

Autumn-Winter 2020/21

Kent

PROTECTING KENT'S
COUNTRYSIDE

Voice

Planning for a catastrophe?

The proposals that threaten
our democracy... and the
landscapes we treasure

Everything in the garden's lovely

... especially if you
let nature have its place

Wildlife crime

It's going on far more
than you might think



The countryside charity

Kent



While we have all tried to cope with the Covid-19 pandemic in our own ways, for CPRE Kent planner Julie Davies and family the lockdown and associated restrictions presented an opportunity to discover their nearby countryside. Julie chronicled their exploits in the Pink Wellies blog on our website cprekent.org.uk - here her daughter and husband put their best feet forward. Cover: Who needs to travel the world and the seven seas when such stunning birds as the kingfisher can be found on waterways across Kent? This stunning image taken by Paul Easton also gives us all hope as we grapple with our cameras - he only began wildlife photography in January!

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contact us

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We always love to hear from our members, so please feel free to drop us a line and tell us what's happening in your part of the county. We are especially eager to hear from anyone who would like to volunteer as a district committee member. If you want to help us keep Kent beautiful, then get in touch with us at info@cprekent.org.uk or call 01233 714540.

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Hilary Newport

Director's Introduction

What a strange six months we have just lived through! Uncertainty seems to be the only firm forecast for our short-term future. Lives and livelihoods have been turned upside down through our response to a global pandemic, and people everywhere have changed their lives almost overnight.

Amid the horror of bereavement, the worry over our loved ones' health and the fear for our futures, people across Britain have been reporting how important it is to them to re-engage with the nature that surrounds them, even in towns and cities. Nature is reasserting itself as a powerful force for our physiological and psychological well-being, and more and more we are coming to the clear realisation that nature cannot sustain and nurture us if we do not, in turn, respect the natural environment and the ecosystems that surround us.

A survey conducted in late April on behalf of CPRE and the National Federation of Women's Institutes revealed that the majority of adults in the country reported appreciating their local green spaces more than they had ever done before and were supportive of measures that would protect and enhance these spaces.

In the drive to rebuild our battered economy, we must never forget the importance of connection with nature and of protecting the environment. Through our collective action in response to Covid-19 we have demonstrated that, when we must, we can make sweeping lifestyle changes overnight.

To return to 'business as usual' with congested roads, air pollution and degraded natural environments would be to do a grave disservice to the choices and sacrifices so many have made. We must make sure that as we build our way back to a healthy economy, we do not do so at the expense of the natural environment that is so very precious to us all.

• See more of our director's thoughts on pages 8-9



People have appreciated their local green spaces more than ever during this year's troubled times (Julie Davies)



Wildlife crime: it's happening right here, right now

Deer, badgers, hares, birds of prey, wild plants... there is very little in our countryside that does not attract the attention of criminals seeking to either make money or satisfy their particular desires. **Alex Hills** reveals what we should look out for in the battle to keep our flora and fauna out of their clutches.

CPRE is not purely a wildlife charity, yet wildlife issues have caused it problems in the past. It was for this reason that when I was asked to write about wildlife crime my reaction was “Why me, what have I done wrong?!”.

What I am giving you is a personal view, not a CPRE one. A view as an honorary life member of the West Kent Badger Group and someone who is on the badger call-out list assisting animals under threat and in distress.

I am also someone who was brought up to respect nature tooth and claw, understanding that it can be ruthless at times. I am also someone who gets very angry when confronted by cruelty to man or beast. Hence my opinions, I would be the first to say, are not unbiased. What I hope to do is to make you think and want to do some further reading.

Wildlife crime is not just about exotic animals – it happens much closer to home and you can help fight it while you enjoy walking and cycling in the countryside. It often goes unreported and the perpetrators escape justice if it is not spotted in time. By looking out for wildlife crime you can act as guardians of the countryside. But what should you look for while first protecting your own safety?

Poaching is one of the oldest wildlife crimes, with commonly targeted animals being deer, fish and hares. Animals are generally killed with firearms or by using dogs. They can be killed for food but more commonly are sold for a profit. Fishing without a licence in private fisheries or rivers is also a poaching offence. Many see poaching as theft, but if too many of anything is taken out of the wild, numbers can drop to the point where the species is no longer sustainable. For example, there have been problems in Kent with mushroom- and shellfish-gathering.

Coursing is a wide term. Deer- and hare-coursing are common forms of wildlife crime, involving considerable cruelty as dogs are used to chase down animals and kill them for sport. This disgusting spectacle is often watched for pleasure (how anyone can get pleasure seeing suffering inflicted on an animal is beyond me) and can attract illegal gambling for large sums of money. People involved with this activity can be very



Despite legal protection, badgers can fall foul of anyone from developers wanting to clear land to individuals choosing to bait them with dogs

dangerous, so you should keep as far away as possible.

Badgers are often a victim of persecution despite being protected by the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. This can vary from landowners interfering with a badger sett by blocking entrances to gassing the animals. A badger can dig a new sett in a night, such is its amazing digging ability, but this can put it in conflict with developers.

Criminals setting dogs on the animals for so-called sport is known as badger-baiting. This is a vile, sickening activity. For someone to say they thought a sett was a fox earth or did not know what it was is no defence. A badger sett has a sweet, musty smell as they are very clean animals. A fox earth stinks, so they are very easy to tell apart.

If anyone doubts that such crimes go on in this part of the world, a 2020 case at Folkestone Magistrates Court proves otherwise.

In July and September, three individuals were each sentenced to four months' imprisonment, fined up to £4,450 and banned from keeping dogs for life after admitting a string of offences against hares, foxes and badgers. The prosecutions followed a joint operation by the RSPCA and police.

For more information on badgers, visit www.badgertrust.org.uk
Under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 it is an offence of strict liability to damage or destroy a bat roost or resting site without a mitigation licence. Intent or recklessness does not need to be proved in UK law – it is even illegal to handle these amazing creatures without a licence. For more information on bats, visit www.bats.org.uk

Birds of prey can be targeted due to the perception that they are pests, interfering with crops, farm animals and the breeding of game. They are often targeted and killed illegally with traps or poison or by shooting.

It is an offence for anyone to intentionally kill, injure or take any wild birds; however, not all traps are illegal, so it can be difficult to tell if you find one. Interference with legally-set traps or snares is an offence, so do not touch them. If you are in doubt, call the police.

All British birds, their nests and eggs are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, but the targeting of birds is one of the most frequent wildlife crimes. It is illegal to disturb birds during the nesting season or take eggs from a nest, either



The RSPCA rescued this fox after it had been caught in a snare at Barnard Castle, County Durham, in September.

Two officers found the animal, which was covered in flies, trapped by the mouth.

Although the trap had been set legally, it was on a public right of way and had possibly not been inspected regularly, which is required by codes of practice. The fox, which could have been trapped for some time, was obviously in distress and taken to a vet.

Inspector Clare Wilson said: “Thankfully, after examination by the vet, it was clear that the wound from the snare was superficial, but we still had to check.

“The fox did have parasites on him, so he was cleaned up, given some treatment and had the fly eggs washed off him, too.

“We’d walked for miles to rescue this poor fox, so it was well worth the effort when we could release him and see him run off happily again.” (pic RSPCA)

for sale or for private collections. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds states: "We recommend not cutting hedges and trees between March and August as this is the main breeding season for nesting birds, although some birds may nest outside this period."

It is an offence to kill or injure any wild animal listed in Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and to intentionally or recklessly damage or obstruct any place used for their shelter or protection. Species protected under this legislation include red squirrels, bats, water voles, sand lizards and natterjack toads.

The Act also makes it an offence to intentionally uproot any wild plant without the permission of the landowner and sell it on. If you see a pretty plant when you are out, please take a photo and leave it alone for the next passing person to enjoy. If you're not sure which species a plant is, some excellent plant-identification apps are available.

All British wild mammals are protected from deliberate acts of cruelty under the Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996. It is illegal to mutilate, kick, beat, impale, stab, burn, stone, crush, drown, drag or asphyxiate any wild mammal with intent to cause unnecessary suffering. I have had the privilege of watching many animals play and care for each other over the years. At times, the intelligence of animals such as badgers can cause conflict with humans. Remember, wild animals are just trying to survive.

It is illegal to dump invasive non-native plants and animals in the natural environment under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Some species can be damaging to our health or, like Japanese knotweed, to people's properties.

Keepers of plant collections like that at Lullingstone Castle World Garden take great care not to introduce another Japanese knotweed into our countryside.

Releasing exotic animals is also illegal. For example, the releasing of mink into the wild has caused massive harm to our native wildlife.



Hare-coursing is a seemingly interminable problem in parts of Kent (Steve Ashton)



This peregrine falcon was discovered shot at Birling, near Maidstone, in February.

The finder took the injured raptor to the RSPCA's Leybourne animal centre and it was transferred to the charity's Mallydams Wood wildlife centre.

An X-ray revealed the pellet or shot had broken the right wing close to the elbow, while fragments of shot were also found in the left wing.

The shooting had caused so much damage that nothing could be done to save the bird and the reluctant decision was made to put it down.

Inspector Kirsten Ormerod, who investigated the incident, said: "It is very upsetting to think that this beautiful bird was deliberately targeted and shot and this is an offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

"Anyone with any information about how this bird came to be harmed is urged to call the RSPCA Inspector appeal line on 0300 123 8018 or the police using the reference 28-1642." (pic RSPCA)

Certain forms of hunting of mammals such as foxes with dogs is illegal as a result of the Hunting Act 2004.

Britain is one of only five European countries where using snares is still permitted – the others are the Republic of Ireland, France, Spain and Belgium. A snare in this country can be legal or illegal depending on the design. Legal snares that have not been set properly or maintained correctly, however, are just as deadly as illegal ones. Snares, legal or not, are both cruel and indiscriminate so should be banned, I believe, as they have no place in a civilised society.

More information on wildlife crime can be found on the National Wildlife Crime Unit website, www.nwcu.police.uk

In an emergency, dial 999. Otherwise, use the 101 non-emergency number. If you would like to give information regarding a crime anonymously, call Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111. The important thing is: if you see it, report it!

For online references, see this article on the CPRE Kent website (cprekent.org.uk – search 'wildlife crime')



Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 makes it an offence to intentionally uproot any wild plant without the permission of the landowner and sell it - this is a bee orchid (Richard Kinzler)



Gin traps have been outlawed for more than 60 years (RSPCA)

Red alert!



Hilary Newport, CPRE Kent director, details how suggested changes to the planning process could be devastating news for both our countryside and our democratic process unless we respond firmly and swiftly at the highest levels of government

In August, the government launched a series of proposals for changing the planning system aimed at streamlining and modernising the processes of planning, improving design standards and sustainability, reforming the way developer contributions were made and ensuring land was available for development where it was needed.

In the foreword, the Prime Minister claimed that the current planning system was “outdated and ineffectual” and that it was responsible for us having “nowhere near enough homes in the right places”.

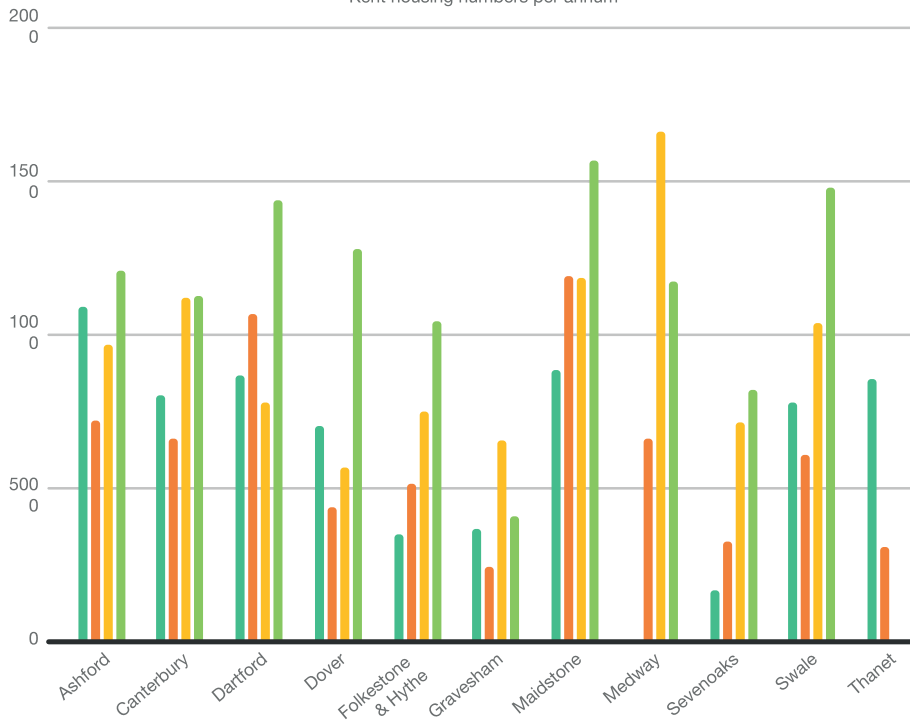
It is clear that there is room to improve the planning system, but it is by no means clear that this wholesale demolition of the democratic planning processes we have come to know is the right step to fixing the problem of not enough of the right sorts of homes in the right places.

One fundamental flaw that underpins the logic behind the proposed planning reforms is the implied assumption that we must grant planning permission for more homes: this, the proposals argue, will increase certainty for developers and reduce the discretionary nature of planning decisions.

We fundamentally disagree that planning needs to be deregulated to allow certainty for developers. At present, some 90 per cent of all planning applications are permitted. In 2016, there were 500,000 permissions for homes that had not been built. In 2020, that number has risen to one million homes with planning permission that have yet to be built; the rate at which planning permissions are granted continues to outstrip the rate at which homes are actually built.

There is huge financial incentive to landowners in simply gaining planning permission on their land; there is far less incentive to deliver on the commitments to affordable housing and other essential infrastructure that accompany the successful delivery of those permissions.

Rather than reducing the opportunities to object to, or improve, planning proposals, we believe that policy interventions would be better directed at closing the gap between permission and completion of homes.



The suggested government formula would have a marked impact on levels of housing development in Kent

- current LP requirement
- 3 year average delivery
- current standard method
- proposed new standard method

There are various proposals open for comment through August to October, principally for our purposes Planning for the Future (a White Paper) and Changes to the Planning System, and these are some of the principal changes proposed:

- Local Plans will be simplified and their delivery sped up to 30 months in total (opportunities for public consultation will be reduced as a result).
- Local Plans and planning applications will be digital, accessible online and simpler to navigate. This is in principle a good thing, but often site notices are the first information local people receive about planning decisions that may have been made years ago. Not everyone wishes to engage with social media to receive notifications of changes that could fundamentally affect where they live.
- Housing targets will be set using a formula dictated by government, rather than as a reflection of local need or, indeed, local constraint [see table above for how this would affect boroughs across Kent]. The policy intention is to focus housing delivery where demand is greatest, but across the whole of England we are seeing that the algorithm disproportionately focuses more housing into rural areas, and less into towns, cities and areas requiring regeneration. The proposals are very vague on how these housing targets can be met in areas where Green Belt or AONB make up a large proportion of a planning authority district.

- All land in England will be designated in one of three zones:

- Growth:** outline approval replaced by automatic permission
- Renewal:** statutory presumption in favour of 'suitable' development; brownfield redevelopment encouraged
- Protected:** 'more stringent' development controls will apply, and full planning applications needed (in practice, no change from now)

This raises the distinct possibility that planning committees will have little or no say in determining applications in Growth or Renewal zones.

- A new policy regarding First Homes will replace the current Help to Buy scheme. It will offer a 30 per cent discount, rather than the current 20 per cent discount for affordable homes as they are currently defined. Homes designated as First Homes will retain that discount in perpetuity. Both of these changes are to be welcomed in principle. However, the policy will mean that First Homes will still remain unaffordable for many people, and the developer contributions that will subsidise the initial 30 per cent discount will mean that money for other essential infrastructure, or other types of affordable housing, will be squeezed.
- Developer contributions will be reviewed with a stated aim of achieving at least as much public benefit as the current Section 106 agreements or CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) do at present. However, there is little information about how this will

be achieved in a way that addresses national variation in development values without widening the gap between areas of intense demand and those that would benefit from public investment and regeneration.

A proposed temporary lifting of the threshold for affordable housing from 10 to 40 or 50 homes. This means that for 18 months, smaller builders – who suffered badly during the last recession – would benefit by being exempt from the requirement to contribute to the cost of affordable homes. While we agree that smaller builders should be supported to meet local needs, this is not a sensible way to provide that support. This exemption, as proposed, would mean that larger building firms could also propose multiple development sites of up to 39 (or 49) homes without any contribution to affordable housing.

Higher design standards will be imposed through a set of design codes. Again, this is a laudable principle – CPRE has conducted an audit showing that a large proportion of recent developments fall far short of current design standards and ought not to have been permitted. However, the proposals again remain vague about how such design codes could be set when local topography, landscapes and character are so variable across the country.

Together with our colleagues at national CPRE, all CPRE's county branches are working hard to respond to these proposals and help shape a planning system that will allow us to tackle the challenges of the 21st century.

Decisions, decisions: how does planning work during the pandemic?

The Covid-19 crisis has curtailed public involvement in almost all aspects of life, so it is important for us all to see that fairness and the democratic process do not suffer as a result

Are you still getting your say at planning committee? Since Saturday, April 4, councils have been able to hold public meetings virtually – using video or telephone conferencing technology – hence removing the requirement for physical attendance at meetings.

The decision was announced by Robert Jenrick, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, in a bid to ensure effective local decision-making and transparency during the coronavirus pandemic.

Did you know that not all planning (and other) applications must go before councillors at a committee meeting?

Under the 1972 Local Government Act, local planning authorities can discharge some decision-making to an officer – in the case of planning applications this is what is commonly known as a delegated decision.

Planning permission can still be granted (or refused) for individual schemes. The only difference is that, compared with a committee decision, the process is faster because there is no need to wait until the next planning committee comes round.

As it is up to individual councils to draw up their own delegation scheme, decisions that can be delegated in one authority may not be in another.

Unless a local planning authority has changed its delegated scheme, all decisions that would normally have gone to a planning committee continue to do so.

While the decision-making format will not have changed, it is possible that meetings may have been cancelled in the early days while councils made the necessary arrangements to move committee meetings online.

It might not be the same for all councils, but at least one Kent authority minutes at the beginning of each session that meetings are being conducted in accordance with the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panel (Coronavirus) Flexibility of Local Authority Police and Crime Panel Meetings (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 No. 392.

In welcoming councillors and members of the public, the chairman states which council officers are in attendance.

The procedure for one local council in the county is that members of the public are advised in the normal way of the committee date for schemes in which they are interested. As usual, the procedure for speaking at committee is explained. In accordance with the regulations, interested parties are invited to dial in to the meeting and, where pre-arranged, get to speak for their allotted time.

In addition, participants are asked to provide a written copy of the statement they wish to make so that in the event of technical difficulties their views can be read out.

At this specific council, members of the public can not actually see what is going on at the meeting (they dial in by phone). Any papers that are likely to be viewed by councillors at the meeting are placed on the council's website in advance.

Audio recordings of the meetings are posted on the council's website within 10 days.

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To find out more contact
Vicky Ellis 01233 714540
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Chairman's Update

John Wotton

Deregulation of planning and loss of democracy loom over the countryside and our way of life... we need your support more than ever

I could begin this piece with the same words I used in the spring: "As I write this column, the uncertainties facing all of us, both short-term and long-term, seem overwhelming".

The events of the past six months have been unprecedented in my lifetime and it would be brave to predict how the next six months will unfold. CPRE Kent has, I'm pleased to report, held firm amid the maelstrom and demonstrated that we can carry on our work effectively despite lockdown and social distancing.

The primary credit for this must go, of course, to Hilary Newport and the team at Charing, who promptly set up arrangements for home working, which have proved to be successful. They have skilfully and patiently trained us all to take part in virtual meetings, which have swiftly become part of our modus operandi. I anticipate that we will continue to meet virtually, on occasion, after the pandemic has passed. I'm grateful to all of you for learning new skills and adapting to these unfamiliar proceedings.

After lockdown was lifted in the summer, we began a cautious process of returning to more normal ways of working. Staff have been visiting the office

more regularly and small face-to-face meetings have been held there, while larger meetings have continued to be held online.

CPRE has launched a national campaign, Don't Deregulate Planning, which I urge you to support by signing the petition

At this point, with coronavirus infection rates having risen and the 'rule of six' in operation, it seems likely that we will remain in this mixed mode for some time to come.

We had all been hoping that our annual general meeting, on Friday, November 13, would be the first occasion we could all meet again, in person, to celebrate our achievements over the past year and discuss our plans for the future. In current circumstances, we cannot plan for a physical AGM, so this will be held online, on the same date, and we

will make it as inclusive and as much like a normal AGM as we possibly can. Full details of the arrangements will be circulated separately.

I'm delighted that our guest speaker will be Simon Murray, the newly-elected national chair of CPRE, who comes to the charity from the National Trust, where he was chief operating officer and senior director.

At the AGM our treasurer, Mike Moore, will complete the five-year term after which he is obliged to stand down from that role for at least a year. We are fortunate to have had someone with Mike's expertise and commitment as treasurer and equally fortunate that our constitution enables him to remain on the Trustee Board, where we will continue to benefit from his advice and good judgement.

I'm delighted that Julian Glenister, a chartered accountant practising in Folkestone, has agreed to take over as treasurer at the AGM.

In my last column, I asked whether the government would be persuaded that deregulation of planning was the answer to housing shortages, further limiting local democratic control of development.

The answer, given in the Planning for the Future White Paper published in August, is, I'm afraid, a resounding "Yes"!

The policies in the White Paper, combined with the measures in a

separate consultation paper, Changes to the Current Planning System, are wide-ranging and, in my view, potentially disastrous for the countryside, especially in Kent and other parts of the South East, where the pressure for unsustainable development is already intense.

Increased housing targets will be set by central government, under a complex formula, with a view to building at least 300,000 homes per year and will be binding on local planning authorities, whose ability to review and refuse planning will be reduced. A new system of zoning will designate all land as either growth, renewal or so-called 'protected' zones. The opportunities for the public to participate in the plan-making and placemaking processes will be curtailed. [The government's proposals are discussed more fully elsewhere in this edition.]

CPRE has launched a national campaign, Don't Deregulate Planning, which I urge you to support by signing the petition and drawing it to the attention of your friends and acquaintances; it can be accessed on our website.

I believe that opposing these changes is a fundamental necessity for protecting the Kent countryside, which we all love. At CPRE Kent, we are working hard to inform and influence our MPs (10 of whom have signed a letter to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, expressing their concerns about the changes), local councillors and others.

We are also working co-operatively with national CPRE and all the other county branches to craft a hard-hitting and persuasive One CPRE response to the government's ill-conceived and damaging plans.

Planning for the Future has dominated our recent work and will, I expect, continue to do so for some time to come. We are, of course, not cutting back on our work on Local Plans and major planning applications throughout the county, or on our support and advice for local groups fighting against harmful developments affecting their neighbourhoods. I know I can count on your continued support as we fight these important battles over the coming months. I wish you all good health and good cheer for what will, I'm sure, be a difficult autumn and winter.

Ten of the county's MPs signed a letter asking Secretary of State Robert Jenrick to reconsider proposed changes to the standard housing method

HELEN GRANT MP



House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA
Tel: 020 7219 7107

Rt. Hon. Robert Jenrick MP
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
2 Marsham Street
Westminster
London
SW1P 4DF

10th September 2020

Dear Secretary of State

MHCLG consultation - standard housing method

We write to express our deep concern about the impact that the proposed changes to the Standard Housing Method will have upon our communities in Kent and Medway.

You will be aware that these proposals will result in an increase in housing targets for all but one lower-tier local authority in Kent, requiring the delivery of an additional 2,835 homes a year across the county. The numbers produced by the current 'standard method' already substantially exceed the county's previous combined local plan requirement; partly due to the use of outdated ONS household projection statistics from 2014 which have since been revised down. These new proposals will now create further increases in the annual housing targets of between 25% and 85% for the Kentish local authority areas represented by signatories to this letter. By way of comparison, however, housing numbers required for Northern Powerhouse regions, such as Greater Manchester, are scheduled to decrease under the proposed reforms.

Under the Government's new proposals, new homes will need to be delivered in areas which have already shouldered a substantial amount of housing growth in recent years. They are areas where road infrastructure is creaking, particularly in our towns, where school places are under pressure and where access to GP appointments is proving increasingly difficult. There is understandable and widespread concern amongst our constituents about the impact upon our precious green spaces, including Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Green Belt and farmland.

The proposals also appear inherently unreasonable, particularly to those local authorities in Kent who have already successfully worked with the Government to deliver the homes we need. One has to question the propriety of constantly increasing targets with completely unrealistic transitional timescales, being foisted upon our hard-working planners, executives and elected officials in such a demotivational and punitive manner. Local plans (many of which are in the latter stages of development) will be left in tatters and planners will have to re-start the process, wasting so much time and taxpayer's money already spent.

Further, there is considerable doubt about industry capacity to build at the rate required. This could result in missed delivery targets, leading to local plan redundancy and thus empowering developers to determine which sites are prioritised for construction. Such sidelining of the democratic planning process must surely be questionable.

In short, the proposed changes will arrest well-considered town and country planning and threaten community trust and consent. We therefore ask that you look again at the proposed changes and seek to relieve the disproportionate burden they place upon our communities in Kent.

The short consultation timescales mean time is very much of the essence here. We would therefore like to meet with you, at your earliest convenience, to discuss our concerns in more detail.

Best wishes

HELEN GRANT

ROGER GALE

TRACEY CROUCH

GORDON HENDERSON

TOM TUGENDHAT

DAMIAN GREEN

REHMAN CHISHTI

CRAIG MACKINLAY

GARETH JOHNSON

GREG CLARK

A dark day for nature... or is there a glimmer of light?



The deeply upsetting government decision to give the go-ahead for the colossal Cleve Hill Solar Park should not dash all hope that the scheme might yet falter, writes **David Mairs**

More than 350MW capacity, some 880,000 panels, almost 1,000 acres... the fantastical figures, although they don't quite roll off the tongue, became strangely familiar over the past couple of years. They add up, of course, to Cleve Hill Solar Park, the largest planned development of its type in the country and one that, should it come to pass, will sit slap-bang on Faversham's doorstep.

The announcement in May of the decision by Alok Sharma, Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, to grant a Development Consent Order for the solar park (we'll just refer to it as Cleve Hill from now on) marked the conclusion to a public examination that had begun almost exactly a year earlier.

It was an examination that had drawn together an impressive range of organisations and individuals speaking out against a scheme that would have a devastating effect on what so many considered a very special area for people and wildlife alike.

A petition against it gathered more than 3,000 signatures, while the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Greenpeace, Kent Wildlife Trust, CPRE Kent, Kent Ornithological Society, Swale Borough Council and Faversham and Mid Kent MP Helen Whately all voiced their opposition to such a destructive scheme.

The Swale branch of Friends of the Earth, on the other hand, seemed to think it a good idea.

Christmas Cards

Help to raise funds by buying CPRE Kent's charity Christmas cards. We have three designs: barn owl, robin and grey squirrel.

They cost just £3.50 for a pack of 10... which is excellent value for money.

They are available by calling the office on 01233 714540.

And why not give the gift of the countryside and buy a gift membership for a loved one this year? Also available online or from the office.

If you tell us it's for a gift we will even throw in a few goodies to make it extra special!



What was striking was the near-unanimous condemnation by environmental groups of a scheme trumpeted as an exemplar of green energy. They were not adopting a blanket approach of 'all green energy is good energy'. All projects should be judged on their merit.

And the merit in Cleve Hill was hard to see.

Lying within the North Kent Marshes, which are internationally important for bird populations, Cleve Hill adjoins two KWT reserves – Oare Marshes and South Swale – and is close to RSPB-managed chunks of Seasalter Marshes.

The area targeted by developers Hive Energy and Wirsol borders an extensive Site of Special Scientific Interest, Special Protection Area and Ramsar-designated site, making a mockery of what Hive Energy had stated on its own website:

"In order to proceed with a [solar farm] site we would usually ask that the land is... not in or next to a designated protected area such as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty [or] Site of Special Scientific Interest..."

Further features the developers "would usually ask" included the site being "well screened from visibility to people in the local area" and that it was "well drained, with no flood risk".

Well screened? The impact on the low-lying landscape would be devastating, while views from the surrounding higher ground would be ruined, a fact exacerbated by the planned east-west orientation of the panels with barely any space between them. And forget any ideas you might have based on solar farms you have seen elsewhere – the panels at Cleve Hill are planned to be up to 4.3 metres high. That's the height of a London double-decker bus.

No flood risk? An Environment Agency map states the "proposed development is in an area with a high probability of flooding", albeit benefiting from flood defences.

And so it went on and on. Even the developers' own criteria counted for nothing, while it was next to impossible to see how such a staggering land-take and drastic environmental impact could be justified in powering just 90,000 homes.

Many involved in the public examination had a growing belief the case against Cleve Hill was stacking up so heavily that consent would be refused.

But not a bit of it.

Wide-ranging – and exhaustively researched – observations, criticisms and objections were dismissed wholesale. For the Examining Authority and subsequently Mr Sharma, it was full steam ahead for Cleve Hill.

Even safety concerns over the Battery Energy Storage System to be built on site cut no ice. Technologically, this is still uncertain ground and there have been explosive battery fires at sites across the world. One at a battery-storage unit in a sparsely populated area of Arizona was so severe and so concerning that it led to the state authorities refusing to approve any more such schemes.

Below: The planned solar park lies next to Oare Marshes KWT reserve - a site popular with large numbers of wading birds as well as people from far and wide.

Opposite page, top left: Little egrets have been seen increasingly frequently in the area over recent years

The Cleve Hill plans include the world's largest BESS (it would cover 25 acres) on the edge of a small town and close to a village of some 600 people.

Not a problem for Mr Sharma.

In a piece on Cleve Hill, the journal *Private Eye* noted concerns over human and environmental rights relating to extraction of the minerals necessary for batteries. It added that Wirsol had "been castigated by regulator Ofgem for its safety and construction standards elsewhere, and is being sued in the high court over some smaller UK solar farms it built and sold".

Doesn't that give you a warm glow?

Given the strength of argument against Cleve Hill – and we can only skim the surface here – some view the granting of the DCO as grounded in politics rather than in responsible planning.

To them, it smacked of an underlying drive to boost energy-generation of any sort at any cost, even to sensitive sites.

Perhaps it was evident in Mr Sharma's backing of a 158-turbine wind farm off the Norfolk coast against planning inspectors recommending the scheme be refused due to potential impact on protected habitats.

Maybe we also saw it when government approved a new gas-fired power station in North Yorkshire, again against recommendation for refusal by the Planning Inspectorate, which had climate-change concerns. That project also survived a High Court challenge by environmental charity ClientEarth.

Back at Cleve Hill, the developers' claim that their solar farm was subsidy-free sweetened the offering, as did its gift to government of a chance to shout its green credentials.

Should all ultimately go to plan, the message we are likely to hear will be along the lines of "You wanted net-zero carbon – we gave you net-zero carbon".

Such a tack would sound more convincing if housing developers were obliged to include solar panels in the roofs of new homes – something of particular pertinence to Faversham, which is preparing for eye-wateringly high levels of housebuilding in coming years.

Despite the promotion of Cleve Hill as a green-energy project, it is difficult to view it as anything other than a developers' cash cow. Something that destroys countryside and harms wildlife on this vast scale is not green energy.

There are issues wider than we can cover here, but we'll end on a positive note.

The Solar Power Portal website quotes Finlay Colville, of Solar Media, as saying that whether Cleve Hill is actually built is "still an open question".

Mr Colville says: "Governments around the world are granting unsubsidised projects planning approval all the time, especially if there is no commitment on subsidies being paid for 20-plus years. Only some of these ever get built, and the large projects can be delayed often by a few years compared to original plans."

Keep the faith – this fight might not be over yet.



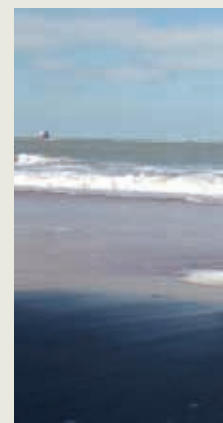
KENT, OUR KENT

As the Covid-19 pandemic tightened its grip and the government announced a national lockdown towards the end of March, it seemed spring could hardly have got off to a worse start.

For many lovers of the countryside, restrictions on movement meant that some favourite places were out of reach. However, we could still dream of them and the happier times that would hopefully return... maybe lightening what were undeniably difficult days in the process.

With that in mind, CPRE Kent invited anyone (of all ages) in the county to share photographs of their special places; if they chose, they could add a short description and tell why the locations meant so much to them.

We were delighted by the response and we present a selection of those images here. At the time of writing, tighter restrictions are again being imposed and we can only wonder how autumn and winter will pan out – these shots seem as resonant now as they did back in the spring.



Richard Kinzler is chairman of the Pegwell and District Association - a member of CPRE Kent - and he was thrilled to see these good folk clearing litter in the bay



Top seven images, clockwise from top left: Robin, by Paul Buckley; coastal defences and Kingsgate Castle, by Tom Betts; Romney Marsh, by Henny Shotter; North Foreland colour, by Tom Betts; Roughway, near Plaxtol, by Jackie Moxey; pretty in stone, Longfield, by Alex Hills.



Left top: Brabourne pilgrimage, by Liz Garnett. Left: fulmars, by Tom Betts. Above: Teston, by Sophie Shotter.

The trees that hold the secrets to our past... and our future?

Tricia Moxey, today CPRE Essex vice-chairman but a daughter of Ramsgate, reviews a book that is both fascinating and concerning

Trees grow well in Kent and in recent years enthusiasts have been out and about measuring and recording the tallest, oldest and more unusual specimens.

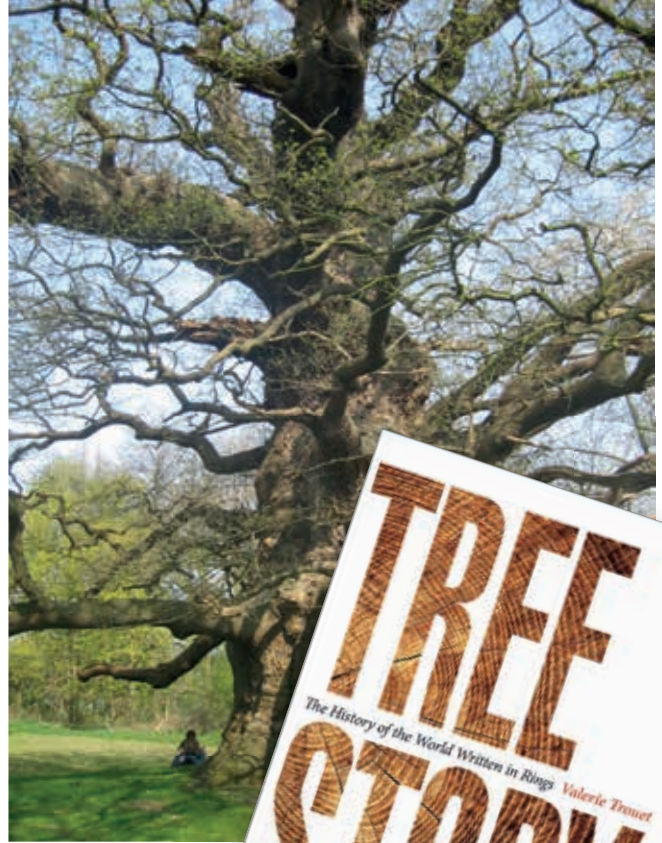
There are some wonderful tall and large-girthed oaks and beeches in the parkland at Knole and other long-established parks. The Majesty Oak standing in Fredville Park, Nonington, was a well-established tree in 1554 when it was called the Fredville Oak – and people travelled to admire it then! Today its girth is 12.36 metres and it is listed in the Guinness Book of Records as the largest maiden oak in the United Kingdom.

As a tree grows, it lays down an annual ring of new woody tissue just beneath the bark. The width of each ring will reflect the growing conditions of each specific year – wider in a year of warmth and rain, narrower in dry years. Using many sections of wood from different species, it is possible to chart the relationship between tree ring growth and changes in climatic conditions.

This study is called dendrochronology and can be used to date timbers from buildings and wooden objects. Linking these patterns of growth rings in different species with many and varied datable sources of historic information, it is now possible to plot warmer or colder decades and use these to theorise about the impact of such changes on past civilisations.

In her recently published book *Tree Story, The History of the World Written in Rings*, Valerie Trouet, an ardent dendrochronologist, details her fascinating story of locating some of the oldest living trees around the world. Once found, their rings were sampled and examined to reveal detailed records of how changes in climate shaped their growth pattern over several centuries.

She discussed her findings with historians and archaeologists and in this eloquently written book poses theories about the link between changes in climate and the rise and fall of earlier civilisations as agricultural production either prospered or failed with dire consequences.



This summer, UK farmers recorded the worst wheat harvest for 40 years due to the recent changes in weather patterns. Fortunately, this is unlikely to lead to widespread famine in our region thanks to our ability to import grain from other countries.

However, the increasing numbers of devastating hurricanes, plagues of locusts, unseasonal late frosts, summer droughts and increasing levels of soil erosion are some of the challenges facing agriculturalists around the globe. We should all be concerned as food security will become a major issue in the years ahead as climate instability increases and we should seriously consider ways to reduce our own carbon footprints and food miles.

References

- Trouet, Valerie. 2020. *Tree Story, The History of the World Written in Rings*. John Hopkins University
- Berners-Lee, Mike. 2019. *There is No Planet B*. CUP
- Berners-Lee, Mike. 2020. *How Bad are Bananas? The Carbon Footprint of Everything*. Kindle Edition

For further details of the Majesty Oak, visit

www.monumentaltrees.com

The Majesty Oak near Nonington (top) is listed as the largest maiden, or clear-stemmed, oak in the country (Tim B, monumentaltrees.com)

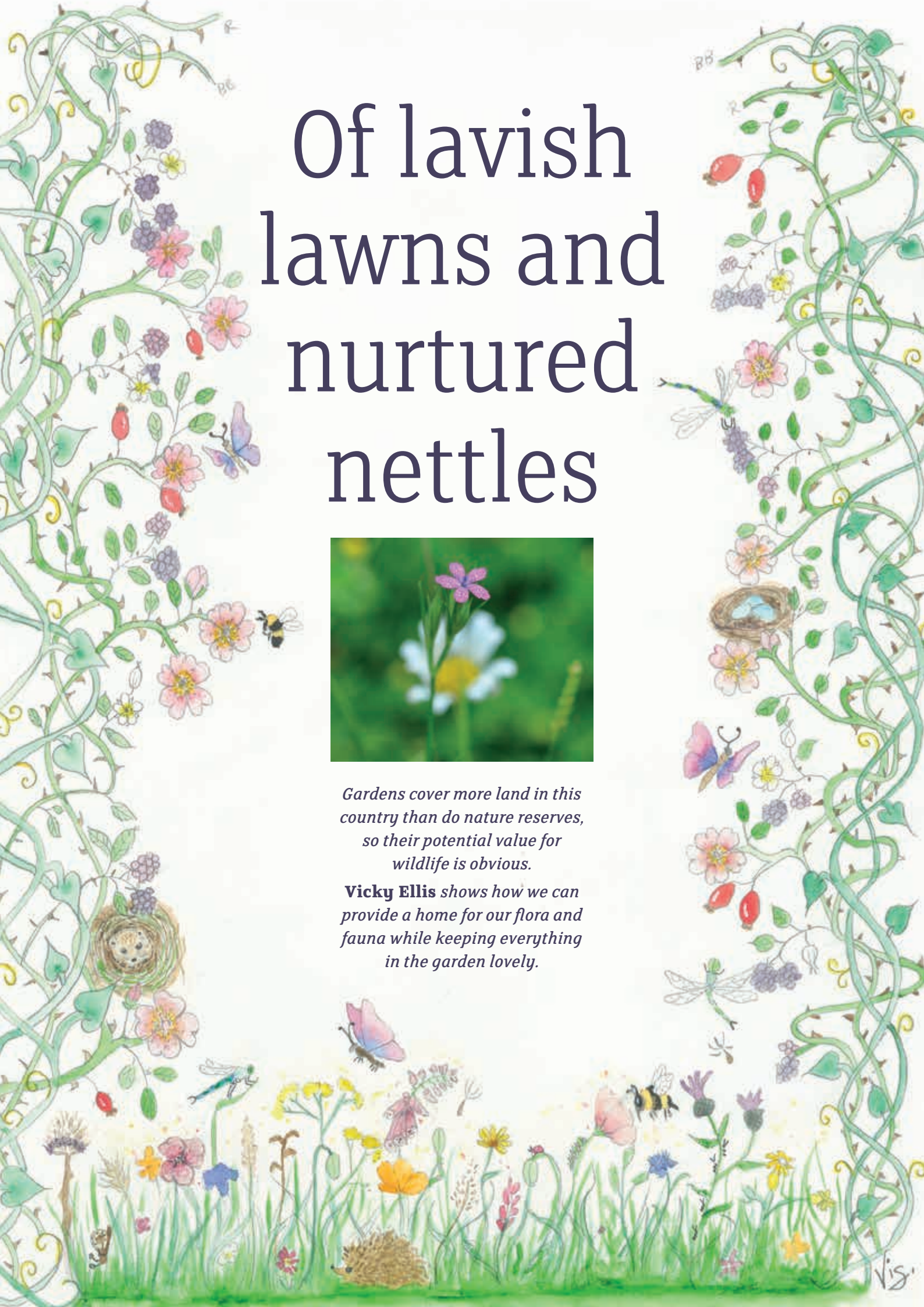


Of lavish lawns and nurtured nettles



Gardens cover more land in this country than do nature reserves, so their potential value for wildlife is obvious.

Vicky Ellis shows how we can provide a home for our flora and fauna while keeping everything in the garden lovely.





Where possible, place your wildlife pond so it is half in shade and half in the sun

Considering wildlife while gardening does not necessarily mean only wild lawns and stinging nettles. It is possible to grow flowers, vegetables and wildlife and have a lovely garden, too.

The area that gardens occupy in the UK adds up to an area larger than all our nature reserves combined. This drums home how important our gardens are to nature and what they could potentially contribute to our biodiversity, especially when considering that our gardens were probably once part of our countryside. Even window boxes and balconies can play an important role in our environment and, in turn, our health and well-being.

Two of the most damaging things we can do in our gardens is lay down plastic turf or concrete. Plastic turf, or artificial grass, is effectively just that, plastic, and as it breaks down, so the micro-particles of plastic are absorbed into the ground below.

Plastic turf is the single worst option, not just from an environmental stance but also hygiene and waste, with no biodiversity benefits at all – it is a threat to the habitat of birds, bees, butterflies and other critters and creates landfill that will never break down.

The Guardian reported on a study in 2011 that revealed almost 3,000 hectares (7,413 acres or 12 square miles) of green gardens had been lost in eight years, equivalent to two Hyde Parks per year, to artificial grass, decking and concreting. Concrete is impermeable, causing run-off when it rains, and provides little or no shelter to invertebrates.



Privet hawk-moth

Even the best-kept lawns have bees that burrow and worms, crane fly larvae and other grubs living beneath the surface. All these help the lawn maintain its structure and ability to absorb nutrients. A lawn is a living, breathing thing, providing habitat, shelter and food for all sorts of wildlife. Cover it up and you create a dead zone.

So how to maximise your space for biodiversity? The more diverse habitats you can fit in, the better. Habitats cater for different species of flora and fauna depending on where your garden is (coastal, woodland and so on) and the soil type, such as clay, sandy or loamy. To avoid getting bogged down in detail, we will stick to the basics that would fit most garden types.

The first step is to retrain your mind to accept that nature is not naturally neat and tidy with straight edges; it is unpredictable, surprising and changeable. Once you have accepted these three ideas, you can relax and enjoy your garden so much more as you won't fret about a weed or two in the flowerbed (a weed is simply a plant growing in the wrong place – if you accept wildflowers, there are no such things as weeds) or the fact that your lawn is more than an inch high!

Wood piles

One of the easiest features to add to any garden is a wood pile. Rotting wood provides food, shelter and nesting sites for invertebrates, amphibians and reptiles. Try to find a sheltered, quiet area in a corner for your log pile and use different types of wood of varying sizes. You can place them stacked on top or randomly clustered together as long as it creates a pile of some sort and, if possible, half-bury the bottom logs. The wood at the bottom should remain damp, even during dry spells; this really aids pupae, molluscs and nematodes. As the logs rot, they provide homes for an array of fungi.

Rock piles

As with logs, rocks provide shelter and basking areas for reptiles. The bottom rocks should remain damp and a pile will provide a sculptural focus for your garden. Try not to place them anywhere hot and exposed. Over time they can become covered in moss, which provides a micro-habitat for invertebrates, holding in moisture. To make your rock pile look even more attractive and colourful, plant with alpines and other plants to create a rock garden, or just wait and see what grows naturally. Maybe keep a diary of what appears.

Ponds

Water will not just enhance the look of a garden, it will substantially increase biodiversity. You do not need to build a huge pond, a small upturned bin lid or indeed any large receptacle capable of holding water will suffice. It is important to incorporate an escape route for small mammals that might fall into your pond, so put in a ramp; it is best to grade the pond from very shallow at the margins, gradually deepening

to the centre. Putting shingle around the shallower edges helps provide shelter and hiding places for aquatic insects and nymphs and gives an opportunity for birds to bathe. Some substrate at the bottom of the pond provides shelter and hiding places for aquatic insects that prefer deeper water. Plant a few reeds round the edges if there's room as these allow nymphs to come out of the water to morph, while if possible place your pond so it is half in shade and half in the sun.

Resist adding fish as they will feed on invertebrates and aquatic insects or the eggs of amphibians. Unless it is huge, fish do more harm than good in a wildlife pond. Once you have created your pond, aquatic insects such as diving beetles, water boatmen and water skaters will make use of it almost immediately. They seem to parachute in out of nowhere.

Around the margins you can put water-loving native plants such as water mint, arrowhead, water forget-me-nots, marsh marigold and yellow flag iris and place rocks and other water features to enhance the natural look. To help oxygenate the water, plant hornwort, spiked water milfoil and water soldiers.

Lawns

Lawns do not have to comprise simply grass – you can have a moss lawn, chamomile or clover. Allowing your lawn to grow up in patches encourages grasshoppers, crickets, moths, butterflies and damselflies. Why not allow the grass to grow and then mow paths through the long grass? Take part in 'No Mow May' and see what spring flowers you have lurking within your lawn that you never knew were there – there may even be a hidden orchid or two. Having a lawn encompassing an array



Marbled white

of native plants such as dandelion, scarlet pimpernel, bird's-foot trefoil and daisies can look so pretty if allowed to flourish and the pollinators will love it! You will witness more bees, hoverflies and flower beetles and your lawn will come alive with all the activity. It is still important to have mown areas to allow birds to find grubs and seeds.

Height

Varying height in a garden can be attractive to an array of flora and fauna. We have covered the lower-down areas of your garden with log and stone piles and a pond, now we're going to consider the flowerbeds, pots, shrubs and trees.

Flowerbeds

In your flowerbed, place small plants at the front, working up to larger plants at the back, using pollinator-friendly plants with a mixture of perennials and annuals such as lavender, cornflowers, alliums, foxgloves, cosmos, sunflowers, hollyhocks, lupins and fennel. You can dot the odd vegetable to harvest among your flowering plants. Avoid ornamental double-headed flowers as bees find it difficult to reach the centre of the flower. If you are feeling adventurous, buy a wildflower seed mix and see what grows. Here you can throw caution to the wind and really cram in the flowers. Think about flowering seasons and try to place plants that flower at different times to extend the flowering season for as long as possible from spring through to autumn.

Pots

If you have no room for a flowerbed or prefer pots, you can still grow all the plants already mentioned. Dwarf fruit trees flowering in March and May help provide bees with their first food and then give you a tasty harvest come autumn. The same goes for window boxes and hanging baskets – all these plants can be grown in the tiniest garden or balcony and all help our pollinators.

Shrubs and trees

Flowering shrubs such as buddleia, lilac, choisya and manuka encourage butterflies and bees. If dense enough, you might even get a wren nesting in the shrub. Trees provide nesting areas for birds and, if fruit or nut trees, the blossom provides food for pollinators in spring and the fruit food for birds and small mammals in autumn. Try to think about how useful the tree or shrub is when choosing, rather than its ornamental qualities. Often you will find that any shrub or tree that flowers has highly attractive qualities. If you have a large garden, think linear when placing your trees and shrubs to help create feeding corridors for bats.



Toads are rare on Thanet - indeed this fine-looking animal, which paid a visit in April this year, was the first record for the garden



We don't need huge acreages to provide a home for wildlife – this back garden of a semi-detached house in Ramsgate is the setting for every photograph in this feature

(all pics Richard Kinzler)



Frog spawn is an increasingly scarce sight across Kent, but gardens provide an important refuge for the common frog

Wild areas

Being bold and allowing your garden to grow wild in parts if you have room can be so beneficial for insects, especially caterpillars. A few stinging nettles, brambles and thistles, for instance, are sought after by some species. The peacock butterfly will lay its eggs on stinging nettles, while bumble bees and cabbage whites will enjoy the thistles. To prevent these plants from taking over, you will need to manage them through the year, but the benefits a wild area provides in a wildlife garden are well worth the effort. Be aware that some wildflowers are notifiable, such as spear thistle and ragwort.

However, there are ornamental thistles on the market that can be equally as beneficial, while one or two carefully managed specimens of ragwort, an important food plant for the cinnabar moth, placed safely away from any cattle or horses, will do no harm if as soon as they have finished flowering and before they turn to seed, are topped immediately and disposed of carefully by either burning or landfill. Note that ragwort is still toxic to animals even when cut.

Compost heaps

Compost does not just supply regular natural earth and food for plants, it also provides a habitat for wildlife. Slugs and snails are nature’s recyclers and a source of food for birds such as thrushes, frogs, toads, hedgehogs and ground beetles. Worms love a compost heap and help turn your waste into soil. Snakes seek out the warmth of a heap and may even lay their eggs there, so be careful when turning your heap over – avoid using a sharp garden fork.

Wildlife at night

Nocturnal pollinators such as moths benefit from night-scented blooming plants such as honeysuckle, jasmine, tuberose, japonica and evening primrose. These insects in turn are valuable prey for bats.

Other enhancements

There are lots you can add to your garden such as insect hotels, bee homes, nesting boxes, bat boxes, a toad house, a bird bath, a watering hole for hedgehogs and feeding stations for birds and mammals. It’s best not to feed birds during the nesting season; the parents should be foraging for a balanced diet, otherwise they will just choose what’s on offer from you, which may not be the best option for growing chicks. Try to

place any bird-feeder up in trees or tall bushes; this helps protect visiting birds from aerial predators and gives them a chance to escape. A tree or bush is also a more natural place for them to feed.

You could make your own bug hotel using stacked crates with moss, logs, clay pots, sticks and hollow tubes stuffed in the gaps between. It won’t take long before the residents move in.



CPRE Kent has an array of wildlife-friendly enhancements for your garden for sale, so why not email the office for more information at info@cprekent.org.uk?

Butterfly house: £10

Bee hotel: £10

Bird nesting box: £10

Bug hotel: £15

Toad house: £10



Despite substantial fluctuations in population, foxes are frequent visitors to the county’s gardens

Why?

join CPRE Kent

CPRE Kent is the only charity that fights for the wider countryside in our county. We don't just battle to protect trees, birds, wildlife or open spaces – we seek to protect the countryside itself.

Without the wider rural environment that we hold so dear, not only do we lose our nature but also what makes Kent special.

No one has fought harder for the countryside with its people, villages and wildlife than CPRE Kent. Last year we celebrated our 90th year – we could of course not have lasted that long without our supporters, but similarly we have proved our right to be here through the passion, care and professional expertise of our staff and volunteers.

No one knows the crazy levels of pressure from urban sprawl weighing upon Kent as much as the people who live here – and suffice to say all who represent or work for this organisation live within its borders.

We want to bring people together in connecting with the nature in our downs, woods, marshes, farms and coastline with which we are blessed... we still have much to celebrate.

As you will read elsewhere in this magazine, central government is proposing changes to the planning system that could be disastrous for our countryside. CPRE has been engaged at the highest level in consultations on what is being suggested – the charity's combination of local and national knowledge is its strength.

While CPRE Kent is far from opposed to all development or to all change, there are cases where we believe we have a duty to challenge what is profoundly wrong.

Sometimes that duty drives us to seek protection for the countryside through court; it is an expensive option and one taken only as a last resort, but if we don't do it, who else will?

CPRE leads the fight for our beautiful county in a way no one else can, holding developers and the people that represent you to account. Please join us – as together we are stronger.

Write to us at: CPRE Kent, Queen's Head House,
Ashford Road, Charing, Ashford, Kent TN27 0AD

email info@cprekent.org.uk
or phone us on 01233 714540

Local Plans: an overview

Our list gives the latest situation on Local Plans throughout Kent. In addition, many local authorities have an old-style Local Plan that has 'saved' policies still relevant when considering planning applications. These will gradually be replaced as new Plans are adopted. Details of currently 'saved' policies are provided on local authority websites.



Ashford

- Local Plan adopted in February 2019.

Canterbury

- Local Plan adopted in July 2017. A new Local Development Scheme (LDS) was adopted in October – Regulation 18 consultation will take place up until spring 2021, with submission late 2021/early 2022 and adoption in July 2022. A Call for Sites ran from February 7-June 30, 2020. Consultation on issues has been taking place – the deadline for comments was September 30.

Dartford

- Regulation 18 consultation on 'strategic issues' for the new Local Plan (Core Strategy Review) took place from June 8-July 20, 2018. A further 'preferred options' Regulation 18 consultation took place from January 13-February 21, 2020. Consultation details for the draft Local Plan are awaited – potentially winter 2020-21 or afterwards.

Dover

- Consultation on the draft Local Plan planned for June-July 2020 has been postponed until later this year or early 2021.

Folkestone & Hythe

- The examination hearings for the Places and Policies Local Plan took place from May 14-17. Consultation on Main Modifications to the Local Plan has taken place and all duly-made representations passed to the Planning Inspector on March 2, 2020. The Inspector's Report was received on June 26, 2020 – with the Plan found to be sound subject to modifications. Inspectors have been appointed to carry out an independent examination of the Core Strategy Review Plan – correspondence has been exchanged regarding initial questions, and hearing statements submitted. The examination hearings will take place during the first two weeks of November.

Gravesham

- Regulation 18 consultation took place in 2018 on the Local Plan Core Strategy Partial Review and Site Allocations: Issues and Options (Part 1) and Development Management Policies (Part 2). The next round of consultation was expected in March or April 2020 but has been delayed.

Maidstone

- Local Plan adopted in 2017. Regulation 18 Scoping, Themes & Issues public consultation took place in summer 2019. The council reviewed its LDS in July 2020. Consultation on the key growth strategies is taking place in October, with further consultation on detailed topic areas in February 2021.

Medway

- Regulation 18 consultation on the Local Plan development strategy document took place in 2018. It had been hoped that Regulation 19 consultation on the publication of a draft Local Plan would take place by December 2019 (having been delayed pending the outcome of a bid for £170 million from the Housing Infrastructure Fund). A revised LDS (December 2019) anticipated Regulation 19 consultation this summer, with adoption in December 2021.

Sevenoaks

- Examination of the Local Plan commenced in October 2019. The inspector suspended the hearings and advised the council to withdraw its Plan as it was considered unsound (failure to comply with Duty to Cooperate). The council advised the Planning Inspectorate that it would not voluntarily withdraw its Local Plan. On January 21, 2020, the council wrote to the Secretary of State requesting he intervene and has since launched a judicial review (April 2020). In June the council won permission to bring a judicial review against the Planning Inspector's decision to reject the draft Local Plan.

Swale

- Local Plan adopted in July 2017. Regulation 18 consultation (scoping issues) for the Swale Local Plan Review 2022-2038 took place in 2018. A new LDS was adopted in March 2020. The anticipated issues and options (Regulation 18) consultation from April-June 2020 was postponed.

Thanet

- Local Plan examination hearings finished on July 18. Consultation on Main Modifications took place from December 11, 2019-January 27, 2020. The council received the Inspectors' Report on March 23, 2020. The Plan was formally adopted at full council on July 9, 2020.

Tonbridge and Malling

- Local Plan submitted to the Secretary of State on January 23, 2019. Two inspectors (Simon Berkeley and Luke Fleming) were appointed to carry out examination of the Plan. Post-submission consultation relating to some examination documents took place from November 4-December 23, 2019. Due to other work commitments, Berkeley was replaced by Louise Crosby. The hearings scheduled to take place from May 19-21, 2020, were postponed and will now take place in October and November.

Tunbridge Wells

- Regulation 18 consultation on a draft preferred Local Plan took place from September 20-November 15, 2019. Given the number and range of issues raised, the council published a revised LDS. The next round of public consultation is expected to take place in March-April 2021.

District	Plan	Apr-Jun 2020	Jul-Sep 2020	Oct-Dec 2020	Jan-Mar 2021	Apr-Jun 2021	Jul-Sep 2021	Oct-Dec 2021	Adoption
Ashford	Local Plan 2030								Adopted Feb 2019
Canterbury	Local Plan		Consultation			Consultation			Adopted 13.7.17
Dartford	Local Plan			Consultation					
Dover	Local Plan				Consultation				
Folkestone & Hythe	Places and Policies Local Plan		Adoption anticipated						
	Core Strategy review			EIP					
Gravesham	Site Allocations & Development Management Policies Document			Consultation					
Maidstone	Local Plan			Consultation					Adopted 25.10.17
Medway	Local Plan 2012 - 2035			Consultation					
Sevenoaks	Local Plan 2015 - 2035	Judicial Review							
Swale	Local Plan 2022 - 2038			Consultation					Adopted 26.7.17
Thanet	Local Plan 2031		Adopted						Adopted 9.7.20
Tonbridge & Malling	Local Plan			EIP					
Tunbridge Wells	Local Plan 2033			Consultation					

KEY

- Regulation 18
- Regulation 19
- EIP
- Adoption

Regulation 18 consultation: early stage consultation often with open questions and a wider remit for consultation input.

Regulation 19 consultation: views sought on whether the Local Plan is legally compliant and meets the tests of soundness set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

Examination in Public (EIP): hearing held by a planning inspector to assess whether the Local Plan has been prepared in line with relevant legal requirements and meets the tests of soundness.

Around the districts.

A quick catch-up with our committees – more extensive reports from our chairmen are on the website. Don't forget, if you would like to become more involved with CPRE Kent in your local area please contact us in the office and we will put you in touch with your district chairman.

Ashford – Christine Drury

- In the last edition we were able to celebrate the strength of Ashford's Local Plan green-corridor policy when the East Stour Park development was refused. Now that decision has been appealed, the policy will be tested again in front of a planning inspector. The pressure never seems to go away.
- In another high-profile application adjacent to Kennington, the planning committee agreed to 288 homes being built by Redrow and another 460 approved as outline. Listening to the planning committee, it was clear that the plans were only approved because the site was in the Local Plan, and it was only in it because the targets for Ashford are so high; this is Grade I agricultural land in the setting of the AONB that is highly valued countryside-next-door laced with much-used footpaths. Maybe Gladman was taking note of the reluctance to approve and the vehemence of local opposition to the Kennington site. Gladman's application for yet another 625 houses on adjacent fields even closer to the AONB was withdrawn in September.
- Another entirely inappropriate application for 250 homes was refused by the planning committee, this time in Tenterden. This was a site refused for the Local Plan, but Wates submitted anyway and has caused huge angst and work for the town council and residents. Kent Wildlife Trust has done battle royal to call out misuse and misrepresentation of ecology data by the applicant's ecology consultants. KWT has shown that biodiversity mitigation would be impossible, let alone biodiversity gain, and done highly technical work applying Defra metrics and its knowledge and experience on the beneficial effects on grassland of using grazing animals rather than mowing.
- Ashford is now coping with another type of planning application: a government Special Development Order (SDO) close to the newly-completed junction 10a of the M20. Amid the local alarm of seeing bulldozers appear in fields alongside before any plans had been published, the Department for Transport did apologise and hastily started communicating with the parishes after insistence from borough councillors and MP Damian Green. A letter to the Secretary of State from CPRE Kent may have helped, too. The promised planning portal is still awaited, but it is good news that the county council is the project manager. This is a site of 27 hectares that will accommodate border clearance facilities for Defra, animal and plant health border checks and Customs checks by HMRC. These are planned for five years. From January 1 to July next year it will have additional space for up to 1,800 trucks en route to Eurotunnel or Dover to resolve export document queries. It is hoped that by July the new export document systems required on January 1 will be well established and all freight will be using them without difficulty. The good news is, after challenge, the DfT did engage. And even better: the plans for the site are following precisely the landscaping, ponds, bunding and heritage mitigation that were agreed in eight years of hard work with the previous owner, AXA Insurance, which had plans for a giant Amazon warehouse on the site. There is much to be done to make sure it happens as planned. A petition and encouraging discussions give hope that land between the site and Mersham might become green space in perpetuity. More on this next time.

Dartford and Gravesham – Alex Hills

- Covid-19 means more and more consultations are being done online. The recent Highways England four-week supplementary consultation on the Lower Thames Crossing proved the perfect example of how not to do an online consultation:
 - i The website was very difficult to navigate, to the point where many people gave up.
 - ii The files were so big they caused many people's computers to freeze.
 - iii Key information such as traffic data and environmental information was not available.
 - iv The maps used were not big enough and so complex they were very hard to understand.
 - v More details on walking and cycling routes were given out on a webinar a week before the consultation closed.
 - vi The online discussion sessions were held on difficult-to-use software rather than the easier Zoom.
 - vii There was a separate email address to order hard copies of the documents, but extra response time was not given to those who had ordered them.
 - viii It emerged during the January consultation that two lanes in each direction on the A2 would be lost to accommodate the crossing – this was still not made clear in the latest consultation. I had committee members Pat Luxford and Noel Clarke in my garden with planner Paul Buckley trying to make sense of what we were being asked to respond to.

ix The crossing is in Gravesham, but hard copies were only available in Rochester Library, which we thought was very wrong. Despite many protests, HE refused to make them available in Gravesham or to hold a drop-in session.

- At a week's notice, Pat joined Meopham Residents Association to hold a Covid-compliant drop-in session in Meopham. This was possible thanks to Barbara Wade from Meopham Cricket Club, who gave us the use of the pavilion for free and helped out on the day. Of the 30 people who attended, not one was aware of the loss of four lanes on the A2, which will have a major impact on the A2 and surrounding roads like the A227.
- Thanks to Jackie Luckhurst and Sue Gofton for also helping at short notice and James Ferrin for doing such a good job with social media. The drop-in session showed what can be done even with the Covid restrictions; it also proved the benefits of having such a good local committee. Thank you to all members for your hard work.

Dover – Derek Wanstall

- With Dover District Council's Local Plan in the middle of being reviewed, and the government's apparent intention to alter planning development guidelines, we seem to be heading towards greater problems regarding planning and infrastructure. Local views and issues must be considered, likewise highways and travel, with many people having to travel for work and children needing to get to school. Government must listen to the people it represents. Protecting our countryside, AONBs and Green Belts, along with our wildlife, is so important, but few developers seem to care about it.
- An issue still causing great problems is Lydden Hill racing circuit, where expansion was approved by Dover District Council without residents' quality of life being considered.
- Quinn Estates has submitted a planning application for Betteshanger Park and this is being consulted upon. Committee member Peter Cutler has worked hard on this scheme on behalf of residents and parish councils.
- My meeting with consultant Sarah Merrington was interesting in our efforts to gain new members, which is so important. I'm looking forward to Sarah's report.

Maidstone – Gary Thomas

- The borough council's planning committee has twice stood up against officers' advice on a planning application for a site included in the Local Plan 2017. A decision to refuse was deferred for further discussion before the application was approved at the next meeting, only for officers to require it to go before the policy and resources committee, which also refused it. The officers raised possible costs each time and advised that any appeal would be lost. There has been an appeal and we now have Rule 6 status, with great concern at the council's approach. Richard Knox-Johnston will lead.
- Proposals by the council to build a 'garden village' at Lenham Heath have been stalled by advice from Natural England regarding water quality. The government body has said "an appropriate assessment" must be carried out before the council agrees any new development likely to have "a significant adverse impact on water quality" in the River Stour catchment. The assessment must include any necessary mitigation measures. With the source of the river system of the Stour Valley catchment being in Lenham, and part of the upper section of the Great Stour lying in Maidstone borough, the council says there will be "an immediate impact" on planning applications for new homes in and around both Lenham and part of Boughton Malherbe parishes. The advice aims to ensure new residential development does not cause further deterioration of water quality at Stodmarsh National Nature Reserve in terms of nitrate and phosphate discharges. Maidstone council says it is "investigating possible solutions" and has "identified a way forward for larger housing sites". It is, though, "taking a precautionary approach and will require appropriate assessments for any planning applications including those not yet determined". The Lenham Heath development had originally been set at 5,000 dwellings but since cut to 4,000. Nothing has yet been passed by any committee.
- **Similar concerns led to revised plans for the 4,000-home Mountfield Park development at Canterbury being pulled from the city council planning committee's agenda in October. Planning permission for the huge scheme had already lapsed after legal challenges, meaning it will need to be decided upon again.**

Medway – David Mairs

- Those who love the North Kent Marshes can look forward to years of mass urban development as Medway Council begins its "plans to unlock the potential on the Hoo peninsula". Many residents believe that such potential involves little more than the creation of a giant London commuter dormitory that will do little, if anything, for local people.
- November's announcement that the council had secured £170 million funding "to deliver strategic transport and environmental projects" through the Housing Infrastructure Fund has been followed by the signing between the council and Homes England of a 'grant determination agreement'. This is likely to set out plans for a 12,000-home new town at Hoo St Werburgh, expansion of other villages and a new train station at Sharnal Street to take all those commuters to London. Oh, and a "community parkland".

Sevenoaks – Nigel Britten

- Some years ago there was an outbreak of 'plot sales' in the district: redundant farmland being divided into small plots, down to a quarter of an acre, and marketed with the message that at some point they might gain planning permission for housing. As all such land in Sevenoaks is in the Green Belt there was never a realistic chance of it happening. The problem about this scam was not the bad investment but the effect on the landscape – fences being erected and other clutter introduced in otherwise open countryside. This was eventually brought under control through action by Trading Standards and others. Unfortunately, the problem has come back. Plots have recently been offered for sale at Edenbridge and West Kingsdown. In some cases the sale prospectus says, quite brazenly and untruthfully, that the land is not in the Green Belt. This is misrepresentation and Trading Standards is dealing with it. The district council has acted very swiftly to make it illegal to do anything on the land beyond its existing use without planning permission, and we are hoping that will have put an end to it.
- The Local Plan remains in limbo, awaiting a hearing of the judicial review brought by the district council of the inspector's decision to deem it 'unsound'. Meanwhile, the government has launched a consultation on a complete overhaul of the planning system. In our view it would

seriously undermine – some would say end – proper democratic engagement with planning. It is potentially very bad news for a Green Belt and AONB district like Sevenoaks because the government's new algorithm for calculating housing need would impose a mandatory requirement on the council to allocate land to achieve the numbers.

Shepway (Folkestone & Hythe) – Graham Horner

- We have made a submission to the inspectors for the Examination in Public of the Draft Revised Local Plan Core Strategy. Unless this is found sound, Otterpool Park (a proposed 10,000-home new town between Lympne and Sellindge) will have no basis. The inspectors are targeting early November for the hearings and trying to work out whether physical meetings can be arranged safely and whether online meetings can be effective. Our principal objection to Otterpool Park is that it is too big. It does not fit between existing villages without coalescing with them; there is no evidence there will be enough fresh water available or enough capacity in the sewerage; and there is no confidence things like schools and doctors' surgeries can be built and manned in time to serve the new population. Also, we have not yet seen any evidence the buildings can be designed so as not to completely spoil views from around (especially from the North Downs Way). Folkestone & Hythe District Council has established a subsidiary, Otterpool Park LLC, to be the master developer. It now owns or has agreements to buy almost all the land within the masterplan area. It has appointed Tibbalds to produce a masterplan for phase 1 (town centre next to Westenhanger village) and a design code. There has been some engagement on this with affected parish councils, two of which share members with our area committee.
- The legal challenge to the Princes Parade development rumbles on. The Places and Policies part of the (old) Local Plan was found sound by the Planning Inspectorate earlier in the year and has now been adopted, giving Princes Parade a bit more legitimacy in planning terms.
- There has been a bit of rash of proposals for gypsy/traveller sites – more than the allocations in the Local Plan, which has only just been signed off. We have objected.
- Otherwise, things have been relatively quiet – lots of people doing up their homes but no major development proposals.

Thanet – David Morrish

- Thanet District Council has now nodded through what purports to be a Local Plan, albeit with a five-year shelf-life including 180 pages of major modifications that require it to prepare a new Plan by February 2021.
- We have, of course, the government's proposed planning changes, including the scrapping of Section 106 agreements. That's good news for prospective developers in Thanet who had all cunningly 'in principle' signed up to very expensive S106s to provide a superhighway system to link new housing estates built on pre-1948 logic, so it will certainly put a bang into Thanet council's and the county council's plans. Let's await consultation over the next six months.
- Thanet council has finally appointed its first climate control officer fully 25 years after most other local authorities in the UK, confirming the view that it is at least a quarter of a century behind the times in organisation, policies and outlook.
- The £34 million white elephant known as Thanet Parkway station was approved at the start of September by the county council's planning committee. It was described by the leader of Thanet council as a "game-changing investment for the coastal economy", with the statement that "a commitment to delivering this required infrastructure will provide increased confidence in our district and the wider region". In truth what has been approved is a scheme that has risen in cost to £34 million from an initial estimate of £11 million, destroys some 23 acres of high-quality farmland, has no permanent station staff or commercial bus services... and will save – wait for it – three minutes' journey time. Where even that alleged saving has come from is anyone's guess – in 2018 a damning Department for Transport statement said its panel was "concerned that accommodating an additional stop at Thanet Parkway would add two minutes to the journey on the line between Ashford and Ramsgate". Indeed. The station will in fact increase times. CPRE Thanet was the only formal objector to this out-of-date, half-baked lunacy.
- The committee welcomed the help of consultant Sarah Merrington in assisting us with the gritty problem of communicating with our members and encouraging potential volunteers.
- Just as I was completing this missive I was delighted to open my copy of the local weekly to find extracts from the most recent district audit report. The head of the East Kent Internal Audit Partnership says "action is needed at Thanet District Council to address the cultural and governance failures that stem from the very top of the organisation. In my view this is all about people, their relationships, behaviours and attitudes, and I only experience this culture at Thanet DC, not the other councils that I work for". This, dear friends, is what we are up against.
- **In the Spring-Summer 2020 edition of Kent Voice, we referred to a voluntary tree-planting programme in Thanet "financed by RiverOak (the Manston airport promoter)". We have been asked to point out by the Isle of Thanet Tree and Woodland Initiative that funding for the programme came in fact through the Forestry Commission's Urban Challenge Tree Fund. This was match-funded by voluntary labour allowance and other financial contributions from the public. Thanet District Council has also awarded a grant.**

Tunbridge Wells – Liz Akenhead

- We objected to an application to build a McDonald's at the Blue Boys roundabout on the A21 at Kippings Cross near Matfield. It was a difficult case because there was a previous permission for a restaurant/diner on that site, which had officially been started by the provision of the picnic area, but we argued that the proposal was sufficiently different for that permission not to apply. Following objections and comments from numerous residents, as well as from the borough's conservation officer, BP Oil, the operator of the Burger King franchise at the Blue Boys, the Civic Society and two parish councils, together with a long letter from Highways England requiring a number of things to be reviewed, the application was withdrawn. However, we understand that McDonald's intends to submit a revised application in due course.
- We objected to an outline application for a C2 care village of 108 units in Green Belt off Sandrock Road, between Tunbridge Wells and the A21.
- Following amendments to the hybrid application for a major housing development and 'relief road' at Hawkhurst Golf Course, which would reroute the road to avoid ancient woodland and reduce the number of dwellings from 417 to 374, we maintained our objection, as did the High Weald AONB Unit. Natural England has maintained its objection, saying it would seek a call-in to the Secretary of State if the borough council was minded to approve the application. In connection with this application, many residents have raised the issue of existing sewage problems in the village, while Southern Water has sent an interesting letter saying "The proposed development has not been identified and allocated for development by the Local Planning Authority, and therefore Southern Water has not had reasonable time to make provision for the additional treatment capacity that is necessary to service this development. Additional capacity would need to be funded through the 5 yearly investment

plan and as such will take time to implement". It has requested a condition, if planning permission is granted, that construction should not start until details of the proposed means of foul and surface water sewage disposal have been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the local planning authority in consultation with Southern Water. It has also written to the developer asking for information on the proposed occupation dates and build-out rate, to help it plan facilities to meet the new demand. This is the first time I have seen Southern Water adopt such a proactive stance. Let us hope this will continue and help to avoid some of the problems we have previously encountered with housing developments being built without sufficient sewerage to serve them.

- We also objected to a number of more minor applications, including a proposal (the most recent in a succession of unsatisfactory applications and appeals) for three self-build dwellings to be built in the garden of Paygate Cottage, Matfield, the only remaining turnpike toll cottage in the parish and an undesignated local heritage asset. We are pleased that the borough council has refused permission.
- Given the uncertainties and difficulties caused by Covid-19, our committee has decided not to hold an annual meeting this year. However, if members have any issues they wish to raise with the committee, please feel free to contact me by email (elizabeth@akenhead.co.uk) or to phone me on 01892 723920.

Historic Buildings – John Wotton

- The committee held its AGM in January and has since met twice by Zoom, in April and July.
- We arranged a talk for March on Climate Change and Traditional Buildings by John Preston, heritage chair of the Sustainable Traditional Buildings Alliance. This proved our last physical event before lockdown and was well attended and interesting. John's slides have been circulated to all who attended or expressed an interest.
- The 2020 Gravett Award for Architectural Drawing has been forestalled by the pandemic. However, greatly assisted by the participation in the committee of Anske Bax, of the Kent School of Architecture and Planning, and the good offices of Manolo Guerri, a member of KSAP's faculty, arrangements are in progress for the competition to be run early in 2021
- During 2020, we have worked on several threats to built heritage around the county and assisted the county branch in responding to approaches from CPRE members, owners and others. Our members continue to keep a close eye on threats to heritage assets and emerging Local Plan policies affecting heritage and I am grateful to them for their work.
- The committee submitted an objection to the demolition of Swiss Cottage, Bredgar, and its replacement with a new dwelling next to a listed building, and to a new housing development at Perry Court, Faversham. We intervened with Swale District Council to protect 75-77 Milton High Street.
- At my suggestion, submissions made by the Tunbridge Wells committee on two proposed housing developments near Cranbrook – Turnden and Brick Kiln Farm – included heritage arguments.
- Lack of time and resources have sadly prevented our investigating and potentially intervening in several cases during the year. This is unavoidable for so long as the committee chair also chairs the county branch – our search for a new committee chair continues.
- We were sorry to lose Andrew Wells as our long-standing Tonbridge and Malling representative, as he is moving away from Kent. Andrew is immensely knowledgeable and will be hard to replace.

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From the Frontline

Hilary Newport with the campaigns update



Lower Thames Crossing

We made a response of more than 5,000 words to Highways England's consultation on further design revisions to the proposed crossing.

There are many issues with the project – not least regarding air pollution and climate change – but did you also know the following?

The A2 was widened both ways at great expense to four lanes. With the proposed refinements, the A2 coastbound would reduce from four lanes to two just east of the Gravesend East junction and London-bound from four lanes to two before the Thong Lane bridge.

These pinch points would cause serious congestion and should be reconsidered in the light of the decision permitting the operation of Manston airport, which will result in large vehicles carrying air-freight containers along the A2.

Wincheap Water Meadows

Canterbury City Council has announced its intention to revoke its permission to extend the Wincheap park & ride over an area of valued water meadow. This follows our legal challenge to the permission on three grounds:

- Failure to carry out an Environmental Impact Assessment
- Legal errors in the Habitats Regulation Assessment
- Misleading claims that the site had been 'allocated' in the Local Plan and that it would not have a harmful effect on the landscape

The council's decision follows an announcement from Highways England that it could not sign off the planned slip-road from the nearby A2 funded by the nearby Cocking Farm development, thereby rendering the proposed changes to the park & ride redundant.

Manston airport

RiverOak Strategic Partners has been granted consent to reopen Manston airport as a freight hub.

After two postponements of the decision, in January and May, it was finally announced in July that the RSP scheme to reopen the airport six years after it closed was being granted a Development Consent Order by transport minister Andrew Stephenson.

RSP says it will be investing £300 million in the scheme, which it claims will create up to 6,000 jobs at Manston. The developer predicts the reopened airport will be operational from 2023 and able to handle at least 10,000 freight movements a year.

The decision effectively dismisses the conclusions of the Planning Inspectorate's Examining Authority, which had been clear that the DCO should not be granted.

It is a shocking outcome given that four inspectors spent some nine months preparing a report and concluded very strongly that the DCO should be refused.

The developer was not able to demonstrate need, there were adverse impacts on traffic and transport and there were concerns over noise pollution.

Most importantly, though, the Examining Authority recommended the DCO be refused due to conservation of habitats and species regulations.

In short, the inspectors' conclusions were ignored.

The decision flies in the face of the Heathrow third-runway judgement where the Court of Appeal ruled that expansion proposals had failed to consider the UK's commitment to reduce carbon emissions.

Campaigners are applying for a judicial review of the DCO decision.

Cleve Hill Solar Park

We were hugely disappointed by the government's decision to back the building of the UK's largest solar farm on Graveney Marshes, near Faversham.

The Planning Inspectorate announced in May that Alok Sharma, Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, had granted a Development Consent Order for Cleve Hill Solar Park.

CPRE Kent believes the industrialisation of almost 1,000 acres of the North Kent Marshes – an area of international importance to wildlife – is wholly unacceptable and further evidence of the government's chaotic approach towards sustainable energy generation.

A coherent policy would entail solar energy becoming an integral part of housing development. Instead, the government is offering little or no incentive for that to happen, a particular irony given the thousands of new houses being targeted for the surrounding area.

This development, if it proceeds, will destroy a precious and fragile landscape, wreck natural habitat for a wide range of wildlife and inflict substantial disturbance and disruption on local people, through construction and subsequent maintenance of the site, for decades to come.

CPRE Kent is a strong supporter of renewable energy, but both the vast scale and sensitive location of this scheme mean its development should never have been accepted.

Don't forget to keep up with our campaigns news on our website and via Facebook and Twitter @cprekent



Gift of Membership

Have you considered the gift of CPRE Kent membership?

CPRE Kent's membership is in serious decline.

Without our members we would not be able to protect the countryside from inappropriate planning decisions or campaign on litter issues and biodiversity at a time when there is unprecedented pressure on green spaces and protected areas. Nature is under serious threat.

Please consider giving a CPRE Kent membership when making a gift to a friend or family member.

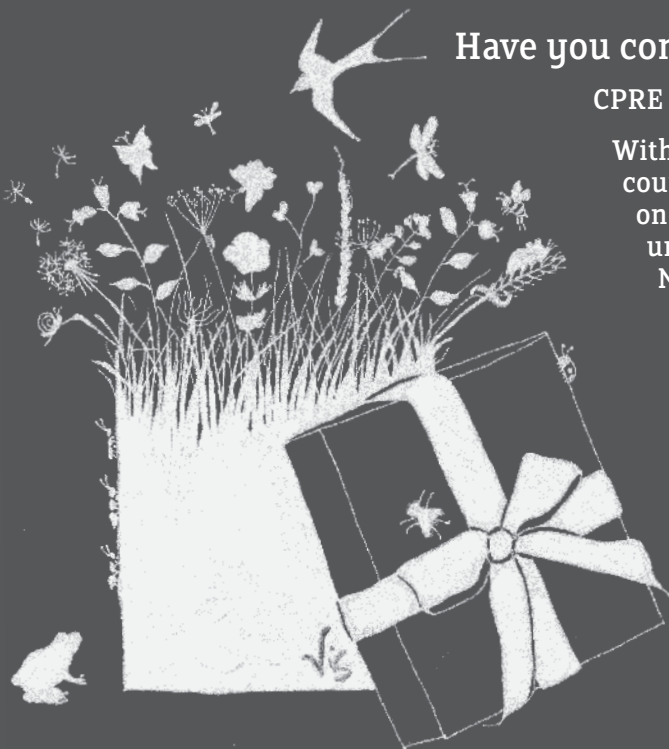
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email info@cprekent.org.uk;

or phone us on 01233 714540.



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Lottery results



Here are the Lottery winners since the last edition of Kent Voice:

April 20

Mr G Thorpe £50
Ms C Benfield £30
Mr D Gardner £20
Mr A White £20

May 20

Mr A Terry £50
Mr C Catt £30
Mr N Britten £20
Mrs McFarlane £20

June 20

Mr J Carr £150
Miss J Lushington £50
Ms G Heywood £30
Mr L Wallace £20

July 20

Mr D Gardiner £50
Ms P Manger £30
Mr G Thorpe £20
Mrs L Dowding £20

August 20

Mrs P Pollock £50
Mr L Wallace £30
Mr P Stevens £20
Mr R Stickland £20

September 20

Mr & Mrs Mercy £50
Mr P Whitestone £30
Mrs P Pollock £20
Mrs M McFarlane £20

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CPRE Kent,

Queen's Head House, Ashford Road, Charing, Ashford, Kent TN27 0AD.

T: 01233 714540 F: 01233 714549 E: info@cprekent.org.uk

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Bank/building society account number

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