



Norfolk 2126: A Tale of 2 Futures

As we celebrate 100 years of CPRE campaigning for the countryside we are asking you to imagine - **what Norfolk will look like in 2126?**

In one possible future, the pressures we face today have simply been allowed to accumulate. New housing has spread further into open countryside. Major infrastructure has carved through landscapes. Fields of industrial-scale solar panels stretch across productive farmland, while new data centres and other developments have transformed the character of rural areas. Habitats have become increasingly fragmented, our darkest skies are harder to find and landscapes that once seemed permanent have disappeared.

This isn't inevitable. But neither is it impossible.

Now imagine a different Norfolk.

A county where new homes are thoughtfully designed around existing communities, with green spaces, trees and wildlife corridors built into their plans from the beginning. Where renewable energy is part of a greener future, but solar is prioritised on rooftops, car parks and previously developed land rather than our best agricultural soils. Where development and infrastructure are located sensitively, while the character of our villages, market towns and rural landscapes remains valued.

Imagine thriving hedgerows and meadows, flourishing wildlife and cleaner rivers. Imagine more people able to access and enjoy the countryside - and more communities actively involved in caring for it. Imagine a countryside that continues to produce food, support livelihoods, absorb water, store carbon and give people space to breathe.

That is the future we want to help create.

The choice between these two futures won't be made in 2126. It is being made now - through planning decisions, land-use policies, infrastructure projects and the choices we make about where and how we grow.

And the positive future isn't simply a dream. Across Norfolk, people are already demonstrating what is possible: communities caring for woodland and waterways, creating spaces for nature, bringing people together to experience the countryside and finding practical ways to protect the landscapes around them. The stories throughout this edition celebrate some of those people and projects.

They are reminders that countryside protection isn't just about saying no. It is about saying yes to a better future. CPRE Norfolk exists to help make that future possible - by challenging inappropriate development, championing nature and tranquillity, supporting communities and arguing for thoughtful, sustainable planning.

Valuing today. Protecting tomorrow.

Chairs Note

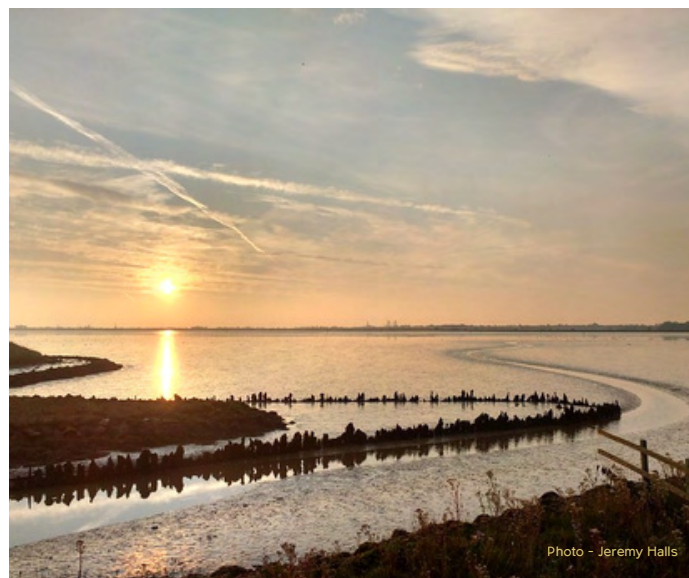
The Celebrations Continue?

100 years of CPRE

You would have thought that by now our work was done, but the drive for economic growth through development, the gold rush for data centres, the seemingly single solution approach to creating green energy to help fight climate change (albeit primarily focussed on trying to reduce energy bills), and the legislation changes to enable local views to be over ridden, leaves us with plenty of work still to do. It feels like the Norfolk countryside has been abandoned, and is for sale.

There is no doubt now that climate change is real, and accelerating. We head towards food shortages, mass migration and temperatures that are life threatening. So of course we need to change our consumerism away from fossil fuels. But, green energy is only one part of the solution, and unless it is rooftop, we lose land that can play its part in other ways.

Regenerative farming will not only protect biodiversity, but will absorb floodwater and carbon. Solar on rooftops, and over other spaces such as car parks, will produce all the solar energy we need leaving the land free to contribute. Green tourism needs unspoilt beauty, and generates substantial wealth for the county. Water is a huge issue, cleaning our sea and rivers is absolutely vital (and very long overdue), but many more measures are needed. Expansion of green spaces within urban areas, tree and hedgerow planting in our towns and countryside will both have a real impact on helping reduce temperatures, protecting our biodiversity, as well as creating opportunities for leisure activities and improve our own mental and physical health.



My wish is that CPRE will be able to close it doors before it reaches another significant anniversary.



We know we need more social housing, but there is already plenty of land available that is well connected and has limited impact on the countryside. This needs to be government sponsored and built, and retained in that sector. Housing developers have shown they cannot or will not deliver housing to deal with our housing crisis.

The challenges for our new Prime Minister are huge, but he can now sow seeds to start longer term planning to manage our future in the best way possible. That means valuing the countryside for what it can deliver, not enabling multi national developers to asset strip the UK solely for short term profit.

My wish is that CPRE will be able to close it doors before it reaches another significant anniversary. Not because we have failed, but as the benefits our countryside can bring will be recognised in full, and it will be cherished and protected by our policy makers for the long term.

Chris Dady, Chair, CPRE Norfolk

Caring for the Places We Love

By Lisa Ashbury, CPRE Norfolk Trustee

When a local litter problem revealed a much wider challenge

On a dry August morning, a problem I had thought was mainly about rubbish suddenly became something much more serious.

At a popular informal swimming spot beside the River Great Ouse Relief Channel, substantial living branches appeared to have been cut from trees with a saw. The branches had been gathered around the site and a fire lit among them, scorching the foliage overhead. Broken glass, rubbish, fire debris and abandoned inflatables had also been left behind.

With Norfolk experiencing exceptionally dry conditions, the possibility of fire spreading through the surrounding riverside vegetation was deeply concerning.

I walk this stretch of the River Great Ouse and Relief Channel at Wiggenhall St Mary Magdalen almost every day. It is a beautiful place used by walkers, swimmers, paddlers, anglers, families and young people. Seeing more people enjoying the countryside is something to celebrate, and the aim has never been to discourage anyone from coming.

However, increasing use has brought increasing amounts of litter, disposable barbecues and damage. Friends and other local walkers regularly collect bottles, cans, food packaging and broken glass. Rubbish is also left around the existing dog-waste bin because there is no general litter bin at the car park.

Trying to establish who could help highlighted a much wider problem.

The Environment Agency initially advised that day-to-day litter, bins and cleansing were outside its regulatory remit. The Parish Council explained that it had been advised the land belonged to the Environment Agency and that even the existing dog-waste bin had required permission. The borough council has separate responsibilities relating to waste and community safety.



In other words, different aspects of the same well-used countryside space sit with different organisations, making it difficult to identify who has overall responsibility for its care.

Following the discovery of the fire and tree damage, the incident was formally reported to Norfolk Constabulary. Local councillors helped involve the borough council's waste and community-safety teams, with some of the dumping potentially being treated as fly-tipping rather than ordinary littering.

I was also able to show photographs of the damage to Terry Jermy MP and his caseworker Gareth during a visit to Wiggenhall St Mary Magdalen. Recognising the immediate fire risk, Gareth escalated the matter directly to the Environment Agency's Regional Director. At the time of writing, we are awaiting a response.

Alongside seeking action from the organisations responsible, my friend and I have been discussing whether something positive could grow from the experience. A possible Love Our River initiative could involve local families and younger residents in celebrating the river, caring for wildlife and encouraging responsible enjoyment.

The principle is simple:

This is our river. Let's look after it together.

Community pride and volunteer action can make a genuine difference, but they cannot replace appropriate waste facilities, secure fencing, site management and enforcement.

The desired outcome is not to make the river less accessible. It is to keep this much-loved part of Norfolk clean, safe, welcoming and cared for, for wildlife and for everyone who enjoys it.

Data Centres: The Next Pressure on Norfolk's Countryside?

For 100 years, we have worked to protect the landscapes, farmland and rural character that make Norfolk special. Today, a new and rapidly growing pressure is emerging: the demand for land, water and energy to power the UK's digital future.

Data centres may be essential to modern life, supporting everything from online banking and streaming to cloud computing and artificial intelligence. But they are far from weightless. Behind our digital world sit enormous buildings containing thousands of servers, requiring substantial amounts of electricity and, in many cases, water for cooling. The Government has recognised their importance by designating data centres as Critical National Infrastructure.

The question is not whether we need digital infrastructure. It is where it should go, what resources it will consume and what we are prepared to sacrifice to accommodate it.

That question has become particularly relevant in South Norfolk, where Norwich Apex has proposed a 150MW data centre on land adjoining Ipswich Road and the B1113 near Keswick. The site lies close to Marston Marshes and the River Yare valley, in a landscape where farming, wildlife and water are already important considerations.

Norfolk is also one of the driest counties in England. At a time when drought, water scarcity and extreme weather are becoming increasingly familiar, adding another major demand for natural resources deserves careful scrutiny. Nationally, Water UK warned this year that future data-centre expansion could place significant pressure on already stretched water supplies, particularly in eastern and southern England.

And water is only part of the story.

A 150MW facility represents a significant demand for electricity. That demand has to be generated, transmitted and connected – potentially bringing new substations, cables and other infrastructure with it. Across Norfolk, we are already seeing the landscape pressures created by proposals for large-scale solar farms, battery storage, wind-energy infrastructure and new electricity transmission routes. CPRE Norfolk's mapping has highlighted how these developments can combine to create a cumulative impact far greater than any single project.

Add ambitious housing targets and expanding settlements to this picture and we face a fundamental question: **how much change can Norfolk's countryside absorb?**

There is a danger that each proposal is considered in isolation – a solar farm here, a data centre there, a new housing development elsewhere – while the long-term effect is a gradual industrialisation and urbanisation of the countryside.

Our centenary is a reminder that the landscapes we inherited were protected because previous generations looked beyond the immediate moment.

We need to do the same.

CPRE Norfolk supports a modern, prosperous and connected Norfolk. But progress should not mean treating land, water, farmland and beautiful landscapes as limitless resources.



Photo - Geoffrey Moffett

Turning Gardens into Wildlife Havens

What if every garden in Norfolk could become a little haven for wildlife?

That was the idea behind the **Garden Wildlife Competition**, an inspiring initiative run and sponsored by the Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk, which celebrated the simple but powerful ways residents were helping nature from their own back doors.

The competition was the brainchild of Councillor and CPRE Norfolk Trustee Pallavi Devulapalli, who began developing the idea with council officers and members in 2023. The first competition took place in 2025, with residents across West Norfolk invited to celebrate the wildlife-friendly features in their gardens – however large or small.



And small really did mean small. A window box could qualify just as readily as a large garden.

The competition criteria, developed with the **Nature Volunteers Network**, rewarded a wide range of wildlife-friendly choices. Entrants could gain points for features including pollinator-friendly planting, water, fruit trees, bird boxes, bug hotels and even using recycled or upcycled containers.

The first year attracted entries across several categories, including large and small gardens, window boxes and a children's prize. The winners were celebrated at a special prizegiving at King's Lynn Town Hall, bringing together gardeners, wildlife enthusiasts, ecologists, councillors and officers.

Feedback from that first year showed there was an appetite for the competition to reach even more people. In 2026, the council broadened its publicity, including talks to horticultural groups in King's Lynn and Downham Market. Around 40 entries were received, many of an exceptionally high standard, with awards presented in September.

For Pallavi, however, the competition was about much more than prizes.

"Too often, the news is full of dispiriting matters which feel far out of anyone's control," she explained. "I really wanted us to offer something different and positive, something that every individual can do to create a better world."

Residents created wildlife-friendly spaces by planting flowers for pollinators, providing water, leaving areas of grass unmown, avoiding pesticides and creating safe routes for hedgehogs between gardens. Bird and bat boxes, wildlife-friendly hedges and ponds all helped turn otherwise ordinary spaces into valuable habitats.

Not everyone could do everything – but every small change mattered.

The competition demonstrated an important principle that sits at the heart of CPRE Norfolk's work: **protecting nature isn't only about what happens in our countryside. It can begin right outside our own front doors.**

By connecting individual gardens, communities could create a much larger network of places where wildlife could feed, shelter and thrive.

Pallavi hopes the idea will continue to grow across Norfolk and inspire similar competitions elsewhere and that some CPRE Norfolk members might take part.

Perhaps 2027 could be the year when even more Norfolk gardens became small spaces that make a big difference for nature.

Last call: tell us why you love Norfolk

There's still time to add your voice to our Love Letters to Norfolk centenary campaign. Whether it's a favourite landscape, a treasured memory or simply what Norfolk means to you, we want to hear from you.

Help us celebrate the places we love and inspire their protection for generations to come.

For more inspiration and tips on how to get started visit:

www.cprenorfolk.org.uk/get-involved/events/love-letters-to-norfolk/

And then send your letter or poem to:

LoveNorfolk@cprenorfolk.org.uk

THEY ARE ALREADY HERE

Meet Norfolk's Next Generation of Countryside Champions.

As CPRE looks towards the next 100 years, it is natural to ask who will understand, cherish and stand up for Norfolk's countryside in the future.

The inaugural CPRE Norfolk Youth Engagement & Schools Awards have given us a wonderfully reassuring answer: they are already here.

The Awards were created to recognise young people, schools and colleges taking practical action for nature and developing a meaningful connection with the countryside. This year's recipients demonstrate what can happen when young people are given the opportunity to participate.

Creating a woodland legacy

Easton College received the **Showcase Award** for its Miyawaki Mini Forest.

Students have helped transform a 254m² plot into a fast-growing, diverse woodland ecosystem, supported by South Norfolk Council's Nature Conservation Fund. Their involvement extended from funding applications, species selection and planning through to planting approximately 800 trees. They will now help monitor the woodland as part of their studies.

The project provides valuable practical experience, creates habitat for wildlife and leaves a legacy that could benefit generations to come.

Dylan Roddy from Easton College told us:

"This recognition means a great deal to everyone involved, and we are delighted that the students' hard work has been acknowledged in this way."

Building lasting connections

The **Engagement Award** was presented to City Academy Norwich for its Forest School and Outdoor Learning programme.

Through practical and creative experiences using natural materials and the woodland environment, the programme helps young people explore nature while developing confidence, curiosity and wellbeing.

Protecting the countryside is not only about creating habitats. It also means giving people opportunities to experience nature, understand its value and develop a relationship with it that could last a lifetime.

White Woman Lane Junior School also received a special **Letter of Recognition** for its commitment to improving biodiversity within its grounds. Its plans include raised beds, better wildlife habitats and involving pupils in creating a richer environment for nature and outdoor learning.

Thanks to the generosity of **Mannington Estate**, both winning schools will receive tailored educational nature experiences during the new academic year, providing another opportunity to learn outside the classroom and experience Norfolk's countryside first-hand.

Easton's students are creating woodland that could outlive them. City Academy is nurturing relationships with nature that could influence young people for decades. White Woman Lane is beginning its own biodiversity journey.

Norfolk's future countryside champions are not people we must wait for. Given encouragement, opportunity and a voice, they are already making a difference.



Showcase Award Winners - Easton College

Last Chance to Visit Our Centenary Exhibition

There is still time to visit CPRE Norfolk's special Centenary Exhibition at Diss Museum before it closes at the end of October.

Since opening in March, the exhibition has shared the story of a century of campaigning for Norfolk's countryside. Diss Museum reports that visitor numbers have remained healthy, with those who stop to explore the display able to discover more about the challenges faced by previous generations and the difference determined local action has made.

Our sincere thanks go to Basil Abbott and everyone at Diss Museum for hosting the exhibition and helping us share this important part of CPRE Norfolk's history.



Admission is free. Please check the museum's opening times before making a special journey.

A Wonderful Day at Martha's Meadow

In our spring edition, we invited members and supporters to join us for a **Countryside Day at Martha's Meadow**. We are delighted to report that more than 200 people came along to enjoy this very special corner of West Norfolk.

The meadow was filled with guided walks, pond dipping, children's activities, photography, music, local organisations and opportunities to discover more about Norfolk's countryside. Visitors could learn something new, meet people working for nature or simply slow down and enjoy being in a beautiful place.

Twelve organisations and stallholders took part, supported by around 15 wonderful volunteers. Together, the day raised an incredible **£1,069.84 for CPRE Norfolk**.

Our heartfelt thanks go to everyone who volunteered, ran an activity, donated a raffle prize, supported the event or simply came along and enjoyed the meadow with us.

More than a successful fundraising event, the day showed what can happen when people of all ages come together through a shared love of the countryside. Martha's Meadow was certainly buzzing – and not only with bees!



More Ways to Stand Up for Norfolk

People support the countryside in many different ways. Some can commit to becoming charity trustees, while others have valuable knowledge, enthusiasm or connections to offer but need a more flexible way to contribute.

CPRE Norfolk is working to create clearer and more welcoming routes for people who would like to become involved, including **new ambassador roles**.

Ambassadors will be people who care deeply about Norfolk's countryside and want to help raise awareness, build relationships and encourage others to support our work, without taking on the formal governance responsibilities of trusteeship. They might share campaigns and stories, introduce useful local contacts, support community engagement, attend selected events or contribute specialist knowledge and local insight.

We also continue to welcome interest from prospective trustees who can bring practical skills, energy and different perspectives to the charity. You do not need to be an expert in planning or countryside policy. Experience of finance, communications, fundraising, governance, community engagement or charity leadership could all be enormously valuable.

Our longstanding members and supporters remain at the heart of CPRE Norfolk. Whether as a trustee, Ambassador, volunteer, supporter or member, there is a place for you in CPRE Norfolk's next chapter.

To begin an informal conversation, please contact info@cprenorfolk.org.uk

Growing Nature Together

Letting a churchyard reveal what is already there.

An underused corner of St Mary Magdalene Churchyard in Wighall St Mary Magdalen is being given a new opportunity to thrive as a small, wildlife-rich space.

The idea began within the village and has grown through the enthusiasm of the churchwarden, and other local volunteers, with support from the Parochial Church Council and Parish Council. Ecological and practical advice has also been generously provided by the team at Martha's Meadow.

The project area has now been marked out, plastic and other unsuitable rubbish removed, and valuable deadwood and habitat piles retained. Temporary signs explain why the area is being managed differently, while the grass-cutting team knows to leave it unmown. A new noticeboard near the church entrance will help keep visitors updated.

Most importantly, the project will work with nature rather than trying to impose an instant result.

Instead of turning over the whole area and sowing it immediately, much of the central space will be allowed to grow naturally. Volunteers will observe what emerges from the existing seed bank, record the plants and wildlife that appear and learn how the ground changes through the

seasons. In other churchyards, a simple change in mowing has revealed unexpectedly rich plant life, sometimes even including orchids.

A sown wildflower border was originally planned to provide colour during the first year. However, the exceptionally dry conditions would not give seeds and young plants the best opportunity to establish, so planting has been postponed until the site is better understood and the weather is more suitable.

Plans for the autumn include traditionally scything the meadow area, with the possibility of local people learning this valuable countryside skill. Cut material may also be used to create an additional habitat feature.

CPRE Norfolk has approved up to £305 from its Centenary Grant to support this phase. However, Growing Nature Together remains firmly a community and church project, shaped and cared for by local people.

This first year will provide an important baseline, but it is also an invitation to be curious.

By stepping back, observing and giving nature a little more room, we may discover that the beginnings of a richer churchyard were there all along.



St Mary Magdalene Church, Wighall
Lewis Collard

100
YEARS



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