



Green Corridors

By Chris Dady

The rural nature of our county has historically been reflected in our agriculturally based towns and city, and we continue to imagine that leafy nirvana.

But as agriculture has moved into a more industrialised process, and the local markets have become a thing of the past, the farming influence has diminished. Growing populations, many incomers seeking rural tranquility, and massive new developments have changed our towns and city into something unrecognisable from the past, and new developments look like they could be anywhere in the UK.

Whilst every district council must produce its own local plan, these are very focussed on development, with imposed housing targets requiring more and more land to be earmarked for building. In this rush, the retention of beneficial green spaces and connecting corridors has been overlooked, and we are losing the connection with the rural hinterland at an increasing pace.

A long running campaign for CPRE Norfolk has been to seek the establishment of a network of green pathways in and around Norwich. We consider this is the 11th hour to create a very overdue network, that can not only support wildlife, but can also provide safe cycle and walking opportunities for all, and can help address a key deprivation issue. The Ramblers Association has just issued its report about the benefit of footpaths, and have discovered increasing deprivation in terms of access to these. This is very true in Norwich itself. There has been a plethora of research about the benefits of people having the opportunity to exercise in green space, and if an infrastructure can be created that has connectivity it can encourage travel into and out of towns without the need for a car.

We would like to see such a network for all towns, however in Norwich another step can be taken. It is the only urban area in Norfolk that meets the criteria for a green corridor network to be protected for the long term through green belt legislation.

A Note from the Chair

There is a whole plethora of issues facing our county all seemingly unresolved, with many about the environment. It is a terrible shame when our environment is considered the elephant in the room. In many statements and plans there will be words about 'environmental sustainability', but these are always just that, words not actions. Until we properly embrace the environment within decision making in a fair and balanced way organisations like CPRE are vital in holding public and private organisations to account.

Our environment is often cited as the problem that prevents progress, and yet this is almost never the case. A shining example of this is the current moratorium on new planning consents being granted for large housing schemes due to 'nutrient neutrality', that is, the need for proper measures to be included to ensure our watercourses are not further polluted by that development. There are then calls to override the issue as it is preventing 'thousands of new houses', but is this the case? The fact is developers are not building very much at all at the moment due to a lack of demand and falling prices, and yet they have plenty of sites already with planning consent available to build. In fact, a perfect time to step back and properly plan for how we protect our fragile environment ready for the next house building boom.

A roads campaigner in Norfolk has been taken to task by an MP and a leader of a council over his attempt through the courts to force a much more holistic approach to considering the environmental impact of road schemes.

But how can such an approach be wrong in the light of the accelerating threat of poor air quality and climate change? We should always look at how the best use can be made of what we have already got, and properly plan our transport future, rather than relying on new schemes all of the time. We need our leaders to embrace these challenges, work with the expert campaigners, not turn them and every project into a battleground.

Breckland has its share of controversy too, with the potential for new housing developments to be challenged by the presence of stone curlews. This really is a classic case of the importance of our environment versus new development on virgin land. Hindsight is a wonderful thing, and my feeling is that when we look back at many of the schemes that have gone ahead regardless of environmental considerations it will be with regret that we did not work harder to take a less damaging approach.

We are in a time when household budgets are being challenged and there is slippage of net zero climate protection measures, the many organisations who work to bring balance and common sense to the continual demand for cash based growth at all costs. We can have our cake and eat it, but we need much more open and long term planning on many issues. Your support is even more important today, and I thank you for being a member of CPRE Norfolk as it is such an incredible help is our work to bring balance to all the issues being faced.



Chris Dady
Chair, CPRE Norfolk

Continued from page 1

Councils are nervous such a step would hinder its development ambitions, and threaten the supply of new housing. However, our own research concluded that with the right planning a green infrastructure plan would open up more rather than less opportunities, as well as significantly improving the environment for new and existing communities.

On this basis there can be no disadvantage in creating a green corridor network in every larger urban area in Norfolk, with Norwich being the the pioneer. With the slowing of house building, and the moratorium on granting planning consent on new schemes where there is a risk of water course pollution, now is the time for all councils to take another look at the greening of our towns and city.

Natural Flood Management

By Sandra Walmsley

Some of the greatest advances in public health were brought about by the Victorians. They established our system of sewage and safe drinking water.

I was reminded of this when last week, on holiday in Hampshire, I visited Twyford water mill. This magnificent Victorian mill pumped clean water from the chalk aquifer which underlies the county into the local water systems. The mill was sold in the 1970's when water was privatised. In order to make water companies attractive to investors, assets were sold off. Twyford mill was saved as a model of water extraction by a local entrepreneur and is now run by a team of enthusiastic volunteers, many of whom worked here before the sale. Water is still extracted from the aquifer. Of course, we are rarely conscious of the fact that all the water on earth now is the same water that the dinosaurs drank. All water on the planet is simply recycled. What happens to it in the cycle depends on natural ecosystems and human interventions.

That same week Michael Gove announced that he would be changing the requirements connected with nutrient neutrality. New houses will be allowed to continue to pollute the water. Another news item was that Southampton Water, the local water company, had released sewage into the internationally important chalk streams and rivers in dry weather. Water companies can discharge untreated sewage into rivers and the sea when there are storms, when water flows are so great, they cannot be contained by the existing water infrastructure. It is illegal to do so in dry weather.

Chris Packham appeared on the news, angry about the impact on wildlife. Southampton water apologised! Last year in England there were 300,000 sewage discharges. They are supposed to be the exception when the infrastructure cannot cope. Water was international news

that week too, as ferocious floods tore through central Greece killing people and destroying human built ways of life.

It is not just wildlife at risk here. This is not a story of nature versus people. One of the consequences of our climate crisis is that extreme weather events are becoming the norm, not the exception. Water companies are promising to reduce the sewage discharges. Here in Norfolk, Anglia Water have acknowledged that the practice of discharging sewage into water sources is outdated but is set to continue. Storm drains cannot cope, sewage can legally be discharged. The Environmental Protection Agency is taking legal action against the government.

On the other side of the climate picture, extreme heat and droughts don't just cause wildfires, they create dry, corridors to channel the excess rainfall as storms of rare ferocity pour along them. Roads and pavements and brick and concrete covered gardens add to the problem. Our water systems are out of control with greater stresses to come as the extreme weather events continue to increase. We are seeing floods where they have never been seen in living memory. Recent figures show sewage was pumped into Norfolk rivers for the equivalent of more than 1,000 days last year. In June this year, the hot dry weather was punctuated by heavy sudden downpours leading to flooding in Hunstanton and King's Lynn among other places.

Norwich Sea Scouts recently pulled together a meeting of interested groups, with Anglian Water and the Environment agency, regarding the sewage in the Wensum. Clearly it would be better if no sewage was discharged, but local groups are planning to help monitor the water quality. Citizen science is a vital part of protecting our environment. At least people will know when it is safe to swim and the sea scouts will be better protected.

We are not helpless. We are not just at the mercy of the water companies.

Continued overleaf



Photo - Kevin Jones, CPRE Norfolk Trustee

Natural flood management continued

Natural Flood Management (NFM) can slow the flow of water during peak rainfall events and can help reduce flooding to people and properties. We are now seeing the slowing down of the River Yare in Norwich due to the work of the Rivers Trust. Measures that can help ‘slow the flow’ include simple actions, such as tree planting on hillslopes and along watercourses to help intercept overland runoff. Other measures include allowing water to be stored temporarily in lower areas where the ground often sits wet. Leaky dams can be added to watercourses and ditches to physically hold water up behind them. Slowing these flow pathways benefits communities at risk of flooding. The aim of NFM is to work with natural processes at a catchment scale to help reduce flooding downstream, whilst also having an environmental benefit.

NFM won’t solve all flooding problems and would not be effective in the larger flood events that occur, but these measures can, when targeted throughout a river catchment area, work together to reduce flood risk. The more landowners that get involved, the greater the downstream impact becomes. Beavers are doing a great job in north Norfolk too!

A major initiative is planned for the broads where high river levels are becoming a problem. Proposed works will help marshes store more water in winter. This will encourage peat restoration in the long run, great carbon storage, as well as reducing flood risk.

Some communities are taking matters into their own hands using the same NFM approaches. Two Norfolk villages are already developing their own flood management strategies.

CPRE Norfolk are planning to bring together the various groups who might be involved in tackling water issues in the county.

We will be supporting communities to share experiences and learn about approaches they can take to tackling problems in their local areas as too often the agencies involved in water management work in separate silos. The issues are presented as nature versus people, as with nutrient neutrality. By working together, we hope that flooding, as a result of the climate crisis, can at least be limited and that would mean fewer sewage discharges too.

Norwich Western Link

CPRE Norfolk monitors Local Plans across the county and takes the opportunity to comment when consultations are held. We encourage members to do the same, as it is sadly often the case that local residents only become aware of intentions to build developments once a planning application is lodged and the notice appears on site. This is usually too late to affect a planning decision, if the proposed site has been allocated for development within a Local Plan. Therefore, it is more effective to comment when the Local Plan is being drawn up, either as individuals or through Parish or Town Councils. Across Norfolk each district, borough or city has its own Local Plan, with the Local Planning Authorities for Greater Norwich (Broadland, South Norfolk and Norwich) combining to form one Local Plan. Each Local Plan has its own timetable, so they tend to come up for review at different times, although this tends to be every five years.



Photo - Annie Spratt, Unsplash

The Housing Crisis

By Michael Rayner

CPRE Norfolk continues to have huge concerns about what many refer to as ‘the housing crisis’. These concerns have been highlighted by comments from politicians, such as Lisa Nandy (Lab.) saying that Labour will “back the builders, not the blockers”. In addition, comments by some local councillors from the major political parties show a lack of understanding of how new housing would be affected by a Green Belt for Norwich.

However, every Norfolk Local Planning Authority already has sites for thousands of houses already allocated within their Local Plans. The major reason for these houses not being built is due to the developers who have put forward these sites and then deciding to delay to build them. This “land-banking” of sites results in higher prices of houses and higher profits, while restricting the supply of new properties. Therefore, it is the builders who are, in effect, the blockers.

To illustrate this point the draft GNLP for Norwich, Broadland and South Norfolk includes sites for 31,452 homes (correct at April 2020) which had already been allocated for development in the previous and still current Local Plan, the Joint Core Strategy. Surely those sites should be built-out before additional sites are added?

There are additional reasons for delays in house-building in Norfolk, including: the nutrient neutrality issue for the Wensum and Broads catchments, high inflation leading to expensive building materials, and a shortage of workers in the building industry. In August, the Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, announced during a visit to a large housing estate under construction in Norfolk, that delays due to nutrient neutrality would no longer be necessary. Instead of the directive from Natural England preventing new permissions being granted in these areas, it would become guidance instead.

This did come with promises of more funding for Natural England and for mitigation measures, but there is real concern that more environmental protection for these sensitive waterways will no longer be as effective as before. As well as issues caused by the construction industry leading to nutrients entering water systems, there are additional concerns around pollution from agri-chemical run-off and sewage releases.

Both the Conservative and Labour parties focus on large national targets – 300,000 houses to be built every year. There are serious reasons to doubt the validity of this target. Sadly, there is little detail on what type of houses need to be built. CPRE Norfolk strongly supports the need for new social rented houses on brownfield sites where these exist. Rural communities need such truly affordable housing to enable local people to live close to family and workplaces, as well as to help villages thrive – they do not need large estates of ‘executive-style’ housing in unsustainable locations. Unfortunately, rural affordable housing is usually only built as a percentage of houses on applications of over 10 houses, or on ‘rural exception sites’ by housing associations. Even then the former can result in fewer affordable houses being built than initially agreed due to re-calculated viability studies, while the latter are usually funded in part through the provision of some market housing on the same sites.

Sadly, housing policy is not delivering the much-needed affordable homes for our rural population. Rather than blaming the planning system or objectors, politicians of all persuasions should be focused on how best to solve this problem rather than letting the big developers choose where and when new housing is built.



Photo - Matt Blake, Unsplash

Planning News

Local Plan Reviews

Estimated costs for the proposed new road have been rapidly increasing, with the price thought to be £400 million at the beginning of August 2023, from the earlier figure of £251 million. This massive hike in costs is largely due to inflation and long-term borrowing. It should also be remembered that Norfolk County Council needs to secure funding from central Government for 85% of the costs – a decision for which has been delayed for many months. Meanwhile, the Norfolk Wildlife Trust’s Dr. Charlotte Packman has been conducting further research into bat species, including the barbastelle bat super-colony in the area. This is adding to our knowledge of the richness of biodiversity in this part of the Wensum valley, which will aid the planning process if a planning application for the proposed road is submitted.



Photo - Sven Mieke, Unsplash

Norfolk New Towns?

At the present time no New Towns are allocated within any of the Local Plans across the county. However, sites have been proposed for New Towns (sometimes called garden towns or villages) in four locations. Three of these were put forward for the Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP) but none were taken forward at this time, although the GNLP authorities wanted to include a policy which would have paved the way for one or more of these new settlements when the Plan is reviewed. The Inspectors have called for this policy to be removed from the GNLP, but this is not to say that a new settlement proposal will not appear in the future. Indeed, plans are underway for one at Honingham Thorpe, with the initial proposals having been made public at a round of consultation events. In addition, a New Town has been proposed between Bintree, Billingford and North Elmham in Breckland, as part of the call for sites in their Local Plan Review, with another potential new settlement at Swanton Morley on the Robertson Barracks site, if and when that is given up by the military. This has resulted in large-scale objections to the concept of a new settlement in Breckland in the initial Issues & Options Consultation. CPRE Norfolk’s position is that no new settlement is needed in Norfolk, due to housing need being met through existing allocations within Local Plans, and then through development of available brownfield sites and the organic growth of existing settlements. In addition, new towns are unlikely to address the real need for housing, particularly in rural areas, where truly affordable housing is required.

Norwich to Tilbury

The original East Anglia GREEN project to construct a new line of electricity pylons through South Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex has been renamed the Norwich to Tilbury Project. Plans for it have seen few changes from the original proposals, which would see large pylons running through South Norfolk roughly parallel to the existing ones, which would be retained as well. CPRE Norfolk continues to call for better long-term and less harmful solutions, either by running the cables underground or through investing in an offshore grid. The latter would save our countryside and residents from disruption and harm every time a new offshore windfarm has to be connected to the National Grid. With doubts being expressed about the financial viability of some offshore projects, with Vattenfall halting their Norfolk Boreas Project, further questions should be asked about the Norwich to Tilbury scheme.



Photo - sigmund-r9PeXDCJyEw, Unsplash

Down to Earth

This was the title of the fascinating talk delivered by Wild Ken Hill estate manager, Nick Padwick at the CPRE Norfolk AGM on 25th May at Easton College.

Nick, an authority in soil microbiology, outlined the approach taken at Wild Ken Hill where they have become experts at regenerative farming while fostering amazing farmland biodiversity and storing carbon in their soils. He also discussed the current state of soils around the UK and how investing in our soils was needed to ensure long-term fertility and food security. We offer our thanks once again to Nick and all those who attended what we considered to be a very successful evening.

CPRE Norfolk attended a number of events across the summer, including Norfolk's Healthy Environment Day held in June at the Forum in Norwich. We also hosted a stand at the Royal Norfolk Show where children had the opportunity of making countryside crowns and visitors were challenged to guess the number of food miles our fruit bowl had travelled, with the answer shocking many. We also asked guests to disclose their favourite places to spend time in the Norfolk countryside and what they considered to be the largest threats to it. You can find out their answers by visiting the 'News' page of the CPRE Norfolk website.



West Norfolk Chair, Pallavi Devulapalli with administrator Anita Diaper at Fincham Fete

West Norfolk Update

The last few months have been busy for the West Norfolk CPRE team. Trustee & West Norfolk Chair, Pallavi Devulapalli and administrator Anita Diaper have been out and about increasing local awareness of the charity and its aims and objectives. They attended a fete in Fincham and were spotted in August with a pop-up stall on the Kings' Sandringham estate. In June they held a wild herb foraging workshop in Stoke Ferry which was led by herbalist Katy Fullilove and was free for CPRE members to attend.

Keep an eye open for the team at future events in West Norfolk and don't forget, if you have any that you would like them to attend, please contact Anita -

westnorfolk@cprenorfolk.org.uk

CPRE Norfolk Awards, 2024 - Can you help?

We will be holding the CPRE Norfolk awards once again in 2024 and are in search of sponsors for each of our 8 award categories:

- Restoring Nature
- Rural Living
- Made in Norfolk
- Helping individuals & groups access the countryside
- Get Growing award for schools
- Tranquility
- Chair's award

If you think you might be able to sponsor an award, or be interested in submitting an award entry, please get in touch - info@cprenorfolk.org.uk



Photo: Austin Kehmeier, Unsplash

People

Barbara Adamski

CPRE Norfolk welcomed Barbara in May 2023. As a part time planning assistant Barbara helps monitor upcoming planning applications, writes official CPRE Norfolk responses to them and deals with questions and enquiries about development across Norfolk.

Barbara studied planning and regional development and has worked on many projects supporting positive changes to regions and fostering their unique characteristics.

Barbara loves exploring the Norfolk countryside with her family, preferably by bicycle as you can always find little gems reflecting the special Norfolk landscape.

Faye LeBon

CPRE Norfolk would like to give special thanks to Faye LeBon who served as a trustee from 2020 until August 2023. Faye was a strong believer in the benefits of the countryside and other open space to people's wellbeing. Faye will be missed by all of us at CPRE Norfolk.

Anita Diaper

Anita joined the team in April 2023 as West Norfolk Project Officer, her role is to promote CPRE Norfolk and it's campaigns in the west of the county and to engage with local members. She has a longstanding working career in Environmental, Waste and Recycling fields. Outside of work she is mum to three boys and holds roles within Norfolk Scouts. Anita is passionate about her local environment, that Norfolk families can have access to our beautiful countryside and we provide sustainable and affordable food to all.

Ian Francis

CPRE Norfolk would also like to give thanks to Ian Francis as he steps down from his role as Honorary Secretary due to the increasing demands of his position at IBM. We are grateful for his expertise and contribution during his time with us.

We have a number of really interesting trustee and volunteer vacancies with CPRE Norfolk. To learn more and to apply, you can visit our website:

<https://www.cprenorfolk.org.uk/get-involved>



Photo - Bill Waters

Join in:
[cprenorfolk.org.uk](https://www.cprenorfolk.org.uk)

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