

OUTLOOK



The countryside charity
Northamptonshire

March 2022



A computer generated image of the DHL development in which Towcester town has disappeared!

The newsletter of CPRE
Northamptonshire

www.cprenorthants.org.uk

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Hell and High Water - The Questions Behind Towcester's Warehouse Nightmare - Geoff Carverhill

As the sheer scale of proposed warehouse developments in and around Towcester comes to light, many questions are being asked by residents of this historic market town as to how the town and its residents came to be placed in such a depressingly invidious position. More to the point, who is responsible for this calamity and why?

Firstly, let's take a step back in time... If, thirty or even twenty years ago, anyone had heard me say that Towcester would be a major logistics hub for the Midlands, with huge warehouses built right in its historic midst, they would have been quite within their rights to get the men in white coats to come and take me away and lock me up! But that is exactly what will happen if this nightmare scenario goes ahead.

The developments, which have been the focus of a vigorous campaign by the Save Towcester Now group (www.savetowcesternow.org), consist of four individual applications:

AL1 – a hybrid planning application for warehousing development on land north of Bell Plantation on the A5 by DHL, with an adjacent application **AL2**, the size of both sites combined being 32.06 hectares (79.22 acres).

AL3 – a hybrid planning application with predominantly B8 warehousing on land east of Tiffield Lane to the north west of the A43.

AL4 – Woolgrowers at Tove roundabout on the A43 – a 4.5 hectare (11.12 acres) hybrid application.

A fifth application should also be considered: a hybrid, but again, predominantly B8 warehousing application 2 miles south of Towcester on the A43 at Shacks Barn, Podium Business Park near Whittlebury.

AL1 and AL2 are, in essence, an underhand attempt by DHL to obtain a much larger site than if they applied for AL1 and AL2 as one application. The height of the warehouses, in some cases up to 80 feet (24.5 m), will be seen from

miles away. If just one of these sites is implemented, it will be a bad outcome for the area, but it is the combination of all four that spells out a catastrophic environmental nightmare for Towcester.

In 2014, West Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit put together part 1 of their Joint Core Strategy, the opening Foreword of which states:

*"The importance of Strategic Planning which shapes and makes the places in which people live, work and play cannot be overstated. **The alternative would, in all likelihood, result in an uncoordinated approach through speculative developer-led planning and related applications.** This West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy Local Plan is a key*

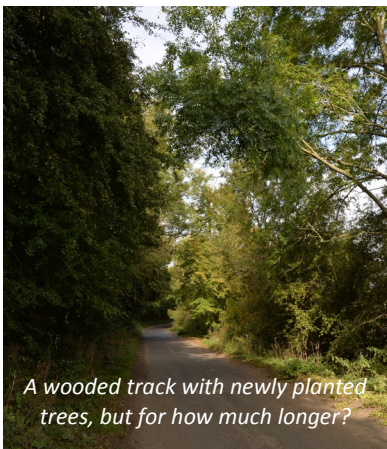
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document in ensuring places are shaped and made in a way which meets the needs of the people of today whilst ensuring the needs of future generations are safeguarded."

So what went wrong?

In 2011, South Northamptonshire Council commissioned a 'Towcester Masterplan', which was aimed at defining Towcester's strategic profile for the future. Land allocations were highlighted in the plan, which stated that "no development was envisaged



A wooded track with newly planted trees, but for how much longer?

for north of the A43" and that a 'Green Edge' would be established as areas for no development. A subsequent final version of the Masterplan was issued, which mysteriously included the land allocations north of the A43, and which, according to the 'Save Towcester Now' campaign group, also included a number of erroneous references. These were carried over to the SNC Local Plan Part 2, adopted by South Northamptonshire Council in July 2020. The document had enough holes in it to make a kitchen colander look watertight!

Had the original 'mistakes' on the map of the second version of the Masterplan not been made, the Local Plan would not have contained quite

as many ambiguities; the result has been to allow developers to exploit these ambiguities to their advantage. For example, if a Strategic Plan contains references to the types of employment use a land allocation must have, such as B1, B2 and B8, and there is not enough demand for the smaller B1 and B2 uses, a developer can then fill their site with B8 warehousing, which is exactly what will happen in Towcester.

CPRE Northamptonshire has highlighted the potential issues from an environmental and health and wellbeing standpoint: 24-hour noise and light pollution, together with serious associated traffic and air pollution issues, as well as Towcester being a high flood risk area. Since AL3 was granted outline planning permission on 22 January 2022, the scenario is looking bleak for Towcester and especially the outlying village of Tiffield.

Even SEMLEP, the South East Midlands Local Economic Partnership, the organisation responsible for encouraging business investment to the area, does not include Towcester as an area for logistics development. Rt. Hon Dame Andrea Leadsom, the Member of Parliament for South Northamptonshire, sent a strongly worded letter to WNC outlining her constituents' concerns over the future of Towcester. The Town Council, parish councils, individuals and campaign groups such as CPRE Northamptonshire have voiced their opinion in the form of robust rejections of these developments, but there seems to be a concerted effort by WNC to nod these applications through, for whatever reasons, whatever the cost!

If the developments get the final go-ahead, they will impact negatively on the semi-rural, historic market town setting of Towcester for generations to come.



DHL site plan showing the allocation for Towcester Town Football Club's new site, Zone 5, which has been offered but with no solutions towards how it can be accommodated. Sport England has questioned its viability.

4th Quarter Draw

£70 Top Prize

- Max Nicholls, Geddington

£40 Runner-up Prizes

- Christopher Hart, Cotterstock
- Alan Wiffill, Maidford
- Hilary Worton, Hollowell

LET'S GET TOGETHER

Our first face to face gathering for over two years

You are invited to a CPRE garden and estate walk and lunch

Wednesday 4 May 2022, 11 am

Take a look at the invitation that comes with this magazine and join us if you can

Save Our Street Trees

Alice Whitehead, founder of Save Our Street Trees, explains more about the work her community group does to protect and plant urban trees in Northampton – and how you can get involved

The Save our Street Trees campaign started with one tree. A beautiful flowering cherry on Penrhyn Road in Far Cotton. My son and I called it the Candy Floss tree because of its clouds of fluffy pink blossom in spring.

We passed this tree on the school run every day (we also had a raspberry ripple tree!) – but in 2016, we noticed our tree wasn't doing so well. The branches were becoming tangled, and the canopy overgrown due to lack of maintenance.

Then other trees in our street, and surrounding streets, began to



Delapre Primary school children planting whips



Penrhyn Road Tree planting with Alice Whitehead and members of Woodland Trust and Transition Town Northampton

Photographs by kind permission of Kirsty Edmonds

disappear – never to be replaced. Where once there were trees – there were now just empty muddy tree pits.

Later, when Save Our Street Trees commissioned Northampton University to do the first ever tree survey of our local district, we discovered 58% of street trees had been felled and not replaced in the last 50 years. It was easy to extrapolate this could be the case in the rest of Northampton.

In early 2016, we began to write letters to councillors and MPs, asking them to do more to protect, maintain and replace the street trees. We tentatively created a Facebook page to publicise what we were doing and get support. And Save Our Street Trees was born!

The focus of our community group continues to be to promote, protect and plant trees on Northampton's urban streets and highways. But we also support any tree project in the urban environment, be that in an orchard, park or school.

We've come a long way since 2016. We're now a constituted community group and Tree Charter branch – supporting its pledges to make "trees accessible for all". We've organised school schemes, created art projects and tree trails. And we've planted more than 400 trees!

We continue to work with Northampton's unitary authority and parish councils to do more to protect and replant lost trees. But we couldn't do the work we do without the fantastic support of Northampton residents. We now have a team of Tree Guardians across Northamptonshire that help us fundraise, map trees and water newly planted trees.

Fancy getting involved? We'd love to extend our volunteer network. If you love trees and want better maintenance, protection and replanting, find out more about us at www.saveourstreettrees.org.

You can also donate to help plant more trees in Northampton. Or follow us on Facebook/Instagram @saveourstreettrees, or Twitter @savestreettrees.

What's On in 2022

Despite the enforced inactivity of the last two years, we have not been idle. Elsewhere in this newsletter you will read of our continuing planning work. You may have visited our new website and Facebook page. You will have received planning updates and Outlook. Life has gone on, albeit in a lower key than any of us would have liked. So, what are our plans now that face-to-face meetings are permitted?

Firstly **two planning roadshows** – one in June and one in November. We'll be back to normal for the first one at an as yet unchosen venue. The second one might be a mixture of a conventional meeting and Zoom – not everyone is happy driving cross country at night!

Secondly **two fundraising events** – one on 4 May and one later in the year. You'll have received the invitation to the first with this issue of Outlook. A walk across the fields at Chairman Paul Parsons' home in rural South Northamptonshire, food and drink and a chance to catch up with old friends. It sounds good and links up well with the hedgerow project referred to next. More about the second fundraising event in the next issue.

Elsewhere we report on an exciting **new hedgerow project** – an opportunity for us to do something really worthwhile for the county while at the same time raising our profile as the countryside charity. Spending £20,350 on hedgerows sounds easy, but it will no doubt occupy plenty of volunteer time over the coming twelve months.

Selecting the winners of the **2021 Town & Country Awards** competition may be taking place as you read this and the **2022 Community Awards** competition kicks off in June. The presentation of the Village Awards which we sponsor is scheduled for 11 July.

Quite a full year!

CPRE Northamptonshire is supporting the STAUNCH campaign, which Titchmarsh residents have launched in response to the decision by the Diocese of Peterborough to sell a 10

which underpins their growth. However, it is difficult to ignore the adverse impact that the expansion of the warehouse facilities at Thrapston will have on the unique landscape of the Nene Valley.

S.T.A.U.N.C.H.

- Carew Treffgarne
CPRE Northamptonshire Technical Committee

year development option on former glebe land in their parish. In consequence, IM Properties plan to transform 114 acres (46 hectares) of Grade 2 agricultural land into a business park that will extend the existing warehouses in Thrapston across the fields towards Titchmarsh.

Last June, a separate proposal to develop the 175 acre (71

hectare) Castle Manor Farm site, east of Haldens Parkway, was put forward by Newlands Developments. This company is also proposing to develop a new logistics hub at the other end of the A605 by the A1, junction 17. Given that both these developments are closely linked to the logistics industry (DHL and DSV in particular), the potential impact on the already congested A605, which links the A12 and the A14, is of concern to local inhabitants.

The STAUNCH campaign estimates that the combined floor space of these two developments will quadruple the existing warehouse facilities at Thrapston. Both development companies make ambitious claims about the employment opportunities that their proposals will generate (1,500 - 2,000 jobs at Thrapston Business Park and 2,700 jobs at Haldens Parkway). However, local councillors are sceptical that such numbers can be met locally, and, in any case, these claims ignore the increasing impact of warehouse automation. Newlands Development asserts that their proposal falls within the SEMLEP and OxCam Arc programmes, by providing the logistics

The Castle Farm application claims that consideration of local views has informed their landscaping scheme, and that these will minimise the visual impact of the development. But it is difficult to see how such

plans can offset the height of the warehouses, which, at 80 feet (24.5 metres) above ground level, will be higher than the existing storage depots. In addition to noise and light pollution arising from the expanded warehouse facilities, there is local concern at the

increased flood risk that could threaten wildlife habitat in the area. This applies in particular to the nearby Titchmarsh Nature

Reserve and the Aldwincle Lakes, which are covered by several statutory designations. They are a Special Protection Area and a wetland of international importance (a Ramsar site), as well as having triple SIs. In consequence, one of the campaign's slogans is 'Wildlife not Warehouses!'.

The STAUNCH campaign has held several meetings to inform local residents and has developed good relations with local MPs Tom Pursglove and Shailesh Vara. A recent meeting with parish councils attracted over 20 councillors or parish clerks from the area.

CPRE Northamptonshire has developed close contact with the STAUNCH committee and will respond to the Planning Applications. It is also leading a working group that is exploring the option of applying for an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty designation for the Upper Nene Valley. We urge you to sign the petition on the STAUNCH website (www.staunchcampaign.org) and to watch the recent campaign video on the threats that these developments pose to the way of life in the villages of the Nene valley.

Save Thrapston and Upper Nene Valley Countryside and Habitats!

Community Awards 2022

- Alan Mayes

This year CPRE Northamptonshire will be running the Community Awards which were first launched in 2018. These 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 and countryside.

1. 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)
2. Applications should demonstrate that at least one of the following has been enhanced:
 - the countryside in Northamptonshire
 - the environment of a village or a town in Northamptonshire
 - an urban area of Northamptonshire
 - the quality of life for those living in, working in or visiting Northamptonshire
3. All projects must have been completed in the past five years
4. Applications should be sent as a short, written statement about the project, with photographs
5. All projects should generally be volunteer based or managed by volunteer trustees

The winners in 2018 were the Brickyard Community Garden at Geddington and the restoration of an urban park by the Friends of Eastfield Park in Northampton. A community orchard and community shop were runners-up. All applications should be sent to alanmayes123@gmail.com or info@cprenorthants.org.uk. The closing date is 30 September 2022. Celebrate your community's achievements - by nominating it!



**Geoff
Carverhill**

I was born in Isleworth, Middlesex, in what is now rather erroneously called 'West London'. My childhood was spent in Twickenham, before moving to Northamptonshire in 1979.

Much of my working life has been in sales and marketing but, having had a somewhat ad hoc training in photography from the age of 18, it was always my ambition to

become a reportage photographer. It was not until the mid-1970s that I started to get freelance work as a press snapper. While retaining the 'day job', I did various freelance work for clients such as CBS Records, Legal & General Insurance and local and national press.

In the mid 1980s, I landed a new day job as sales and marketing manager for an American-owned British manufacturer of castors and wheels, specialising in medical and hospital applications and airport equipment. I became involved with PR, press liaison and product promotion and by default, became the in-house

photographer. During this period I began writing as an automotive historian and contributing to automotive magazines, having learnt the ropes from an experienced hack (trained journalist) while working as a snapper. I also, during a brief period of 'occupational inactivity' in the late 80s, made a living as a music promoter, having also been a music photographer at the same time.

In 2004, I formed my own business as a GM franchised dealer, service and spares agent for GM North American vehicles. The company was closed when the 2008 crash came. I retrained as a piano tuner/technician and qualified in 2011. Since then I have been running that business as well as being a regular contributor to car magazines as a journalist/photographer and have written 3 books on British car companies. The last one, 'The Rootes Story – Volume One' was shortlisted for the RAC Motoring Book of the Year Award. I am trying to retire, but not making a very good job of it!

As far as CPRE is concerned, I would like to raise the media profile of the local organisation, and in supporting local CPRE officers, enable CPRE Northamptonshire to be taken seriously as a committed and able campaigning organisation.



**Rachel
Halvorsen**

With a father in the military, Rachel was born in Singapore and brought up in army-land near Camberley, Surrey. But the family's spiritual home was always Northamptonshire, at Versions Farm in Brackley,

owned by her grandparents and great-grandparents before them. Rachel and family finally moved there in 2001 and started a small organic livestock farm, selling the produce through their farm shop. She was elected onto the South Northants District

Council, representing Brackley West and had a spell on the planning committee.

The farm and shop had to come to an end when HS2 announced compulsory purchase of some of her fields. The line was to be on a 10 metre viaduct overlooking the house, with the 126mph train roaring out of a tunnel the other side of the peaceful stream which later becomes the Great Ouse.

She moved 20 miles north, still within the county and enjoys riding, walking and driving down its country lanes and byways. She believes in the importance of the countryside, not just for its role as a carbon sink to prevent climate change but for the peace and joy its experience can bring in today's frantic high speed world where mental health problems escalate. 'Once a patch of land is concreted over, it can never be reversed, so the decision needs a great deal of thought and justification.' Rachel hopes she has some skills to add to the CPRE trustee team in their fight to protect what we've got.

**First Surplus in
Five Years!**

- Robin Jones

Despite our inability to hold fundraising events in 2021, we ended the year in the black for the first time since 2016. An unaudited surplus of £6,600 would have been over £7,000 had we not chosen to spend money on redesigning our website. There is every prospect of this improvement continuing for the foreseeable future, indeed improving still more with the return of face-to-face

fundraising. However, the object of the exercise is not the accumulation of a mountain of cash but rather the investment of surplus funds in projects enabling us to better protect Northamptonshire's countryside. A welcome problem for your Trustees given the financial concerns of the past few years!

CPRE's Response to West Northamptonshire Strategic Plan Consultation

- Alan Mayes

During the Autumn of 2021, West Northamptonshire Council consulted on their draft Strategic Plan,

in particular the Spatial Options which include possible development sites. CPRE Northamptonshire made a robust response to a variety of policy options, together with comments on all proposed development sites.

We challenged the references made to the OxCam Arc proposals, which with the Government's current thinking on levelling up, may not proceed. We also challenged the calculations for the housing numbers proposed, which unfortunately set the target for the number of housing sites required. At this stage, all the sites proposed are being assessed on their merits by WNC. It is therefore important that strong cases are made against the least appropriate sites

that have the most detrimental impact on the countryside. Amongst those sites put forward for housing are:

- the expansion of Northampton towards Chapel Brampton
- the creation of a new settlement alongside Long Buckby
- the expansion of Towcester eastwards and Brackley westwards and
- the expansion of Old Stratford north-westward

In all these cases, significant countryside would be lost, views destroyed and heritage sites and wildlife habitats impacted. Similarly, sites have been put forward for employment uses at various points along the M1 corridor at Daventry

and at the existing DIRFT rail freight terminal. CPRE appreciates that there is a need for growth; however, a more realistic calculation of the need should help to reduce the pressure for so many additional sites using open countryside and destroying valued landscapes. The re-use of redundant employment sites should also relieve the pressure on greenfield sites.

The Strategic Plan is still at a relatively early stage. There will be further consultations and no doubt further sites put forward for development. We will endeavour to keep parish councils and our members alert to the consultation process; it is most important that we engage with it.

Members will know that we've been itching to get involved in CPRE's national hedgerow project for some time with no success – until now! We received the

£20,350 for Hedgerow Project!

- Robin Jones

Putting together our application started in November with volunteer Carol Sigley and trustee Robin Jones undertaking to do the legwork. It turned out to be a marathon, not a sprint. Finding partners willing and able to participate was not as easy as you might think, especially given the 14 January deadline for applications. But eventually we found three –



CRT volunteers learning the ropes from Dave Padley

of the sums of money involved and the need to satisfy the ultimate donor, a hedge fund (I joke not), that their money would be spent wisely. Eleven pages of words, copious photos and site maps tell their own story, a huge investment in time on the part of CPRE Northamptonshire volunteers and their partners in the enterprise. But we got there in the end, submitting the completed package on the last possible day!

A few weeks later Carol and I were asked to "attend" a meeting with four CPRE National Office staff to answer their questions about our application. A veritable Dragons' Den! Thankfully we were able to rope in Catherine West of the CRT to support us and she did a magnificent job. National Office staff were obviously impressed by our pitch but we were still left wondering.

Until a few days ago when the magic call came congratulating us on our application and telling us we had been successful. None of us are footballers but we were very definitely over the moon!

good news that our application to CPRE for a grant of £20,350 had been successful just in time to share it in this issue. The grant is for planting and restoring hedges in the county and for spreading the word about the environmental benefits of doing so.

Brixworth Parish Council, Brackley Town Council and The Canal & River Trust.

Then the fun really started. The application form, described as a declaration of interest, was extensive to put it mildly – understandably so in view