with five other wildlife trusts, is engaging with 100 farmers across different farm types to explore the best approaches to creating farm management plans.

Trial 2 Gloucestershire Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) is developing a Natural Capital recording tool and survey methodology based around the new UK Habitat Classification, working with local farmers and communities in the Upper Thames catchment.

Trial 3 The Cotswolds Conservation Board is working with farmers, land managers, advisers and agencies to identify new and innovative approaches and applicant requirements to achieve national and local priority outcomes through ELMS in the Cotswolds.

Getting ELMS right will be very challenging if essential food production and caring for the environment are really to go hand in hand and farm businesses are to remain viable. It's in everyone's interest to make this work.

A District Volunteer

David Bayne

I have been involved with CPRE Gloucestershire over many years. It all started with a proposal for a sizeable development in the AONB opposite where we live. I became involved in our local informal pressure group which sought CPRE help in opposing the development. I was encouraged to join CPRE, which I did, and sometime later was invited to become a member of the local CPRE district committee. That was when I became a 'volunteer'.

CPRE Cheltenham, Gloucester and Tewkesbury District covers the northern part of the Severn Vale, including the two main centres of population, as well as the western fringes of the Cotswolds AONB. It is thus a very varied patch but facing lots of development.

Keeping abreast of, and seeking to influence, planning policy and monitoring and responding to planning applications is a large part of our district committee's job. And over the years, notwithstanding having no previous background or qualification in the world of 'Town and Country Planning', I have become increasingly involved in this work.

Much of my recent work as a district volunteer has been involvement with the three individual district council plans that sit below the top-level planning policy, called the Joint Core Strategy (JCS). The three district council areas are very different in character but in their plans, each is required to make provision for housing, employment and related facilities in line with the JCS. As a CPRE Volunteer,

I scrutinise planning documents which set out, with an accompanying rationale, the policies that each council is proposing to adopt and prepare comments, endorsed by my district committee, on those in which CPRE has an interest. This may sound a daunting task, but the documents are not highly technical and much of what is in the plans are policies that CPRE can support. Unsurprisingly, the thorny issues are the locations and scale of proposed housing and employment sites, where councils must respond to external pressures such as government targets and the requirements of the JCS. Subject to endorsement by my district committee, the responses I have prepared are then submitted to the local authority.

Early last year the Cheltenham Borough Plan reached the last step in the process, its 'public examination'. This is when a planning inspector meets with all interested parties in a public hearing which in this case lasted the inside of a week. Representing CPRE in the face of the serried ranks of property developers and their high-priced help was quite a challenge, but a necessary and important task.

I have also taken the district lead in reviewing other consultation documents. One recent example has been proposals for 'Cyber Central', the development to take place on the western edge of Cheltenham close to GCHQ. The draft proposals seem to contain aspirations, principles and objectives which CPRE can readily sign up to. Our main concerns are what the impact might be on adjacent areas, whether the required funding will be forthcoming and whether strict and enforceable monitoring and controls will be in place for the document's vision to be realised.

Planning for a better future: CPRE, the people's representative

Simon Murray

Forest of Dean District Council has been consulting on its future Local Plan which will guide its decisions until 2041.

I know that at this moment, when we are worrying about the coronavirus and when even the basics of life, like getting food and getting outside for fresh air, are hard, this may not seem the most urgent or important subject for an article, but when things do get back to normal, future local authority plans will be crucial documents that we should all be reading carefully.

All councils are required to produce plans setting out what they intend to do in their areas of responsibility. So, for example, district councils are required to produce a Local Plan that sets out how it will deal with such things as rubbish collection and re-cycling, and, crucially, with housing and planning. County councils, on the other hand, have to produce plans for such things as fire and policing, transport and education. Together these plans determine where houses get built, which schools grow and which close and how to address problems of congestion on the roads.

In its new Local Plan, the Forest of Dean will have to find space to build 8,000 new homes between now and 2041. Why? Because central government has determined this figure, not because the local population is naturally growing at this rate. Once built, this increase in houses will result in population growth in the district of about 20%. Worryingly, in arriving at this number of new houses, no account is taken of existing employment within the area or what infrastructure is in place to cope with such an increase. And even more worryingly, no account is taken of the impact more traffic will have on an already congested road system.

All local government plans are designed to deal with these challenges and councils are required to consult with us, the voters, on their future plans. Given their importance to our lives, you would think that we would all be poring over these documents to make sure we end up with the communities we would like to live in. Sadly, this is not the case. In the Autumn of 2019, when the Forest of Dean council ran a consultation on its future Local Plan, there were approximately only fifty separate responses. Of these, only about a third came from members of the public; the rest being split between amenity societies, like CPRE, and developers effectively pitching for a slice of the development pie. So out of a population of over 80,000 people, fewer than twenty people commented on a document that will shape our lives and communities for the next twenty years.

Among the fifteen or so developer submissions to the Forest of Dean Local Plan consultation was one from a consultancy called Ridge and Co. They are proposing to build a 5,000 home 'eco village', wedged between the A48 and the A40 south-west of Gloucester. Set in rolling open countryside and adjacent to the internationally designated, Walmore Common, the 'eco village' justifies its title because it is proposed to open a new railway station on the existing Chepstow to Gloucester line. Of course, the reality would be very different. Thousands of additional cars would be added to an already overloaded road system.

When news of this proposal leaked out, there was local uproar. A meeting was called in Westbury village hall and over 250 local people turned out to protest. People were understandably angry at the idea of 5,000 new homes on their doorstep: they worried about the traffic, about the schools, about the doctors' surgeries and they worried about the impact on Walmore Common.

But why did these 250 people not make their voices heard during the local plan consultation in Autumn 2019?

There is no single answer to this question, but one must be that, understandably, most people are too busy to give the time needed to respond to these consultations. To get round this we need a model similar to our system of parliamentary democracy. That is, we elect and trust someone else, or an organisation, to do the work for us. CPRE might be such an organisation as it has the skills and expertise among its staff and volunteers to comment on these plans and put pressure on councils to adopt sensible and sustainable solutions, and has been doing this work across its volunteer task force for the last eighty years. But not only are our resources limited, but we lack a mandate. There are only 100 members of CPRE in the Forest of Dean out of a population of 80,000. If we had 1,000 members, or, imagine it, 5,000, we could argue from a position of strength. With the additional resources more members would give us, we could be the people's representative when it comes to decisions that affect the character and beauty of our countryside and its communities.

CPRE, the countryside charity, has set out its own vision for a beautiful and thriving countryside. Given a mandate by the people, it could fight for just such a vision and for better and more integrated plans that would give us – and the councils – the sort of sustainable future we all aspire to.



Have you got five minutes?

Actually, have you got about 2 hours per month?

We are looking for volunteers to join our dedicated and passionate task force.

Are you interested in what is built and where in your local community? Do you want more of a say over development in your local area? CPRE is the perfect organisation to join. We are a registered charity and rely on the good nature of our volunteers to help keep the countryside as functional but as protected as possible.

Our volunteers work within one of our six districts and meet on a bi-monthly basis. Each district has a chair, and as a volunteer you make up the committee for that district. If you would like more information either email louise.williams@cpreglos.org.uk or call on 01452 309783 we would really like to hear from you.



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