

OUTLOOK

July 2022



The countryside charity
Northamptonshire



Photograph of Sywell Reservoir courtesy of June Middleton

There's More to an SSSI Than You Might Think

We thought readers would be interested to learn about a local SSSI and so we asked the Castle Ashby Estate to tell us a bit about Sane Copse. We found the detail in what follows fascinating – we hope you do too.

Sane Copse, located to the South of Castle Ashby on the Whittlewood Ridge, was designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in the 1980s and forms part of the Yardley Chase SSSI.

Conservation and sustainability of wildlife have been important to the estate for generations, and today the woodland contains a wide variety of semi-natural habitats and a diversity of species, making it one of the East Midlands' most prominent sites for nature conservation.

Compton Estates manages the woodland and ponds under the guidance of Natural England and implements a series of management strategies to conserve important habitats effectively and appropriately. For example, the mixed broadleaf ancient woodland management includes monitoring the level of canopy cover, benefitting the understorey, reducing shading around the ponds, the composition/

regeneration of standard trees and annually cutting the woodland rides.

The value of these habitats for invertebrates is enhanced by their isolation from intensive agriculture and the range of different woodland types including oak, mixed broadleaves, conifer and an understorey of dog's mercury, hawthorn, hazel, dogwood, guelder rose, honeysuckle and species associated with ancient woodland such as herb Paris.

The diversity of flora creates an array of larval food plants for uncommon species such as wood white, purple hairstreak and white admiral. Emergent vegetation includes stands of the grey club-rush and lesser bulrush.

The site's thirty-nine ponds are rain-fed and have clean water with a pH range of 6.5 to 8.4. Ponds are allowed to mature naturally, which has enabled them to become high-quality wildlife habitats. The ponds are an assortment of sizes and depths, creating multiple diverse micro-habitats important for many species of dragonflies, amphibians, water beetles, water bugs and Diptera.

The newsletter of CPRE

Northamptonshire

www.cprenorthants.org.uk

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Herb Paris

Image ©John Showers



Wood White

Image ©John Showers

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Getting Started on the Hedgerow Heroes Project

- Robin Jones

If you are familiar with the expression "phoney war", you'll know what it was like for people involved in the hedgerow project for a couple of months. Yes, the project was given a sexier name "Hedgerow Heroes", but apart from that it felt like nothing much had happened. Thankfully that all

at Stoke Bruerne where some of the proposed hedgerow regeneration will take place.

Inevitably there is rather more to a project like this than just handing over the money and waiting for things to happen. We have had to agree a

outputs enshrined in each plan. The Canal & River Trust has already begun part of its project, the creation of a nursery to enable them to grow their own whips, trees and wildflower seedlings for this and future years. Brixworth Parish Council and Brackley Town Council on the other hand will not be starting work till the autumn, the season for planting and laying hedges.

The Climate Crisis means that planting new hedges and regenerating neglected ones are at the heart of the Hedgerow Heroes Project, but of course it doesn't end there. We want the people of Northamptonshire to be aware of what we are doing. We want schools, youth organisations and local communities to be involved in the process. We will be working with our partners to ensure this happens – fortunately they are as keen as we are that it will!

Co-ordinating the promotional ambitions of the four teams involved will be challenging. Luckily the cavalry has arrived in the shape of Clare Smith of Bounce PR Brackley. She has volunteered to help ensure that we all pull together over the next year. We are looking forward to it.



changed at the beginning of May when CPRE National Office set the ball rolling. Shortly afterwards we had our first face-to-face meeting with our local partners

delivery plan with our three partners, a different plan for each. Stage funding will be dependent on delivery of the

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The drawdown zones and shallow margins of the base-rich waters give rise to wetland plants such as shining pondweed, broadleaved pondweed, red pondweed and lower plants comprising stoneworts, starworts and the scarce free-floating liverwort.

The tree-lined ponds provide dappled or light shade, and the late succession ponds are important for many mosses, specialist species of invertebrates such as the cranefly as well as large numbers of the great crested newt.

Sane Copse is privately owned as part of Castle Ashby Estate. The site contains a rugged terrain with deep holes which make health and safety a priority. It can therefore only be accessed on a guided nature tour. If you want to learn more, go to <https://thefalcon-castleashby.com/wellbeing/nature-tours/>.

Village Awards Back After Two Year Break

- Alan Mayes

The Northamptonshire Village Awards competition organised by Northamptonshire ACRE and sponsored by CPRE, originally planned for 2020, has finally taken place after two years of stop/start. The presentation of awards to the winning villages is set to take place at ACRE's Hunsbury Hill Centre at 6.30 pm on 11 July. Sir Paul Hayter, who has just announced his intention to retire at our forthcoming AGM, will say a few words on behalf of CPRE in what he describes as his swansong as trustee. CPRE members wishing to attend the event should email acre@northantsacre.org.uk for tickets. There is no charge for tickets, but places are limited and tickets will be issued on a first come first served basis.

Government Backs Offshore Wind but Giant Solar Farms Still Pose a Threat

- Brian Skittrall

The recent Energy Bill will have a significant influence on how the countryside changes in our national journey to net-zero. The Bill's main focus is on energy generation but it does not entirely ignore energy reduction.



It was a great relief for many rural communities that, despite intense lobbying from the wind industry, the planning rules that protect them from overbearing wind farms were not removed. Realistically there are very few easy sites in England that have not already been developed so any new schemes would have to be in currently protected locations or

unacceptably close to homes – neither of which would be very popular.

The main renewable target is for 40GW more offshore wind, but there is also a target of 12GW of "low-cost renewables". The main building blocks to reach that 12GW are anticipated to be more onshore wind and solar PV installations. Onshore wind is most likely to be developed in Scotland and Wales but solar is most likely to be developed in the southern half of Britain. This will probably mean 100, if not 200, more giant 50MW solar farms in the countryside. We can expect more applications.

A huge disappointment to us was that there is no proposal to require new-builds to maximise their energy generation. In our area it is deeply frustrating that new warehouses with their large roofs are not required to double up as solar farms. Similarly all the new housing could be required to include solar panels to help make them carbon neutral, or even carbon negative. This could make a big difference to the number of ground-mounted solar panels required.

In short the Bill is a mix of good news and bad news for the countryside. There are, however, significant areas where the detail is not settled, giving opportunities to lobby for less harmful solutions and more emphasis on energy saving and solar PV in the built environment.

Community Awards 2022

- Alan Mayes

We have already received a number of entries for this year's CPRE Northamptonshire Community Awards, but we would like more. The Awards aim to celebrate a volunteer-led community project that enhances the quality of life and environment for those living in Northamptonshire's villages, towns or countryside. Perhaps your community did something to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee that would make a suitable entry?

Applications can be made by any community group working within Northamptonshire or on behalf of a community group. The award is not a single person award. Applications should demonstrate that one or more of the following have been achieved:

- an enhancement to the countryside
- an enhancement to the environment of villages or towns
- an enhancement to urban areas
- an enhancement to the quality of life for those living in, working in or visiting the county

All projects must be volunteer-led, Northamptonshire-based and have been completed in the past 5 years.

Winners in 2018 included a community garden and the restoration of an urban park with a community orchard and community shop.

Applications should be sent, as a short description of the project with photographs, to info@cprenorthants.org.uk. The closing date is 30 September 2022.

Make sure your community's achievements are celebrated by nominating them!

The public consultation for the Scope and Issues to be covered in the North Northamptonshire Strategic Plan closed on 23 May. CPRE Northamptonshire made a detailed response and hopefully many parish and town councils also took part in this important consultation.

At this stage the consultation was not site specific but covered those topics which will be included in the plan as it develops. Our response stressed the need for protecting the countryside as a living and working asset. Also high on our list of priorities was the protection and regeneration of the market towns of North Northamptonshire. Whilst appropriate employment needs to be encouraged, we stressed the need for controlling the spread of warehousing, particularly adjacent to market towns.

With appropriate housing numbers already in place, we saw

North Northamptonshire Strategic Plan Scope and Issues Consultation

- Alan Mayes

no need for increases, but rather appropriate housing in the places where it is most needed.

As part of the protection and recognition of the North Northamptonshire countryside, CPRE Northamptonshire is promoting an AONB initially for the Upper Nene Valley and this was also mentioned in our response.

Our full response can be found on our website www.cprenorthants.org.uk under Planning/Current Issues.

Political big guns have now started to be involved with the fight to save Towcester and its surrounding rural environs from the onslaught of massive overdevelopment in the form of warehousing.

According to Louise Croft, one of the key members of the Save Towcester Now campaign group, a request has been lodged with Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, to appoint a case officer from the department to review the AL3

any of the other developments, such as AL1 and 2, the DHL site at Bell Plantation be given permission, those will also be put to Michael Gove to be called in, according to another case officer at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

In the meantime, West Northamptonshire Council has appointed consultants to draw up supplementary planning guidelines for future planning applications. But the burning question is whether these

letter to Michael Gove and secondly, in a meeting set up with James Stephens, DHL's Vice President for Corporate Affairs, plus several consultants from various planning committees. Andrea Leadsom's response to the meeting was as follows:

"DHL's consultants believe that the Towcester Relief Road will be available to accommodate much of their generated traffic. I made it crystal clear that this is not the purpose of the Towcester Relief Road – it is to divert existing traffic away from using the A5 Watling Street – not for developers such as DHL to facilitate their planned logistics developments."

"Entirely mitigating the traffic impact on Towcester from HGVs using our town as a rat run when motorways are congested should be within reach once the Towcester Relief Road is completed, provided it does not become overloaded by huge new developments that increase lorry and van movements even further."

"I will continue to support constituents in their strong objection to this and other insensitive applications, and I will provide updates on further meetings and correspondence with DHL".

The fight goes on, and South Northamptonshire is battling for survival and the best outcome for the area, in terms of providing a pleasant and environmentally sustainable place for people to live and work, and to ensure that Towcester does not become an unwilling player in remote corporate business profiteering.

Watch this space...

Towcester's Warehouse Hell – an Update

- Geoff Carverhill

Tiffield Lane planning application from IM Properties, which received outline planning permission earlier this year. The point of the review will be to determine whether the AL3 plan should be called in by Michael Gove. If evidence is found in favour of calling in the plan, this will have an effect on the viability of the other AL plans in the area. CPRE Northamptonshire has also ensured that copies of 'Outlook' magazine documenting the problems of Towcester and other areas in Northamptonshire have been sent to Michael Gove and other relevant politicians.

In a separate application, the Silverstone & Whittlebury Residents Association has placed a request with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, for AL4, the Podium Park development on the A43 at Whittlebury, to be called in. Should

planning guidelines will be retrospectively applied? If they are, we could soon see an end to this battle for Towcester's integrity.

As well as appointing consultants, West Northamptonshire Council also appointed an Interim Assistant Director for Planning and Development, taking over from Jim Newton who, according to a WN press release, has "recently moved on to pastures new". Mr Newton's replacement is Colin Walker, who was appointed in May.

Rt. Hon. Dame Andrea Leadsom, MP for Towcester, has also been responding very positively to the concerns of her constituents, firstly by reinforcing the points made by the Save Towcester Now group, that the AL planning applications will "*expose our historic area to inappropriate and insensitive overdevelopment*" with a very detailed

Over the last year or so we have lost several long-serving trustees. This year alone has seen Peter Hopkins stepping down in January and Paul Hayter has indicated that he will retire at July's

AGM. Both have been trustees for more than 15 years. Over the years Peter has been involved in a huge amount of back-office work – website, newsletter, email communications, 50/50 and a plethora of one-off tasks. Thank goodness he continues to work for us as a volunteer! Paul was for many years a wise and highly respected chairman and will be especially remembered for steering us through the HS2 minefield and editing the highly successful Icons of Northamptonshire. He will offer himself for election as vice president at the AGM following the retirement of Gayle Robinson, another long-serving stalwart. We were told when we adopted our present Articles of

Association that good governance demanded a regular turnover of trustees. If this is the case, we are now ticking that particular box.

While many charities employ paid staff and enjoy the support of numerous volunteers, ours most definitely does not. Your trustees indulge in their fair share of jaw jaw, but it doesn't end there. We get involved in "real" work too – witness this newsletter, fundraising events, the website and so on. That is not to underestimate the sterling work of the few volunteers we have but we need more – not just to maintain our current level of activity but to reinforce and expand it.

Chairman Paul Parsons made it clear when he took on the job in January 2020 that he expected to serve for three years. He will therefore be stepping down as chairman at the end of this year. He will leave behind a financially sound organisation with a streamlined organisational structure and clear strategy, but one understaffed in terms of trustees and volunteers. Right now we are urgently looking for a new chairman to take over from Paul. It is unlikely that any existing trustee will take on this role. If you feel you have the necessary qualities, predominantly a love of the countryside and good people skills, or you know someone who does, please get in touch.

Room at the Top

- Robin Jones

Town and Country Awards 2021

- Alan Mayes



We have now completed the judging of the sixteen entries for last year's Town and Country Awards. The contenders covered local visitor attractions, village and farm shops, a country hotel and several domestic housing schemes.

The winning entries include:

Chester House near Wellingborough - a new visitor attraction within a seventeenth century farm complex adjacent to the site of a Roman town

Northampton Museum and Art Gallery - the regeneration of a town centre visitor attraction including an impressive contemporary new building linking with the former gaol buildings

Housing projects across the county using previously developed land



The date and venue of the awards presentation have yet to be agreed.

Walking the Walk at Southfields

- Robin Jones

Over the last two years or more we at CPRE Northamptonshire have talked a lot about getting back to normality and what we'd do when it happened. Well, the talking is over and we've had a long awaited live event thanks to organiser Mary Miller and host Paul Parsons. The weather played a part, but we can't claim credit for that.

When she became a trustee, Mary took on the vacant, not to say defunct, fundraising role. If the Southfields Estate Walk held on 4 May is anything to go by, we can expect more than just fundraising from her. She organised an event that did so much more than just raise money for the charity – it brought around 50 of us together, most of us members, to enjoy a good natter, some delicious food, a glass or two of wine and an interesting walk through some beautiful South Northamptonshire countryside.

Paul, wife Poosie and family (not forgetting the dogs) have been at Southfields for some 30 years and during that time have transformed its 350 acres from arable prairie to a

pastoral idyll. Trees and hedgerows in every direction, ponds and wetlands too, and more on the way! Southfields is, Paul says, a work in progress – he has plans aplenty for some of the larger fields he's not yet got round to. At the start he explained that this was the first farm walk he had led – not bad then for a beginner!



The event raised just over £1,800, a mixture of ticket sales and generous donations. We even recruited some new members. Mary has set the bar very high for her next event later this year – I'm very much looking forward to it.



CPRE Volunteer Award for Andrew Powles

Although he stepped down as a trustee last year, Andrew Powles continues to work very successfully on member retention. The tracking of lapsed members has meant frequent contact with CPRE National Office who have been so impressed by his efforts that they have recommended his methodology to CPRE branches nationwide. Indeed, so impressed that they have rewarded him with a prestigious CPRE Volunteer Award. Well done, Andrew, and well deserved!



1st Quarter Draw

Top Prize £60: Barbara Hunt, Great Addington

Second Prize £50: Brian Smith, Croughton

Third Prize £40: Alexandra Parsons, Blakesley

What's On

Village Awards Presentation

11 July, 6.30 pm
Northamptonshire ACRE's Hunsbury Hill Centre

AGM

21 July, 3 pm
– see insert and website

Planning Roadshow *

September

Fundraising Event *

Autumn

* We will publish description, dates and venues by email and on the website once they have been agreed.