

OUTLOOK



The countryside charity
Northamptonshire

Summer 2023

The newsletter of
CPRE Northamptonshire
www.cprenorthants.org.uk

Photograph of Blisworth thatch with fox courtesy of Trisha White

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Please Return This Call

- Robin Jones



We have learned over the last few weeks that three of our eight trustees will not be standing for re-election at our upcoming AGM (see insert). This is bad news for the Charity in terms of governance and diversity and bad news for the remaining trustees in terms of workload. While we will not be holding future trustee meetings in a telephone box, there will come a time when we can if this rate of attrition continues.

The main qualities we look for in a trustee are honesty, common sense and a love of the countryside. If they bring with them other skills, so much the better. The responsibilities of a trustee are not hugely onerous. We normally hold four meetings a year plus the AGM. Currently individual trustees involve themselves in planning matters, fundraising and the general administration of the Charity.

We would hope any new trustee would help in some way, but how they might do so would be down to them.

In the event of a financial meltdown, an individual trustee's liability is limited to £1 by our Articles. Thankfully there will be no such meltdown. After years of struggling to make ends meet, the Charity now has a business model that ensures future financial stability as evidenced by our 2022 Accounts.

If you would like to get involved or know someone who would, please contact us by email at info@cprenorthants.org.uk or by letter to CPRE Northamptonshire, The Wheatsheaf, Spring Hill Farm, Harborough Road, Pitsford, Northampton, NN6 9AA. If you would prefer an informal chat, feel free to call me on 07775 825937.

Shout from the Rooftops

- Brian Skittrall

Delivering a Common Sense Solar Revolution

I have been busy dealing with a number of applications and appeals for solar farms in the Northamptonshire countryside and a common question that comes up is "Why aren't there



solar panels all over the enormous warehouses that are being built, instead of covering the countryside with them?" The answer is that developers are not required to do so

because government has not created planning policies to make it happen. This is clearly wasteful and causing us to lose twice as much countryside as necessary and in many cases very productive agricultural land.

This has not gone unnoticed by CPRE and for some time I have been participating in national task groups to find better ways of delivering renewable energy without such a high cost to rural communities and the countryside. On 23 May we published a report produced for us by University College London which shows that an enormous opportunity is being missed. At least 40-50GW of the 2035 70GW target for solar PV could be delivered on rooftops, saving vast swathes of the countryside from industrialisation. Up to 117GW could be installed by 2050, saving an area of countryside larger than Greater London.

What is particularly frustrating is that one of the UK's greatest risks from climate change is lack of food security, yet many panels are being installed on good agricultural land. The war in Ukraine has finally convinced the government that we cannot rely on being able to import so much of our food from other countries indefinitely, so perhaps they will finally wake up to the need to protect agricultural land from unnecessary development.

If we are to protect ourselves from the impacts of climate change while meeting our net zero commitment, it is vital that we do not miss this opportunity to protect food production and the countryside.

You will find links to the full CPRE report and an executive summary on our home page lead article Rooftop Renewables at <https://www.cprenorthants.org.uk>, together with a link to the CPRE petition.

In the March edition of Outlook we talked about Forceleap Farm's history and vision for the future. We were so inspired by Alice Townsend's vision for her farm that a group of CPRE members visited Forceleap Farm on 11 May 2023.

Forceleap Farm's Continuing Story

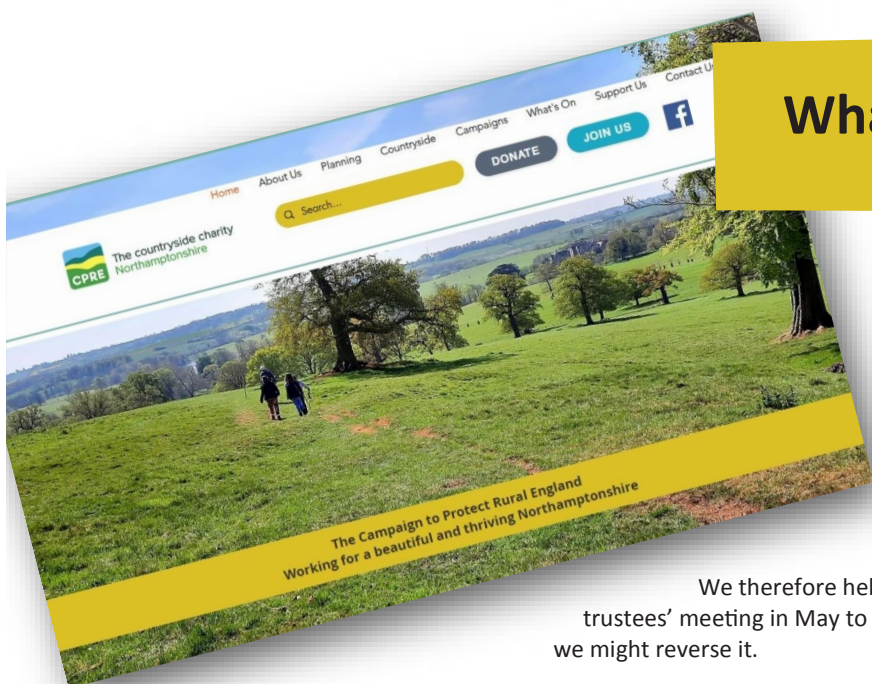
The farm is well signposted and easy to find and entry into the central farmyard reveals the clean stylish development that has been achieved so far. The Farmyard will provide a home for small businesses and act as a conference centre when required. It caters admirably for the modern trend towards home working where conference facilities are only required on demand. It is an extremely pleasant environment in which to work.

We were joined by Alice Townsend who talked us through

the story of Phase 1 development and how the vision of helping people reconnect with the local countryside was coming along. Alice was informative and engaging. She showed us how the removal of farm subsidies currently under way would cause a gap in farming income and how Forceleap Farm was proactively filling that gap. It was a salutary thought that this change was impacting all farms in the UK. How many of them are tackling the problem with the determination and intelligence of Forceleap? Questions from CPRE members were indicative of how concerned we all are with the current situation and our readiness to help

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Like most campaigning charities, CPRE depends on membership numbers to give it lobbying clout and membership subscriptions to help it pay its way. For several years now, CPRE has been losing members at a faster rate than it can attract them – in the longer term an unsustainable situation. While CPRE Northamptonshire has done rather better than most branches, we are not immune from the national trend.

We therefore held a trustees' meeting in May to see how we might reverse it.

Several years ago, CPRE nationally undertook a fundamental rebranding exercise and, as a result, changed its name from *The Campaign to Protect Rural England* to *CPRE The countryside charity*. The aim (we must assume) was to present CPRE as an organisation interested in all aspects of the countryside, in truth a change of emphasis rather than of direction. For evidence of this change, you need only visit its website or read its magazine *Countryside Voices* – both quite intentionally stress CPRE's concerns

What's in a Name? – Robin Jones

Rather a lot in our opinion

across a whole range of countryside matters.

While your trustees are well aware that CPRE still has a very strong interest in planning and development matters, we wonder if members, actual and potential, appreciate this. Do they perhaps think that we have taken our eyes off that particular ball? Is that one of the reasons why nationally and locally we are losing members? We therefore decided at our meeting to make absolutely certain that nobody could doubt what we at county level are about. You will see more references to The Campaign to Protect Rural England in our communications, whatever the media. We remain interested in all countryside matters and in climate change, but, be in no doubt, our main emphasis locally, our unique selling point, remains planning.

Whether it be badly sited warehouses, intrusive or ugly building development or cuts in rural services, we will be there fighting our (and your) corner. We hope we can count on your support to help us do so.

2 and support as best we can.

We were then transported into the surrounding farmland where Alice pointed out the various initiatives she was making to widen biodiversity and allow natural rewilding.

The weather stayed dry while we walked through the areas of rewilding, all the time being guided by Alice with a detailed explanation of what was happening and why.

On returning to the central Farmyard, we sheltered from the rainstorm that had been threatening us during our walk in one of the operational barns whilst Alice concluded her guided tour.

Refreshments and snacks were provided back in the central area with an opportunity to discuss what we had seen with fellow members and the staff of Forceleap Farm.

We said our goodbyes and wished Alice and her team every success for the future. Forceleap Farm opens its doors to the public regularly and it is highly recommended as a family day out.

Take a look at the website for further details: <https://www.Forceleapfarm.com>

– Graham Ferrie



1st Quarter Draw

First Prize £50: Jonathan Charlton-Jones

Second Prize £40: Sir Paul Hayter

Third Prize £30: Peter Hopkins

2nd Quarter Draw

First Prize £50: Susan Stevens

Second Prize £40: Brian Smith

Third Prize £30: Daphne Flavell

Science and Sustainability down on the Farm

- Ian Matts

We live in a largely rural county but how much do we actually know about modern farming? Speaking for ourselves, not a lot, so on a Farm Open Day we asked Ian Matts, MD of Brixworth Farming, to write an article on the subject. Below Ian explains how he farms the 2,250 hectares (5,560 acres) for which he is responsible.

Brixworth Farming is a joint venture arable farm management and contracting company in Northamptonshire. Combinable crops are grown for the market to deliver higher returns to the shareholder farming businesses and to the third-party contracting clients.

Economies of scale are achieved by pooling skilled labour and machinery costs and employing common risk management and grain marketing strategies, whilst making best use of precision farming and other scientific advances in agronomy to minimise unit costs of production.

Cropping decisions are based on a combination of soil type, end market requirements and agronomic benefits, paying particular regard to the management of key pests, weeds and diseases. The arable operations are carried out with particular focus on two key areas – maintenance/build-up of organic matter and blackgrass control. These are key elements of economically sustainable arable production and land management.



No, it doesn't fly, it's a tractor!

Alongside economic sustainability, the business and its shareholders are also very concerned about environmental sustainability. The four farms that form Brixworth Farming have all previously and are currently entered into some form of environmental scheme, be it ELS/HLS (Entry/Higher Level Stewardship) or CSS (Countryside Stewardship Scheme) and more recently SFI (Sustainable Farming Incentive). As well as this, seven years ago we joined LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming), an organisation aimed at improving farming's

environmental standards. As a result, we have strengthened our existing integrated farm management practices with the aim of utilising the best of modern technology and traditional methods to farm in a way that enriches the environment and engages local communities.

Whilst stewardship is an important part of the shareholders' businesses, there has also been an increasing focus on environmental farming practices over the last seven years. This has been driven by the desire to control blackgrass and has resulted in a move away from the reliance on chemistry and



towards working with biology to improve the health of the soil. Cover crops were introduced ahead of spring crops in 2016, whilst catch crops have been explored over the last three years, and companion crops have become an important part of establishing oilseed rape. For readers unfamiliar with these crop descriptions, cover crops are not for harvesting but intended to improve soil quality, catch crops are fast-growing crops grown between successive plantings of the main crop, and companion crops are grown with the main crop to assist pest control. Ploughing has not formed part of the crop establishment methodology for some time (except in exceptional circumstances) and this has moved further towards a reduction in cultivation (utilising catch crops as well) and direct drilling when ground conditions are suitable.

As a business we manage nutrient levels carefully to avoid overapplication, mapping fields for phosphate and potash every four years through precision sampling using satellite technology. We target biennial applications to areas with the highest demand, helping to reduce the amount of phosphate and potash applied. We use the Yara N-Sensor to variably apply nitrogen to the crop according to its requirement. This helps to maximise nitrogen use efficiency at the same time as minimising the environmental impact from excess applications and helping to improve yields.

So virtually no ploughing, no uprooting of hedges, no indiscriminate use of fertilisers! Readers of Shredded Wheat packets will know that Nestlé works in partnership with Brixworth Farming largely because of its adoption of regenerative farming practices. "Better farming, better countryside" as their strapline goes.

A New Chairman



Having been without a chairman since Paul Parsons resigned the post at the end of December 2022, trustees elected Geoff Carverhill to fill the vacancy on 9 June. Geoff joined us as a trustee in January 2022, but because of other commitments was unable to take over when Paul decided to stand down.

Geoff's main interest is planning as readers of Outlook familiar with his trenchant articles on the Towcester warehouse developments will know well. He took a very active part in our recent Planning Roadshow delivering, his opinions in a forthright but humorous way. Geoff sees his role as extending over all aspects of the CPRE Northamptonshire operation. He aims to sharpen our image to make us more attractive to potential new members but also to leave local planners and developers in no doubt that, without being unnecessarily confrontational, we are a force to be reckoned with.

Geoff will be standing for re-election at August's AGM (see insert) and, if successful, will use the next issue of Outlook to explain more fully his hopes and fears for the county and the part CPRE Northamptonshire will play in shaping its future.

Successful Planning Roadshow

- Robin Jones

Great Houghton Village Hall was the venue for the first of this year's two planning roadshows. Over 30 members from all corners of the county attended despite the relatively late notice, obviously attracted by the subject ***Are Changes to our Planning System passing you by?***

Introduced by our new chairman

demonstrating the opposite. Issues raised covered a broad range of subjects – self builds, rooftop renewables, lack of clear policy on tourism, how to ensure good building design, the implications of Neighbourhood Priority Statements and the proposed Community Infrastructure Levy, and many



Geoff Carverhill, Lizzie Bundred Woodward from CPRE National Office conducted her audience on a whistlestop tour of developments in planning over the last year or two. Given the U-turns, changes of emphasis and at times ill-defined announcements of policy we have seen, she did an excellent job. Member parish and town councils will already have received her presentation and associated notes by email. With legislation still in the melting pot, things may well have changed since!

There followed a very stimulating Q&A session during which Lizzie dealt very effectively with questions from the audience – often confessing ignorance of particular areas and then

more. What was always in evidence was attendees' determination to fight for what is best for our county despite the many frustrations they encounter on the way.

The organisers learned some lessons during the evening. We will for instance be investing in some form of amplification in time for our next roadshow. The latter will be held later this year and is likely to take place in West Northamptonshire. If it is as successful as June's event, we will be well pleased.

A copy of the presentation can be accessed at cprenorthants.org.uk by clicking on the Planning Roadshow link on the home page.

Strategic Plans and Core Spatial Strategy Options - Alan Mayes

Back in the latter part of 2021 and early 2022 CPRE Northamptonshire responded to the Core Spatial Strategy Options for both North and West Northamptonshire Councils. To date no further public consultations have been issued and we eagerly await our opportunity to engage once again at a strategic planning level. As we have stressed before, it is at this level that significant policy decisions and land allocations are made which will affect our towns and countryside for at least the next ten years. Once confirmed, all Local Plan documents and Neighbourhood Plans must conform to the Spatial Strategy.

With changes due to the National Planning Policy Framework which could include management development plans imposed at government level, planning departments will be reluctant to embark on further rounds of consultation until the planning system has settled down. These uncertainties were highlighted by our speaker at the last CPRE Planning Roadshow. CPRE Northamptonshire will however monitor the situation in both unitary authorities and send circulars as necessary to parish councils updating and alerting them to forthcoming consultations.

Yardley Arts CIC

- Geoff Carverhill

One of the recipients of the 2023 CPRE Northamptonshire Community Awards as 'Highly Commended' was Yardley Arts, a Community Interest Company based in the village of Yardley Hastings. Established in 2017, with the aim of promoting and supporting the arts as a not-for-profit social enterprise, Yardley Arts' objective has been to improve the lives and wellbeing of rural communities through the development and co-ordination of activities to encourage co-operation, address social inclusion and rural isolation through the arts.

They are at the old school in Yardley Hastings, a building which is part of the Compton Estate at Castle Ashby. It was renovated to a very high standard, with financial and practical assistance from Compton Estate Management. Grant funding was secured in order to provide



improvements to the inside, such as heating, acoustic baffles and a versatile picture hanging system.

The steering committee comprises experienced

artists, art curators, art historians and art educators with connections to the neighbouring communities, all enthusiastically dedicated to supporting artists with abilities at all levels. The chair is Simon Barter; other members include two of the original directors: artist and programme manager Polly Parrish and Richard Artus, whose company provides in-kind services in accounting and website management. A community of volunteers has been developed, who contribute specialist and practical skills and are active in the day-to-day management. Jane, Marcus, Sally and Peggy are the current team, alongside the committee who all volunteer time and expertise, and others who assist with events and exhibitions. To deliver the year-round programme of arts activities, Yardley Arts collaborates with art organisations and individuals and has professional administration services.

Art classes and workshops run by Yardley Arts' team of qualified artists and tutors are often oversubscribed, demonstrating the popularity of the programme of classes and events on offer. Exhibitions are also a feature of Yardley Arts' diverse calendar, which includes hosting Northamptonshire Open Studios.

The success of Yardley Arts has been achieved through the vision and professionalism of its founders, trustees and volunteers, to provide a dedicated focal point for the arts in this part of rural Northamptonshire.

Your Chance to Help Celebrate Good Design

- Alan Mayes

In March this year, we celebrated the 300th anniversary of the death of Christopher Wren, probably the best known English architect. St Paul's Cathedral, the Royal Hospitals at Greenwich and Chelsea and Hampton Court Palace are amongst his most memorable buildings and ones which we now celebrate as icons of good design. So what constitutes good design? The lasting qualities of those buildings by Wren are probably one indicator. Recent government consultations have stressed the need to improve our environment by creating "beautiful" buildings. Beauty, however, if we refer to the old saying, is in the eye of the beholder. Today architects spend up to five years studying all aspects of building design before they can practise as such.

To ensure the government's desire to improve our surroundings is met, there will be a need for planning departments to ensure that they have suitably qualified staff with architectural training, to give advice on design when planning applications are being processed.

We are once again asking CPRE members to put forward their nominations for the CPRE Town & Country Awards. An entry form setting out the categories was included with the last copy of Outlook. They include new buildings, restoration projects and environmental improvements that do not necessarily include buildings. All projects must have been completed within the last five years or, if older, be well maintained and continue to meet their purpose.

When you are travelling around Northamptonshire this summer, please keep a lookout for your favourite new building or restoration project and send in an entry form. If you need a copy of the entry form, please go to our website at cprenorthants.org.uk, select What's On and click on the nomination form link. Alternatively, you can contact me at alanmayes123@gmail.com with questions, or indeed to submit an entry.