



The countryside charity
Norfolk

Norfolk Voice

CPRE Norfolk's Newsletter | Autumn | 2020



Are you ready to take part in making a difference for our countryside?

Over the past 6 months, CPRE Norfolk has not stood still despite the challenges posed by the coronavirus emergency, but has embraced new ways to run meetings and kept vital work on track.

All our meetings are now held online including our AGM which took place via Zoom in August, and we are now working to refresh our website to bring a wealth of information to you.

We know how much we all need nature and the countryside and how it must not be taken for granted. We suggest some ways in this newsletter in which you may be able to help us directly over the months ahead.

Uppermost in our minds are changes to the planning legislation put forward by central government which pose a considerable threat to our countryside. Love or hate the planners, they have done a great job since 1947 of protecting our county from the worst ravages of development, and their contribution cannot be underestimated.

We are fortunate the planning system allows communities and groups like ourselves to have a say on every application. Can you imagine a situation where the system becomes developer led with the public effectively excluded from consultation on applications?

This could be the outcome of the proposals for change in the white paper, currently open for consultation - you can read it here:

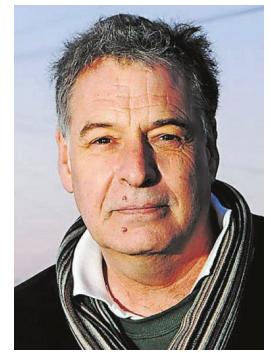
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/changes-to-the-current-planning-system>

We are working hard and submitting detailed comments, briefing MPs and holding meetings with senior ministers. But we need your help: register your views through the public consultation, and please write to your MP to make sure they do not support the changes.

Read more inside, and don't hesitate to get in touch about any of the stories in our newsletter.

Chris Dady, Chairman of CPRE Norfolk
chairman@cprenorfolk.org.uk

Why the Government's White Paper on planning is a recipe for disaster



The Town and Country Planning Act of 1947 was the bedrock on which Britain's modern planning system was built and arguably this system ranks alongside the formation of the NHS as one of the greatest achievements of post war Britain. It has restricted ribbon development and urban sprawl and in so doing protected large tracts of countryside from being swallowed up by suburbia.

We should all justifiably be proud of the benefits that planning has delivered. Not so in the case of the current government, their recently published White Paper: Planning for the Future proposes drastic changes that will decimate our planning rules.

There is an immense democratic deficit in the government's proposals. At the moment it is possible for anyone to comment on development proposals at all stages of the planning process including when local plans are formulated and when planning applications are made. This will change for residents who discover that they are living in one of the new Growth Zones. Here, developments, as long as they conform to central government guidelines, will be granted automatic planning permission. The same automatic permission could also apply to developments proposed in areas defined as Renewal Zones. A large proportion of the public will therefore lose its right to comment on individual planning applications. People living in Growth and Renewal areas will only be consulted during the period when their planning authority is preparing its local plan.



CPRE knows that most people do not engage in these kinds of consultations and that they only become involved when there is a local threat posed by a controversial planning application. The proposed legislation will rob many of their chance to do this.

To justify the legislation the government complains that the planning system needs to be streamlined and that the whole process takes up far too much time.

Certainly democracy can be clunky and slow but it is still preferable to a Chinese style system where developments can be "forced through" because no opposition is allowed.

More stringent controls would still apply to Protected Areas, including green belts, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, conservation areas, wildlife sites and areas of open countryside that are not part of Growth or Renewal Zones. In Norfolk most of our countryside falls in to the category of open countryside and is generally well protected under the current system. The worry is that the "Build, Build, Build" agenda will lead to significant areas of Open Countryside being classed as Growth or Renewal Zones and therefore sacrificed to development.

There is so much more to criticise about the White Paper including its failure to effectively address affordable housing need and its disregard of the major contribution that the countryside provides to the health and well being of the British people during the Covid-19 pandemic. More than ever people value this wonderful asset.

The White Paper should be providing a greater level of protection for the countryside and not indulging itself in "planner bashing". Local planners have done their bit. It is not their fault that sites they have allocated for more than 30,000 houses in the Greater Norwich Plan area remain undeveloped.

David Hook (Chair of Vision for Norfolk Committee) Autumn 2020

this article first appeared in the EDP:

<https://www.edp24.co.uk/features/opinion-government-s-white-paper-on-future-of-planning-is-a-recipe-for-disaster-1-6815885>

You can comment on the White Paper here:

www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-for-the-future

And sign CPRE's petition resisting the proposals here:

<https://takeaction.cpre.org.uk/page/66589/petition/1>

Should the Northern Distributor Road be linked to the A47?

The Northern Distributor Road was built to allow houses to be built in the 'growth triangle' to the North East of Norwich, and not as a bypass to the north of Norwich. This avoided the need to build a road through one of our most sensitive chalk river valleys. In fact the Wensum Valley is not only an area of Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) but also a Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

The impact of ending the road, now called Broadland Northway, at the Fakenham Road has led to an inevitable and predicted impact on communities between the end of that road and the A47. No provision was made to help alleviate the traffic impacts in the valley leading to extensive rat running. When the road was built there should have been a new transport strategy created, but this has not happened.

Some people will favour the completion of the road arguing that the damage has already been done. You can understand the communities view if they see the road as removing the issue caused by the building of Broadland Way North. At the same time, it is devastating that a situation has been allowed to occur that threatens an internationally treasured environment, and others will consider that too high a price to pay.

We believe Norfolk County Council should complete a proper transport strategy, and look at options to mitigate the impact of traffic using the valley with alternatives looked at as to how issues can be addressed without building the link. In that way, we may be able to avoid this environmental catastrophe.

Climate change means we must change our approach to roads. Currently there is no difference in transport thinking since the 1950s, but we must bring this forwards by 70 years if we want a planet that remains habitable in the the lifetime of children living today. At the moment we fall far short of taking responsibility for an issue we inherited, but it is now critical we do so.

Read our policy statement on the Norwich Western Link here: <http://www.cprenorfolk.org.uk/planning/policy-statements/norwich-western-link/>



How you can help

Wind Energy - what do you think?

We have campaigned against large onshore wind turbines in sensitive areas including in landscape settings, near historic buildings and close to communities. We are pressing the government to consider an offshore ring main to avoid vast tracts of Norfolk being dug up with large trenches and buildings for every new offshore proposal. But we agree the generation of green energy is vital for our future.

The government ended support for onshore installations after a public outcry, but they will be reintroducing subsidies for these next year. We believe Norfolk does not have the capacity to accommodate extensive onshore wind turbine developments, but communities could consider a small scale (up to 40 metres high) turbine that directly benefits the local community. At present this would be via a financial payment as power is generated - our grid is not geared up for local power networks.

Let us know at info@cprenorfolk.org.uk what you think.

Don't Buy Peat!

When our ancestors dug peat from the ground for fuel there were two outcomes - the creation of the Norfolk Broads and a release of carbon into our atmosphere. The latter did not matter then, but every time we disturb our peat bogs and extensive peatlands today we are accelerating climate change.

We would like to see areas of peat returned to their natural wet state, and it is absolutely imperative that nobody purchases any garden compost that contains peat. Alternatives are readily available and Kew Gardens has not used any peat products for the last 30 years.

Today It is estimated in the UK peatlands store over 3 billion tonnes of carbon, the equivalent to that stored in all the forests of the UK, France and Germany combined. If we restore our peat bogs this would increase dramatically as potentially only 20% of our peat areas are now undisturbed.

Enjoy an Apple?

Norfolk was once famous for its orchards - we even had a major cider producer, Gaymer's, in our county. But most of these traditional orchards that did so much for wildlife and the landscape have gone.

There is a project to record past and present orchards and they are looking for volunteers to help them make sure they are all recorded - if you wish to volunteer they will send you a parish map and a simple form to complete.

Full details at <https://www.uea.ac.uk/orchards-east/home>



Parish Council Membership of CPRE brings many benefits

The image of a parish council in the 1930s may well have been the local squire as Chairman, with a local businessman or two, but fortunately things have moved on. In fact, parish councils now represent one of the strongest forces we have to help to protect the things that make our county unique, whilst encouraging local enterprise.

You may not know that your parish council can join CPRE for £36 per year, and for that we give them information that they can use (if they wish) to respond to consultations and planning applications. Many parish councils have joined our alliance to campaign for existing building sites to be developed before more new countryside sites are released.

At present we have local plans being drawn up by district councils, and a major consultation for changes to planning. Together we can reinforce a message that our countryside must be protected and our communities need to be properly involved in decision making. In this way we can ensure the people in Norfolk have jobs and affordable houses, access to the countryside and a county that is economically sound as well as beautiful.

Please ask your parish council to join us, if they have not joined already. Contact info@cprenorfolk.org.uk to find out more.



A young visitor to the Wells and Walsingham Light Railway
(c) www.wwlr.co.uk

Don't forget that as a CPRE Norfolk member, you and your family can enjoy discounted entry to 7 visitor attractions, one of which is the Wells and Walsingham Light Railway - the world's smallest public railway - which offers half price travel for CPRE members.

Trains are now COVID-19 safe and running as far as Wighton Halt, on the hour, with the last train at 4pm. The railway hopes to extend the service with trains through to Walsingham in September: more details on the website: www.wwlr.co.uk

CPRE Norfolk members enjoy discounts to a number of visitor attractions :

Wells and Walsingham Light Railway
Stody Lodge Gardens
Raveningham Gardens
Plantation Garden

Mannington Estate
Holkham Hall
Fairhaven Woodland Garden

More details at www.cprenorfolk.org.uk

Ben Burgess relocation

As many will know, Ben Burgess, the agricultural machinery supplier, has outgrown its current location off Europa Way close to County Hall. Thankfully, the Joint Core Strategy for Greater Norwich, along with the emerging GNLP (Greater Norwich Local Plan) has many and varied sites allocated for employment and industrial use, so it should be relatively straightforward for the company to move to one of these areas, which have been designated for such use because of their safe and easy links to the local highway network, would not cause disproportionate harm to landscape, environment or heritage assets, and have gone through a long consultation process.

However, this has not been the case as Ben Burgess has instead been trying to move to a green field countryside site just outside the village of Swainsthorpe next to the A140, which is not designated for such use. It would appear that the reason for this is largely financial as the land was purchased some years ago by the company at presumably agricultural prices, which makes that site a much cheaper option than paying to go to an allocated site owned by a third party.

This raises a huge issue for the location of large businesses such as Ben Burgess : should they have to follow local and national planning guidance?

Planning law and guidance is there to give some degree of certainty to everyone, to ensure development of the right type is permitted in the right places, and that valued aspects of our environment, landscape and heritage are offered at least a degree of protection. It is through measures such as this that Britain, despite a relatively high population density, has managed to maintain much of its identity and charm.

This application could well be something of a test case for the region: if it is permitted then who knows what will follow. Ribbon development along our major roads, over-bearing buildings and infrastructure in rural areas and ever-increasing congestion are some of the prices that may have to be paid. It is so disappointing that some of the lessons from lockdown have apparently already been forgotten. Instead of doing more to ensure that our well-being is enhanced through appreciation of our tranquil landscapes and green areas, there is an immediate drive to “build build build”, with little or no concern for that which is dear to most residents and visitors alike.

Michael Rayner, Planning Consultant, CPRE Norfolk



Win with us!

Join the CPRE Norfolk 100 Club for the chance to win great cash prizes from £15 to £75 and help us raise funds! Each share in the 100 club costs just £12 annually and there is no limit to the number of shares you can buy. Winners this June were: £75 to the Pulham Market Society; £50 to Mrs Deborah Hyslop; £25 to Mr A G H Colman; £25 to Mrs Bridget Yates and £15 to Mr B Taylor. Our lottery is fully licensed, and shares make great gifts for friends and family. Contact info@cprenorfolk.org.uk for more details.

The Brecks - National Park?

The Hobhouse Report (1947) which led to the creation of the first UK National Parks recognised the importance and coherence of the Brecklands (or Brecks), as this was one of the 52 landscapes recommended to become conservation areas. While the importance of the landscape, ecology and biodiversity of the Brecks are recognised in the many and various designations across the area, there is no over-arching designation which would give this unique, distinct and precious area the recognition and potential for better coordinated management and access it surely merits.

The distinctive nature of the Brecks, along with a summary of its biodiversity and current ecological designations, is most clearly explained in the Brecks Landscape Character Assessment (LCA,) carried out as part of the 'Breaking New Ground' project. It seems logical that the core Brecks area is given National Park or AONB status, which would comprise these areas from the LCA: Brecks Arable Heathland Mosaic; Brecks Plantations; those River Valleys within the previous two areas.

The Brecks is an area where lowland heath and forest plantations provide the necessary level of natural beauty to merit designation. The landscape quality is high, with a combination of natural and man-made features. These include the 'pingos' formed by the periglacial climate, the acidic sandy heathland soils overlying chalk, large plantations and the distinctive 'brecks' or 'breaks', 'broken' from the heath where farming and rabbit warrening has created fields of an originally temporary nature, due to the poor soil quality.

The scenic quality of lowland heath and forest plantations gives a remote feel to large parts of the area. This contributes significantly to a feeling of 'wildness' where for large areas there are no major roads, and often no roads at all.

Housing density is very low once away from the more major settlements such as Thetford and Brandon.

Large tracts of the proposed area are under MoD management, which contributes further to the remoteness of much of the Brecks.

This remoteness and relative wildness help one to appreciate the tranquillity of the area, where stillness and calm can be experienced in the forest plantations and on much of the heathland, as well as being able to pick out natural sounds such as birdsong. In addition, the Brecks enjoys a significant band of dark skies as measured in the CPRE's 'Night Blight' project, adding further to the area's tranquillity.

The area has distinctive geology as noted above, largely with sand overlaying chalk, giving the distinctive Breckland heaths. In turn this, along with the climate, historic and modern land management and use, has helped create habitats for a range of distinctive and sometimes rare species of flora and fauna. These include providing the habitat for 65% of the UK's stone curlews, the nightjar and woodlark, plants such as the Breckland wormwood and prostrate perennial knawel, as well as 28% of the priority S41 species in the UK, while 72 species have their UK distribution limited to the Brecks.

The Brecks is largely unique due to its landscape and biodiversity, although it also benefits from a rich cultural heritage, which is also partly reflected in this landscape. The presence of flint beds within the underlying chalk led to the most extensive Neolithic flint mining area in the UK, along with use of flint as an important building material seen in vernacular, public and religious buildings. Built and archaeological features connected to warrening are to be found, as well as grander houses and associated parkland, such as Elveden Hall.

Hopefully, working in partnership with other stakeholders, moves towards an overarching designation for the unique Brecks can be progressed.

**Michael Rayner, Planning Consultant, CPRE
Norfolk**

Have you watched the Regeneration video?

CPRE has set out recommendations for the ways that the government can build a resilient countryside after the coronavirus pandemic. Watch the video here:

<https://t.co/mjCwMRJlfw?amp=1>



Coming up

Tree planting at Mannington Hall

We will be planting trees in November through the generosity of Lord and Lady Walpole, to commemorate three outstanding supporters of CPRE Norfolk who passed away over the last year: Maurice de Soissons; Martin Walton; and Paul Woolnough. The Coronavirus regulations have restricted numbers we can invite to the event, but if you knew Maurice, Martin or Paul and have any special thoughts or memories of them you'd like to share, please write to us at info@cprenorfolk.org.uk

CPRE Norfolk Awards 2021

We will be running our CPRE Norfolk Awards again next year. If you know of a suitable project which is a great example of protecting or improving the natural or built environment in Norfolk, please do enter. Entry forms will be available shortly - you can register your interest by writing to us at info@cprenorfolk.org.uk.

People

Rob Lodge

We said farewell and many thanks in August to our long-standing Vice Chair, Rob Lodge, who stepped down after 8 years with CPRE Norfolk.



Rob brought his experience and energy to the Finance Committee and also headed up initiatives to engage with young people, drawing on his background in education. Thank you Rob, for all you brought to our organisation: we send you every good wish for your future roles on secondary school governing bodies and an academy trust.

Faye LeBon

We are very pleased to announce the appointment of Ms Faye LeBon to the CPRE Trustee Board in August.



Faye serves as a parish clerk for Poringland and brings a wealth of experience in community governance and a passion for working at grass roots levels to stop the damage caused by climate change. Faye was keen to join CPRE having observed at first hand within her own community just how important the countryside became during the COVID lockdown.

Su Waldron

Su joined CPRE Norfolk in June to provide administrative support to the team. Su has lived in Norfolk for many years and really appreciates the beautiful countryside and wildlife we are so lucky to have in our midst. suwaldron@cprenorfolk.org.uk



Join in:
cprenorfolk.org.uk

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