



The countryside charity
Northamptonshire

OUTLOOK

Autumn 2025



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1 Chairman's Update

All of sudden... it's Autumn! Well, the weather has cooled down somewhat and it has actually started to rain!

As you read this, our new-look website will have gone live, aimed at giving members and the public a clearer understanding of planning matters, a new and hopefully useful resources section, as well as relevant up to date news from our social media feeds.

Our activities at CPRE Northamptonshire have been as busy as ever, and our volunteers and trustees have displayed just how valuable their contributions are to helping the Northamptonshire countryside and its rural communities thrive. Since our last newsletter, we have been reminded of the important role volunteers have in our organisation with the sad passing of two of our stalwart volunteers, who over a long period of time helped to make CPRE Northamptonshire what it is today. Peter Hopkins was key volunteer and trustee for many years, who died in March and Sally Hanrahan, who worked as our Outreach and Education officer, died in July. Trustee Alan Mayes has written about their contributions to CPRE.

Geoff Carverhill

② CPRE Community Awards Showcase 2026

Next year is CPRE's centenary, and to help celebrate that milestone, we will be holding a joint CPRE Northamptonshire Community Awards Showcase in conjunction with Northants ACRE and Northamptonshire Community Foundation. It will take place next Spring at Northants ACRE premises at Hunsbury Hill.

We will focus particularly on the work of volunteer-run community larders. In our Spring 2024 edition of Outlook, we profiled one of the many community larders and rural support centres that have been set up in different parts of the county. The success of the community larder scheme has come about in no small part due to the efforts of committed volunteers, whose efforts have been recognised by county-wide support networks and initiatives.



Katie Steele of Towcester Community Larder (Geoff Carverhill)

Two of the largest community larders will be represented by Karen Pollard from Woodford Halse and Katie Steele from Towcester, who will be giving their overview of how the day-to-day running of these impressive enterprises works. We will also hear from Miranda Wixon DL, who has provided support for community larders through her contact with other local charitable organisations. We are also hoping that some past winners of the Community Awards will be present, who will be able to pass on their experiences of running a volunteer-run community initiative.



The SNVB Towcester Community Larder Team (Geoff Carverhill)

③ Peter Hopkins and Sally Hanrahan

It is with much sadness that we were given the news that **Peter Hopkins** had died in March of this year.

He had been a loyal supporter of CPRE and made consistent and valuable contributions to the organisation for many years. Peter initially volunteered as a Technical Secretary but it soon became evident that his skills were far broader than dealing with planning issues. He soon became part of the Executive team helping to run CPRE Northamptonshire.



Peter Hopkins with his dog Bing

Peter was Vice Chair of the branch for many years and also Secretary. His administrative skills were second to none and nothing was ever too much trouble for Peter to sort out. For many years he also supervised the litter picking awards which were sought after by local litter picking groups and schools in the county. Many of the Planning Roadshows were fronted by Peter. His superb communication and publicity skills always ensured that events were properly promoted. Peter had developed an exceptional and unique skill for managing and handling all enquiries from the public, and his quiet and friendly approach in all his dealings ensured matters were always dealt with correctly, and in a timely manner.

Peter's kindness, personality and ability to see the bigger picture in all of his handling with CPRE will be very sadly missed. Our condolences to his family.

Alan Mayes and Geoff Carverhill



James Moulton and Sally Hanrahan at a CPRE event in November 2009

As a main stay of our administration team for many years, **Sally Hanrahan** became an integral part of CPRE Northamptonshire. She sadly passed away in July.

Sally was initially employed by CPRE Northamptonshire as part of a National Office initiative but soon became established as CPRE Northamptonshire Outreach and Education officer. Sally's friendly and outgoing personality endeared her to members and supporters alike, many of whom will remember her at a wide range of CPRE events in the county. For many years she was responsible for organising CPRE summer parties at a variety of venues with meticulous planning. She was also responsible for establishing the Planning Roadshow as an annual event in the CPRE calendar

Her wide ranging skills established a strong link between CPRE and the Northamptonshire Food Awards. Sally also played a key role in hosting the Technical Secretaries meetings in her home for many years - always offering a warm welcome to everyone. There were many happy CPRE events over the years at which Sally's presence will be remembered. Many tributes were paid to her life at a Memorial Service held at Holcot Church, where the congregation overflowed into the churchyard and at which CPRE members who knew Sally paid their respects and offered condolences to her husband Adrian and family.

Alan Mayes



Thrapston Lakes (Suzanne Bowen)

④ Has the government chosen heating over eating?

Brian Skittrall examines the potential effects of recent government consultation on land use

In the 'cost of living crisis' the political rallying cry was that we were being forced to choose between heating and eating. It seems that the government is sleepwalking into the situation where they have made the choice for us. Their drive to meet their accelerated net zero target for electricity generation means that they are putting our food security at risk – one of the few identified risks from climate change that we can actually address at a national level.

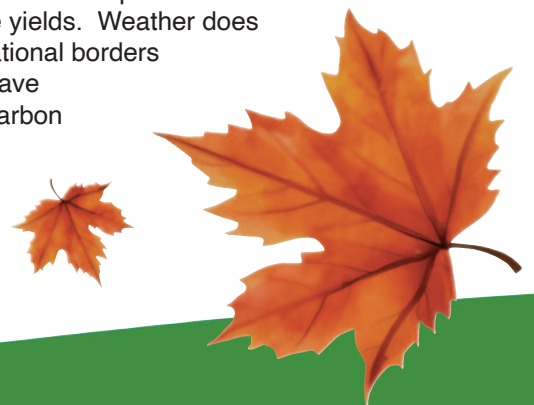
Only last summer Natural England warned the government that our self-sufficiency in food had fallen to the lowest level since records began and that a further decline in food production would be "*unavoidable*" under climate change mitigation measures. You might think that this would have resulted in measures to improve our food security especially after seeing the impact of the Ukraine war on world grain supplies. Instead the government has removed the protection of our most productive (Best and Most Versatile) land from the National Planning Policy Framework. This is the very land that has to be retained if we are going to feed ourselves.

The recent Land Use Consultation continues to fail to value food production. It proposes to take 9% of our agricultural land out of production to use for purposes such as solar farms, rewilding, tree planting and house building. No other type of land was proposed to be repurposed – just the land that feeds us.

The consultation suggested that we need not worry about our food security because the farming industry would be able to maintain current levels of food production by increasing efficiency. Although this has historically been the case, it was achieved by farming more intensively using copious amounts of inputs such as pesticides and fertilizers – the very inputs that farmers are being asked to reduce in order to become carbon neutral and to increase biodiversity.

To further weaken this argument, the new family farm inheritance tax discourages farmers from investing in the very expensive equipment that could help them improve efficiency because its value would be subject to 20% tax.

A further blow to this piece of wishful thinking is that climate change is already causing changed weather patterns that are already adversely impacting upon food production. The prolonged periods of rain or drought and more frequent severe storms reduce yields. Weather does not respect national borders because we have reduced our carbon emissions.



The final nail in the coffin is an unintended consequence of the well-meaning measure within the planning system that requires developers to demonstrate a biodiversity net gain as a result of their development. While laudable in its own right, it encourages developers to choose sites with low biodiversity and so pins a target on land that is intensively farmed which, by necessity, is predominantly a monoculture.

Britain alone cannot turn back climate change and despite our efforts globally emissions are still rising. We need to pay much more attention to surviving the inevitable changes and not laser focus solely on reducing emissions to the exclusion of all else.

⑤ The Planning and Infrastructure Bill 2025 (PIB25)

On 9th July we saw, soon after PIB25 was passed by the House of Commons, a dramatic about turn in the approach taken by North Northamptonshire Council for the hybrid logistics planning application on land adjacent to Haldens Parkway at Thrapston. Was this really the result of structured thinking or was it a knee jerk reaction to PIB25?

But hang on a minute. It isn't law yet. At the time of writing (September 2025) the bill is in committee stage undergoing line by line examination by the House of Lords. It has some way to go before it is given Royal Assent and becomes Law.

As Paul Tucker KC, who has been a very vocal advocate of change to the planning system, stated in a blog in March 2025, *"PIB25 is probably the most significant piece of legislation introduced in Parliament for a number of years. Introduced for its first reading on 11th March 2025 by [the previous Deputy Leader of the Labour Party and Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government,] Angela Rayner, with the express intention to create the biggest building boom in a generation and it aims to address some of the well-recognised problems in the planning system."*

Will PIB25 do what it is intended to do? Is it that the well-recognised problems in the planning system are the blockers of development and growth? Are these blockers the people who live in the development area who value their countryside and are prepared to stand up to remote faceless developers whose main motivation is profit maximisation regardless of consequence? If so what PIB25 represents is sweeping reform that undermines the democracy that has been fought for in planning law since 1947.

The economics of the UK are in a mess at the moment. Debt is high at £2.7trillion (about 100% of GDP) and annual deficit of about £50 to £60 billion is difficult to control within the politics of the current government. Historically, growth has saved economics from this scenario but since the financial crash of 2008 the best brains in the treasury have not been able to move the dial on growth. Removing perceived obstacles in the building of houses, speculative warehouses or solar panels on good farmland is not new thinking. It hasn't worked since 2008 so why should it suddenly work now?

Most worrying is the desire to suppress the voice of the critics, the blockers as they are now described. Westminster knows best!

In Northamptonshire the planning process is in danger of becoming irrelevant. If the only answer to a planning application, no matter how damaging it is, is to say yes, the planning committees, given their mandate by the public, have no value.

The lived experience of CPRE members is that *"the gradual failure of the local planning process over the last two decades has resulted in the complete melt down of the planning system that we now suffer"* [Paul Tucker again]. PIB25 represents many important steps forward but the assault on democracy in planning must be opposed.

Graham Ferrie



Evenley Wood Garden - May 2011 (Peter Hopkins)

