

KENT VOICE

Protecting Kent's Heritage

Spring 2009

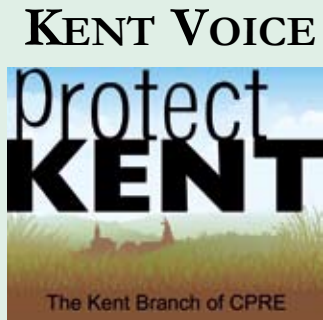
www.protectkent.org.uk



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Cover image: The Protect Kent team (clockwise from front left): Richard Knox-Johnston, chairman; Sean Furey, deputy director; Hilary Newport, director; Brian Lloyd, senior planner; Sandra Dunn, office manager; Gemma Watts, publicity officer

Photograph by Ady Kerry



The paper used for this magazine is elemental chlorine free, Pan European Forestry Commission accredited, Verified Environmental Management accredited and comes from sustainable forests

Imagine ... how good it could be

Imagine it is 2026 and the English countryside is more beautiful, more varied and more tranquil than it was 20 years before. Great care is taken to ensure that new buildings enhance local distinctiveness and the sense of place. Litter and fly-tipping are no longer tolerated. Both rural and urban communities benefit from a thriving countryside.

Almost 90% of England's total land area remains open and green, with relatively little countryside lost to development over the previous 20 years.

One reason for this is that social attitudes have changed profoundly. In the face of growing environmental consciousness and a common understanding that financial prosperity alone does not result in good lives, economic growth is no longer seen as an end in itself.

There has been a retreat from consumerism and a new focus on quality of life, embracing beauty, local character and the enjoyment of green, open spaces. Pioneer transition towns and low-carbon villages have shown the way forward for other communities. People everywhere, including country dwellers, live much greener lives.

Successful urban regeneration, through developing brownfield land and a significant "greening" of towns and cities, has been crucial in protecting the countryside. Attitudes to property have changed. Following the property crash of 2008-09, the aim of government policy was to create a stable housing market. More than two million high-quality homes have been created since 2009, with many old buildings renovated for housing. But property is no longer seen principally as an investment. Homes are places to live.

The Green Belt has played a vital role in safeguarding the countryside and reinvigorating towns and cities. In 2026 there is more Green Belt and it is better protected. At the same time, Green Belt land is more attractive and more accessible, providing an invaluable breathing space for town and city dwellers and supplying them with food.

Above all, the protection of the countryside and greening of the town has been the achievement of a reinvigorated, democratic planning system. Planning is now supported across the political spectrum – not as a tool for economic development. Quality of life and environmental protection, notably the need to tackle climate change, are given

In his first column as Kent chairman, **Richard Knox-Johnston** looks to the future of the countryside and visualises the squaring of the virtuous circle



serious weight within the system, and most decisions on land use are taken locally. There has been a serious devolution of power, including tax-raising powers, to local authorities based on identifiable communities to which residents feel a sense of loyalty, including counties and parishes.

Many more people live and work in the countryside, and visit it for pleasure. Rural communities are stronger and more diverse. Many villages have grown, but most of the new homes are affordable in perpetuity. There has been a decline in the "hypermobility" that characterised the early years of the century. Of course, people still travel to and within the countryside, but with improved access to services, including shops, post offices and schools, people no longer need to travel long distances to meet their basic needs. They walk and cycle more, and there has been a revival of rural railways.

In 2026 people in both town and country are much more interested in our countryside and recognise the health and spiritual benefits it has to offer. Children engage much more with nature and the outside world. They are free to climb trees, play conkers and get their knees dirty.

In 2026 a new consensus on the importance of the countryside has enabled the country to move beyond acrimonious battles between Nimbys and philistine developers. Development does happen in rural areas, but it does so through a democratic planning system that recognises the vital importance of our finite countryside.

There is even a new confidence that sensitive, well-planned development can improve and beautify rural areas. As more people come to understand, visit and value the countryside, we are seeing a virtuous circle: the countryside improves, people care for it more, it is further improved and valued. ❖

Like Darwin said, we must adapt to survive

CPRE Kent celebrates its 80th anniversary this year and we hope you will join us in celebrating what this remarkable organisation has achieved. It's a good time to look back at what we have achieved but an even better time to look forward to the future and the challenges we still face.

Eighty years ago, in 1929, Kent was shivering through its coldest recorded February; the seas froze at Whitstable and schools across the county were closed. Ten years earlier, the 1919 Housing Act had promised Homes for Heroes and the tide of building that it delivered saw a huge decline in rural populations and allowed people access to homes in new suburbs. Car ownership was becoming increasingly affordable and the railways allowed cheap travel for those who worked in London to commute. The pattern for development in Kent was set.

Since 1929 the pace of change in Kent has been relentless. The rise of the car and road freight, and the rail transport links through the county are turning the Garden of England into the Gateway to Europe. Industry and coalfields have gone, the farmed landscape has been transformed as years of subsidy changed farming practices, and successive government administrations have promoted the growth areas of Ashford and the Thames Gateway over the years with varying degrees of success.

Another echo from 80 years ago is the great Wall Street Crash, which saw share prices tumble and heralded years of global depression. The current economic downturn has halted our housebuilding industry in its tracks, which of course has also meant that the developer contributions needed to provide for infrastructure and affordable homes have vanished. So could this mean that CPRE's work is no longer needed?

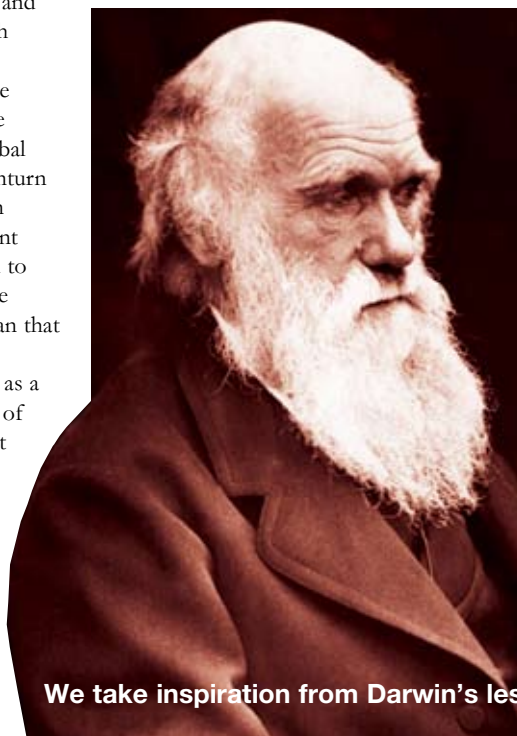
Perhaps we should see this downturn as a much-needed opportunity to take stock of where we are. Ministers are still adamant that the pent-up need for three million new homes by 2020 will still exist at the end of the downturn; however, we remain to be convinced, given the body-blow that has been dealt to our collective confidence in housing as a sound financial investment. Meanwhile local authorities are nevertheless obliged to allocate more

The past 80 years of CPRE's life have seen incredible change – and 2009 has already had its share of evolution, says Kent director **Hilary Newport**



and more greenfield land to accommodate these challenging targets, undermining attempts to direct regeneration where it is most needed. It's more vital than ever that when the economy starts to recover, we are able to meet the challenge of building the right kind of development in the places that it will do the most good, rather than see an unseemly race to cover greenfield sites with out-of-town housing with no access to services. Perhaps, too, this is our opportunity to reconsider the traditional housebuilding methods that have so thoroughly failed to deliver housing that people can genuinely afford, and which are still woefully failing to address adequately energy efficiency and resilience to a changing climate.

It is a pleasing coincidence that we share



We take inspiration from Darwin's lessons

our special anniversary year with two other significant milestones: Charles Darwin's bicentennial year and the 150th anniversary of the publication of his world-changing book *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*. Darwin's vision enabled him to visualise the infinitely changing pressures on species of unimaginable diversity, and the elegant simplicity of their adaptation to those challenges. He showed that the world, and the species with which we share it, is in constant change.

And it is that degree of change to which CPRE Kent must continue to adapt. It is one of the reasons that in our 80th year we are relaunching our organisation with a new profile and image, that better reflects what we do and why we do it – because the need for an organisation like ours is as great as ever. Staff and trustees alike have come to an increasing realisation that our cumbersome name – the Kent Branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England – does not really reflect the entirety of what we do. Nor does it exactly trip off the tongue! We are the leading county branch of CPRE but we nevertheless need to do much, much more to raise our profile and to build on the respect that we have earned among national and local leaders, developers of policy and decision makers. Our work is as vital in Kent's towns and cities as it is in its rural areas, as we help to shape the decisions that will allow Kent to face the challenges of the 21st century.

Darwin showed the world that it is the fittest – those best adapted to their circumstances – who survive in times of challenge, and we must be flexible and adaptable in facing the challenges to our quality of life for all who live in Kent – not just the rural communities. His legacy was to change the landscape of natural sciences forever and we take inspiration from his lessons of constant evolution.

So look out over the coming year for our rebrand as Protect Kent and look out too for our exciting programme of events to win new members and to reinforce our position as the county's leading environmental campaign group. We believe that the need for an organisation like ours has never been greater; our challenge is to help shape the evolution of Kent so that it can meet the needs of its communities without irreparable harm to its environment. ❖

High growth, high

The Dover core strategy promotes a high-growth strategy that would see 14,000 homes built. The argument for such a large increase in housing is that there needs to be an increase in population in Dover to ensure that there is a sufficient workforce to take up new jobs and thus increase the prosperity of the district.

The price that the district will pay for this is large-scale greenfield development, particularly at Whitfield where 5,750 homes would be built around the village.

While such large scale loss of greenfield land is in itself deplorable – particularly when government policy is to focus new development on derelict and underused brownfield land, of which there is plenty in Dover – the growth strategy is laden with risk and uncertainty. It will mean that the rate of housebuilding will need to be nearly two-thirds higher than that achieved at the peak of the recent housing boom. And this is being proposed at a time of economic recession, the duration and effects of which are unknown.

The strategy also relies on significant in-migration to the district. It is difficult to see, though, how this will actually be achieved in the numbers required when Dover has a housing market that the council's own research describes as isolated and self-contained. Dover will also be in competition with all the other east Kent authorities that will also have to accommodate extra houses over the coming years and will similarly be

A strategy full of uncertainty will set the development for the next 20 years, writes senior planner **Brian Lloyd**



relying on in-migration to take them up – especially in Canterbury and Ashford.

Even if people do move to Dover, it is far from certain that they will work in the district. The council's own studies show that when the high-speed rail service is introduced later this year, commuting from Dover Priory will increase by 52%. The studies also highlight that London-based commuters with higher disposable incomes will push up the price of housing, meaning that many people will actually be forced to move away from Dover.

The council's assessment of the strategy is also unsure about its impacts and delivery, and concludes that of all the options, it has the most uncertainties associated with it. This is hardly a resounding endorsement.

We fully agree that the council needs to help address Dover's economic problems and provide new houses, but this strategy is purely theoretical and fails to achieve a balance between economic, social and environmental



The strategy has limited regard for Dover's c

objectives. In particular it has limited regard to the impact that the strategy will have on the countryside and people's quality of life.

We have called upon the council to abandon this damaging high-growth strategy and adopt one that is focused on the regeneration of Dover town. There may need

Renovate the past for an inspiring and eco

There are now a host of interesting, cost-effective and inspiring technologies available in the UK for building new eco-friendly homes as well as improving the environmental (and cost) performance of existing buildings. It has been said that in 2050, 70% of buildings will be those that are standing today. As such, renovation is of the utmost importance.

The first place to start is always by reducing the need for energy/heat/water. This is best carried out in the early design stage when it comes to new buildings. And in existing buildings, knowledge of best-fit, appropriate technologies is essential. In both cases the skills of the installers and other trades are essential as very high performance buildings are quite different from conventional ones. They need to be airtight (so that heat is not

Jae Mather of the Carbon Free Group outlines ways of reducing the need for energy, heat and water when building – and rebuilding – homes



lost or excessively gained); they need to be built with minimisation of materials, lighting, water, heat (insulation) and energy as central themes throughout the building/renovation.

Some of the key innovative technologies today include:

■ **Photo Voltaic Thermal (PV-T)**, an integrated panel producing combined heat and electricity. With the correct systems design, it can provide 100% of both the electrical and heating requirements of a building. Recommended for commercial and domestic customers aiming to achieve low or net zero carbon emissions in new-build and renovation projects. PV-T panels can be integrated into pitched roofs or surface-mounted on to flat roofs. Installation costs are half the price of installing separate photo voltaic and solar thermal system. There are also no running costs, for example, in fuel for a biomass boiler. They need exceptionally low maintenance due to the lack of moving parts.

■ **Mechanical Ventilation with Heat Recovery (MVHR)** buildings that are very airtight need to be properly ventilated as the air quality in sealed buildings can rapidly fall

price



countryside and people's quality of life

to be some greenfield development to meet future needs, but not on the scale proposed.

What do you think? Let us know your views by writing to CPRE Kent, 3 Evedgate Park Barn, Station Road, Smeeth, Ashford, Kent, TN25 6SX, or e-mailing details to info@protectkent.org.uk

-friendly future

to an unacceptable level, leading to health hazards through contaminants in the air. MVHR units manage the airflow so that up to 90% of the internal heat in outgoing air is recovered and reintegrated into fresh air. MVHR ventilation systems can also serve as the main heating system for a building and they can double up as cooling systems as well. ■ **Ground Heat Storage** can be used to create thermal batteries in the ground so that heat can be stored for later use. This system is ideal for larger buildings that integrate solar hot water, PV-T, biomass or other forms of renewable heat production as they can allow for summer heat to be stored for use in the winter.

The Carbon Free Group specialises in delivering low and zero-carbon solutions today. Please take a look at our web site for further information: www.carbonfreegroup.com

Frameworks take shape

2009 is already shaping up to be a busy year with most councils now making steady progress with their Local Development Frameworks. The following provides a round-up of the current state of play:

ASHFORD

■ As we go to press, Ashford Council is undertaking the final consultation on the Ashford Town Centre Area Action Plan before it is submitted for independent examination in July. The examination is likely to open in October.

■ Work is also progressing on the Tenterden and Rural Sites development plan document (DPD) and the Urban Sites and Infrastructure DPD. Both are likely to be subject to further consultation in June, and then submitted for examination in October.

■ Area Action Plans for the urban extensions at Cheesemans Green and Chilmington Green are also being drawn up. It is likely that the AAP for Chilmington Green will come forward first with detailed consultation expected in September.

CANTERBURY

■ Initial consultation on the core strategy is now expected in October.

■ Final consultation on the Herne Bay Area Action Plan concludes on 1 May after which the plan will be submitted for independent examination, which is likely to take place in September.

DARTFORD

■ Having submitted the Town Centre Area Action Plan for independent examination in August 2008, the council withdrew it in January. As a consequence, the timing of the preparation of a new Town Centre AAP and the core strategy is being reviewed.

DOVER

■ In March, consultation concluded on the council's core strategy, which attracted significant opposition to its high-growth plans. It remains to be seen if the council will change the strategy and reconsult, but if it doesn't then it is likely that the core strategy will be submitted for independent examination in July. The examination is expected to start in October.

GRAVESHAM

■ Since initial consultation on the core strategy in 2005-07, the council has been undertaking further background research. This continues and additional consultation is unlikely before August.

MAIDSTONE

■ Progress on the core strategy continues to be delayed with no revised timings currently available for any LDF documents. The council suggests, though,

that there will be further consultation on the core strategy later in the year.

SEVENOAKS

■ Consultation on the preferred options for the core strategy concluded in March, with consultation on the final core strategy programmed for September. It will then be submitted for examination in December with the examination likely to start in March 2010.

SHEPWAY

■ Further consultation on the core strategy is not now expected until June at the earliest.

SWALE

■ The council recently invited views on the issues that will shape the vision of the core strategy, but initial consultation is not expected until the end of the year.

■ Consultation workshops on a vision and objectives for the Faversham Creek Area Action Plan were held in February, but a proposed plan is unlikely to be available until March 2010.

THANET

■ Initial consultation on the core strategy is now likely to start in September. In the meantime, consultation is under way on a Thanet 2030 vision which will have an important bearing on the content of the core strategy.

TONBRIDGE & MALLING

■ Final consultation on the Management of Development and the Environment DPD finishes on 8 May. Following this, the DPD will be submitted for independent examination which is likely to commence in the autumn. When the DPD is adopted, Tonbridge & Malling will be the first council in Kent to complete its LDF.

TUNBRIDGE WELLS

■ The final core strategy is expected to be published on 27 April and will be open for comments until early June. After this it will be submitted for examination, scheduled to start in October.

MEDWAY

■ Medway is inviting views on issues to be addressed by the core strategy as part of the pre-production consultation. The core strategy itself, though, will not be available for consultation until early 2010.

KCC

■ KCC is responsible for preparing a Waste and Minerals LDF. A new Local Development Scheme for the production of the LDF has been prepared and submitted to the government, but is not yet publicly available. It is likely, though, that the LDF will comprise a combined core strategy for both waste and minerals and individual site allocation DPDs for waste and minerals respectively.

The future generation: why we need them so badly

There's never been a better time for CPRE to bring on the next age of young environmentalists says our twentysomething publicity officer **Gemma Watts**



Last year, when I came to work for CPRE Kent, it's fair to say I didn't really know what I was letting myself in for. I have lived in Kent most of my life and grew up near Deal by the coast. Until last year, I had never really heard of CPRE Kent. I was surprised to learn how many people were involved with the charity and the amount of in-depth research that was done to support CPRE Kent's active campaigning.

Being in my twenties with a background in broadcasting, media and press, I am not ashamed to admit that when I joined CPRE, I was probably as far from an "environmentalist" as they come.

Over the past few years, I've had growing concerns, as do many people my age, about topics that are presented to us on a daily basis by the media. Terms such as "energy efficiency", "sustainability" and "carbon footprints" are regularly mentioned nowadays on the radio, television, in newspapers and online. We are constantly being told to worry about these issues but how much do the younger generation really understand what they mean for our future or what we should be doing about it?

Having spoken to my friends about this, they nearly all agree with me that few young people in our age group (18-30) really know anything informed about the environmental issues happening today which will face our generation in the future.

There's no escaping the term "going green" these days. Companies are talking about corporate sustainability, celebrities are supporting "green" charities and events, even media outlets are reaching the public with ideas for conserving resources. Despite this, I can't help but feel that somehow the environmental message of how we can change things and make a difference, is being wrongly portrayed to people my age.

An example of this was Live Earth, a



Young people can make real changes: that's why we need them

series of music concerts that all took place at the same time around the world in July, 2007. The event was organised to encourage young people, corporations and governments to take action to prevent climate change. I read recently that the 24-hour concert may have created a larger carbon footprint than Afghanistan produced in all of 2006, which prompts the question: should they have put the event on at all? Surely, encouraging young people to get involved in environmental issues is better done in a way that is not harmful to the environment?

It has never been more important for CPRE to take into consideration the vital role that the younger generation will play and to try to encourage and support them in their learning and understanding of what

they can do to help. Equally, now is the time for the next generation to start to recognise the environmental issues we are facing and understand fully the impacts they will have on us when we are older.

Young people have so much energy and enthusiasm to bring to organisations such as CPRE, which can only make real changes happen by getting the government to accept the importance of environmental issues in today's culture.

Young people nowadays are a generation of activists and we love to make a noise about something we strongly believe in. If CPRE can encourage more young people to get involved with environmental issues, the political savvy we will afford will prove invaluable in the future. ❖

Kingsnorth, Lydd and 'Boris Island' ... the issues stay at the top of the news agenda and we believe in tackling them head on, writes **Sean Furey**



When we launched our 'Tomorrow's Kent' campaign in February last year, little did we know how much climate change would come to dominate the headlines, even during the economic crisis.

We have heard a lot about carbon emissions from new and expanded airports at Lydd, Manston, Heathrow and "Boris Island" – the Mayor of London's plan for an island airport between Sheppey and Southend. Then there was the climate camp at Kingsnorth, site of a proposed replacement coal-fired power station. We are not a direct action organisation and we do not condone unlawful protest actions; however, the disproportionate response by the police threatens all those who might wish to undertake peaceful protest against damaging development, such as the Kent International Gateway at Maidstone.

While we have been active on these campaigns, the issue for me at least to contend with is: what does climate change mean for Kent and what can we do about it? In the first *Tomorrow's Kent* report I pulled together what I could from latest scientific and policy documents and this showed four broad areas of concern:

- Sea-level rise and the threat of Kent's low-lying coastal land;
- Increasing flood risk and drainage problems;
- Increasing water scarcity and its impact on people, agriculture and the ecology of our wonderful rivers and wetlands;
- Overheating in summer, such as the heatwave of 2003 that led to an extra 200 deaths in Kent and an extra 35,000 deaths across Europe.

As well as highlighting the challenges ahead, we have been working hard to promote positive solutions. We created the Kent Climate Change Forum which comprises non-governmental bodies working in Kent, including the RSPB, Kent Wildlife Trust, the National Trust, the National Farmers' Union and Hadlow College.

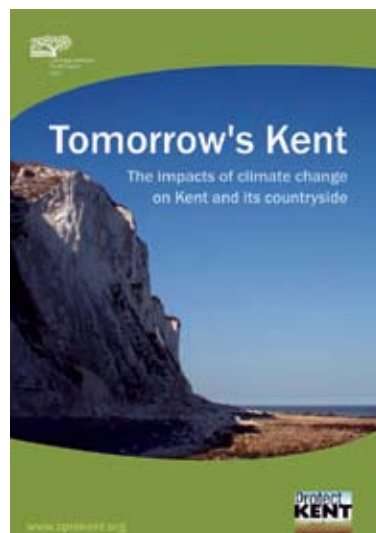
Among the benefits to come out of this forum was a joint event with our friends at Action with Communities in Rural Kent where we showed how parish plans can be an important way to mobilise local action on environment and climate issues.

In January we held a major event on alternative energy at the Assembly Hall Theatre, Tunbridge Wells. As well as a range



Protect Kent's alternative energy conference

The recession can't cut climate change from the headlines



The Tomorrow's Kent report; Greg Clark, shadow secretary, spoke



of exhibitors, we had speakers that included Greg Clark, who is not only the local MP but also the shadow minister for energy and climate change. Cally Ware, from West Malling, showed how she restored an oast house and incorporated rainwater harvesting and a ground-source heat pump. We also heard opinions from Justin Broadbent of ISO Energy on the viability of micro-renewable technologies, and Justin Ford on planning pitfalls lying in wait for the unwary. Jae

Mather from the Carbon Free Group gave a glimpse of the exciting future for eco-building design and energy technologies.

Looking forward, there is the Copenhagen summit in December where some form of international agreement will, I hope, be reached. Before that, the UK Climate Impacts Programme should be releasing its new scenarios for how climate change will affect different areas, and we will use that to push councils into being prepared and to take action. ♦

An important role for students

I loved my history degree and would gladly go back to repeat it, but it didn't give me any sense of direction or really prepare me for life after graduation.

After six weeks of writing applications I concluded it would be prudent to look for part-time temporary work experience. Trawling through Google I found a promising link to CPRE and sent applications to both head office and the Kent office. A few days later Sean Furey e-mailed me asking if I would like to get involved with a project to recruit and engage students with CPRE Kent, and I happily accepted.

Not only I was instantly welcomed into the office and made to feel like part of the team, I was immediately given responsibility and put in charge of the project.

My time with CPRE Kent has been both helpful and rewarding. I have learnt about and become involved in issues that really

Our volunteers come from all walks of life and different age groups. Here, we feature some of them. First, Alice Karpinski, who has helped launch the Protect Kent Student Project



Volunteer Alice Karpinski

interest me: conservation, the countryside, climate change and alternative energies, to name a few. At times I have also felt like an ambassador for my generation, working for a charity mainly supported by retired professionals my volunteering placement has allowed me to demonstrate that young people

are engaged and enthusiastic and perhaps dispel some of the negative associations surrounding "the youth of today". Most importantly I have made a decision about what I am going to do with myself and secured a place to read Water Management: Water and Society at Cranfield University.

Wide range of talent at work

I have worked as a part-time volunteer at CPRE Kent's headquarters since 1997, my main task being the updating of the society's computerised membership records. During this time I have worked alongside permanent staff members and a good number of young people who have joined on short-term contracts to undertake special projects, as well as other volunteers.

These colleagues have come from a very wide range of backgrounds – in government, business, scientific research, farming, media and even a young man from the Merchant Navy. What is readily apparent is the degree of enthusiasm for the key objective – preserving the character of the Kentish countryside – which everyone has exhibited. This is not only the product of energetic management of the small team but also reflects the spontaneous reaction of people working in an organisation, tackling such a wide range of development challenges.

The programme of visits to houses, gardens, industrial sites, farms, etc, also serves to bond members with the organisation.



Volunteer Terry Lawson

First-name terms after many years



Volunteer Margaret Micklewright

In case some of you are unaware of what I look like, this is me above.

I must point out that as CPRE Kent's volunteer events organiser, I do not act altruistically when I organise the outings for you. When I took on this job I was asked to search out places of interest to which members could go, so I set about looking for all the places to which I wanted to go.

So saying, from the increasing number of member and friends who now go on my outings, I must have succeeded in choosing the right places. I am always looking for new venues and from time to time some of you come up with new ideas.

One of the nicest things about organising these outings is that I now know most of you by your Christian names. You were all Mr or Mrs etc when I started these.

Protect Kent welcomes Luke

After spending a number of months as an assistant in a planning firm, I realised this was almost the antithesis of what I wanted to be involved in: finding loopholes to get inappropriate planning applications approved was not my forte. Consequently, when seeking volunteering roles, CPRE Kent crept to the top of my list as the organisation that would complement my environmental and conservational background best and vice versa.

I knew of CPRE as one of the organisations seeking to disrupt the nation's fall towards becoming a concrete plateau and with Kent being a main hub of development, I thought it would be an interesting place to work. I believe CPRE Kent understands the multi-dimensional pressures that threaten the countryside and confronts these challenges well. Perhaps what was most striking about the Kent branch was its refreshing outlook towards meeting the challenges ahead. Fully aware of the negative stereotype held towards CPRE in general, the Kent branch's approach underlines the importance of enabling development and progress within the county.



Volunteer Luke Sussams

Icons of Kent

photography competition

Kent, sir – everybody knows Kent – apples, cherries, hops and women.” Charles Dickens clearly knew what his icons of Kent were when he wrote *The Pickwick Papers*. Now it’s your turn to suggest which icon you feel best captures the essence of Kentish life.

The winner will receive two tickets to Protect Kent’s 80th anniversary gala dinner in September, when you will be presented with a framed print of your winning Icon of Kent photograph. As well as this, your winning photograph and Icon will be used in our future publicity and *Kent Voice* magazine.

Protect Kent would like you to decide which icon you feel makes this county special, photograph it and send it in to us with the reason – no more than 500 words – for your choice.

This competition is open to everyone who is passionate about Kent, not just members of Protect Kent. To enter, please either e-mail your photograph to



info@protectkent.org.uk or post a hard copy to: Gemma Watts, CPRE Kent, 3 Evegat Park Barn, Station Road, Smeeth, Ashford, Kent, TN25 6SX. Remember to include your name and contact details, a title for your photograph and your reason for choosing your icon. The closing date for the competition is Friday 28 August 2009. Only one entry per person. The judges’ decision is final. First, here are the icons chosen by Protect Kent staff.



THE NORTH DOWNS WAY
Hilary Newport, director

My icon is the North Downs Way. Kent has an extraordinary wealth of wonderful walks, but for variety and spectacular scenery the stretch of the North Downs Way from Farthing Common down towards Folkestone can’t be beaten.

The route skirts the village of Postling and this view down to the church of SS Mary and Radegund is a delight.

I grew up in North Wales so I am hard-wired to appreciate coastlines and mountains, but the chalk hills of this part of Kent still leave me breathless in all sorts of ways. I think that there’s no better way to spend a breezy, bright weekend in Kent than by exploring it on foot with good companions.



FAVERSHAM
 Brian Lloyd
 senior planner



Faversham owes its existence to the creek that winds its way through the marshes to the Swale and which forms an enduring connection between the town, countryside and the sea. It is a unique place, but remains largely undiscovered. The jewel in

Faversham's crown is undoubtedly Abbey Street, with its many impressive medieval buildings, saved from demolition in the 1960s. In its time Faversham has been an international port and a brickmaking centre. It was also the birthplace of the gunpowder

industry. These historical legacies are all still visible, and have shaped the town. But with its own water supply, barley and hops, Faversham is probably best known as the main brewery town in Kent. That alone makes Faversham special.



ROMNEY, HYTHE AND DYMCHURCH RAILWAY
 Sandra Dunn,
 office manager



Kent, the gateway to the continent, has many railway lines: commuter trains travelling to London, Eurostar rushing people to Paris and Brussels, the new high-speed Hitachi trains that will halve travel times from Ashford to London and the Kent and East Sussex Railway

tourist line. There is, however, one other line worth mentioning: the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway, a one-third size railway much loved by children as it takes them to school each day from Romney Marsh. On a clear, warm day last summer, we boarded

the train at New Romney and chugged our way to the magical land of Dungeness; a 5,000-acre shingle spit, with two lighthouses, a lifeboat station and two nuclear power stations. A remarkable form of transport that takes you to a remarkable place.



THE OAST HOUSE
Sean Furey,
deputy director

My icon must be the oast house – a distinctive circular building with a conical roof, topped with a white cowl that turns with the wind. On any visit to the Garden of England you are bound to see an oast house in the distance, or beside the road. When I see an

oast, set within a gentle rolling landscape, I just think: Kent. Oasts were originally farm buildings to dry hops in preparation for the beer-making process. Early oast houses were simply adapted barns but, by the early 19th century, the

distinctive round buildings had been developed in response to the increased demand for beer. While it is sad that Kent hops have all but gone from our valleys and fields, they have left oast houses in our landscape just as Kentish beer leaves a pleasant taste.



THE WHITE CLIFFS OF DOVER
Gemma Watts,
publicity officer

The White Cliffs of Dover are unique to Kent and one of England's most famous natural landmarks, often referred to as the Gateway to England. On a Sunday afternoon, it is wonderful to be able to walk along the top of the cliffs, breathe in

the fresh salty air and on a clear day, look out across the English Channel to the French coastline. Walking along the White Cliffs, you get a true sense of history. You can almost hear Vera Lynn singing about the bluebirds. In 1940, Vice-Admiral Bertram

Ramsay oversaw the Dunkirk evacuations from the secret wartime tunnels built into the cliffs beneath Dover Castle, which itself has a history that spans over 2,000 years. The white cliffs help define what it is to be British and are a true icon of Kent.

Pony power is bringing life back to the countryside



Frances Clayton: championing best practice

One of the great pleasures of horses is the way they encourage and enable us to enjoy the countryside. The character of the countryside is, of course, greatly influenced by the activity taking place within it, with farming being the main influence.

However, horse owners have become significant land owners/managers and are therefore also responsible for shaping the landscape. Horses can have a very positive impact on landscape and indeed their role may become increasingly important if agricultural livestock numbers decrease.

The equine industry has a valuable contribution to make to the rural economy. It is the second largest rural employer in the UK and generates a gross output of £3.4 billion a year. High-quality landscapes are also recognised as having a key role in the successful

The ownership of rural land by horse riders is increasingly influencing its use – and that can only be a good thing, writes **Frances Clayton**, author of a guide on the subject

economy of an area. It is therefore important that equine development does not undermine landscape quality but rather it should ensure that the value of both can be promoted.

Unfortunately concerns are growing in some areas about the issues associated with poor horse pasture management – overgrazing, poaching, weed infestation, poor and excessive fencing etc. Today more than a million horses, ponies and donkeys are kept in the UK for leisure purposes and, with changes in agricultural practices and lifestyles,

they are being kept more intensively than in the past. Without due care this can affect the quality and character of important landscapes.

In recognition of this, Protect Kent was pleased to support the development of a guide to champion best practice to ensure that the impact of equine activity has a positive, rather than a negative impact on landscape and wildlife. As author of the guide, I believe better management practices that improve the quality and biodiversity of pastures not only improve the landscape but also have real benefits for the health and welfare of horses and ponies.

CPRE's support has helped bring this research to a wider audience, funding the production of a document on CD-Rom to reduce the environmental and economic costs of a paper publication. The guidance will be published in the spring and will be available to download from www.protectkent.org.uk ❖

Next stage in rumbling bypass saga

In August 2007, a public inquiry ordered by the secretary for state for communities and local government into a planning application by H+H UK for a block-making factory at Ightham was abandoned.

The application included a section 106 agreement to build the Borough Green Bypass as an inducement to Kent County Council to grant planning permission. As local planning authority, KCC had issued a lawful development certificate to H+H UK, confirming that the bypass planning consent, granted in 1992 was still in force. The validity of the certificate was challenged successfully in a judicial review and KCC agreed that the bypass planning consent expired in 1997. The applicants promptly withdrew their application and the inquiry was abandoned.

In September 2007, Cllr Paul Carter, leader of KCC, gave a personal assurance to a public meeting in Borough Green that Kent Highways Services would make a fresh

Protect Kent is the focal point for resistance to inappropriate plan. We must win this battle and we'll see you at the inquiry, writes **Harry Rayner**



application, which is calculated to cost more than £300,000. He also confirmed that the application, which is in an area of outstanding natural beauty would be "fast-tracked".

The original bypass permission was granted on the basis that it would be paid for from public funds. Kent Highways announced that the new planning application would be "development-led": that developers would once again be encouraged to come forward

with inappropriate applications seeking developments in an area of outstanding natural beauty. In return for being granted such inappropriate consent, developers would be required to pay for the bypass, now thought to be £17 million. More than 1,000 houses and commercial developments including a rail freight interchange depot of 250 acres are already being mooted to pay for the bypass.

Environmental impact studies have discovered large colonies of great crested newts and other highly protected species. Kent Highways revealed that it is investigating the potential acquisition of a further 12.5 acres of nearby land, solely to move the newts under the strict supervision of Natural England.

Protect Kent has agreed that it will act as the focal point for resistance to the bypass. To this end a public meeting has been arranged at St George's Hall, Wrotham High Street, at 11pm on 23 May. See you there. ❖



Polytunnels are becoming a serious visual intrusion on the countryside

Strawberry fields forever – but no polythene please

In recent years the acreage under polytunnels in Kent has been steadily increasing. For soft fruit growers there are real benefits: they reduce the amount of pesticides needed to protect crops as well as the amount of water that is needed for irrigation. They also protect strawberries from extremes of weather – one severe summer storm can wipe out a whole crop.

On the downside they are now becoming a serious visual intrusion in the countryside, particularly in areas where soft fruit growing is concentrated. Since a test case in Surrey in 2006, large polytunnel operations have required planning permission and the latest in Kent is an application by Hugh Lowe Farms in Mereworth for a total of 430 acres under polythene across six parishes.

What is particularly worrying about this application is that they are also asking for 183 acres of tunnels to be permanent structures. Polytunnels have been used as part of a traditional rotational cropping system in which strawberries are grown under polythene for two or three years before the frames are removed to make way for other

Increasing numbers of unsightly polytunnels in the countryside could become a thing of the past now that planning permission is needed for them, writes **Simon Evans**

crops after which the tunnels are rebuilt. This is labour-intensive and although the rotational crops are not as lucrative as strawberries, they are essential to maintain fertility and prevent the build-up of soil-borne disease.

By using grow bags containing coir, which can be discarded every few years, the tunnels can remain in place and grow strawberries on a permanent basis. The system can be made even more efficient by placing the bags on galvanised steel trestles at waist height. The manufacturers of this system claim a saving of up to 40% in harvesting costs. It is essentially a hydroponic system which makes no use of the high-grade agricultural land upon which it is placed.

These large-scale polytunnel operations represent a massive industrialisation of soft fruit growing concentrating strawberry production in particular areas, a process which has a number of worrying consequences. The visual intrusion is permanent and the trestle tables supporting a sea of plastic hovering 3ft above the ground are particularly ugly when the covers are removed in winter.

Any claimed reduction in food miles because less fruit is imported needs to be offset by the increased carbon footprint of the overall operation including the manufacture and recycling of large volumes of plastic sheet and steel frames as well as importing coir from India and labour from eastern Europe. Large growers also need large markets which local outlets cannot satisfy so Kent strawberries are transported to every corner of the country.

The use of polytunnels must be balanced with their overall impact on the countryside and those who live in it. Now that they have been brought into the planning system, that debate can take place. ❖

Shadow hangs over Kingsnorth's future power

The future of power generation at Kingsnorth is still uncertain. The oil and coal power station is governed by EU pollution regulations and must close by the end of 2015.

The station's owner, E.ON, has proposed a replacement coal-powered station and the resulting protests by Greenpeace and others have been widely reported. Although

much is being pinned on the promise that the environmental impacts of new coal-fired power stations can be mitigated by carbon capture and storage, there is still little certainty that this technology will be viable in economic or in energy terms: depending on the technologies used, it can take between 24% and 40% more coal to produce the

same amount of energy. E.ON is pressing for a quick decision, but without clear signals that carbon capture and storage is a technical and commercial reality a decision to go ahead with new coal-fired power generation could make it impossible for the UK to meet its targets to reduce climate-changing emissions. ❖

Events and outings in 2009

Saturday 23 May Public meeting about the Borough Green Bypass at Wrotham. All are invited to attend. St George's Hall. Please phone the office on 01303 815186 for more information.

8-14 June Hadlow College Summer Exhibition and Festival. View a fascinating range of stunning garden exhibits from final-year degree students and wander around the charming nine-acre Broadview gardens. Entry is free. For more information please contact Pat Crawford on 01622 817319.

Tuesday 23 June Coach trip to three gardens in France (near Boulogne). Cost about £30 per person. Organised by Margaret.

17, 18, 19 July Come and see us at the Kent County Show. Held at Detling Showground near Maidstone. This year we will be rebranding to Protect Kent in the Eco Village of the Kent Show.

August or September* Visit to Salutation Gardens in Sandwich, guided tour and possible boat trip. Organised by Margaret.

Friday 18 September* Our 80th anniversary dinner. Black tie event with guest speaker.

Monday 12 October Extremely popular College of Arms tour in London. Organised by Margaret.

Friday 13 November* Branch AGM with guest speaker, Lenham Community Centre.

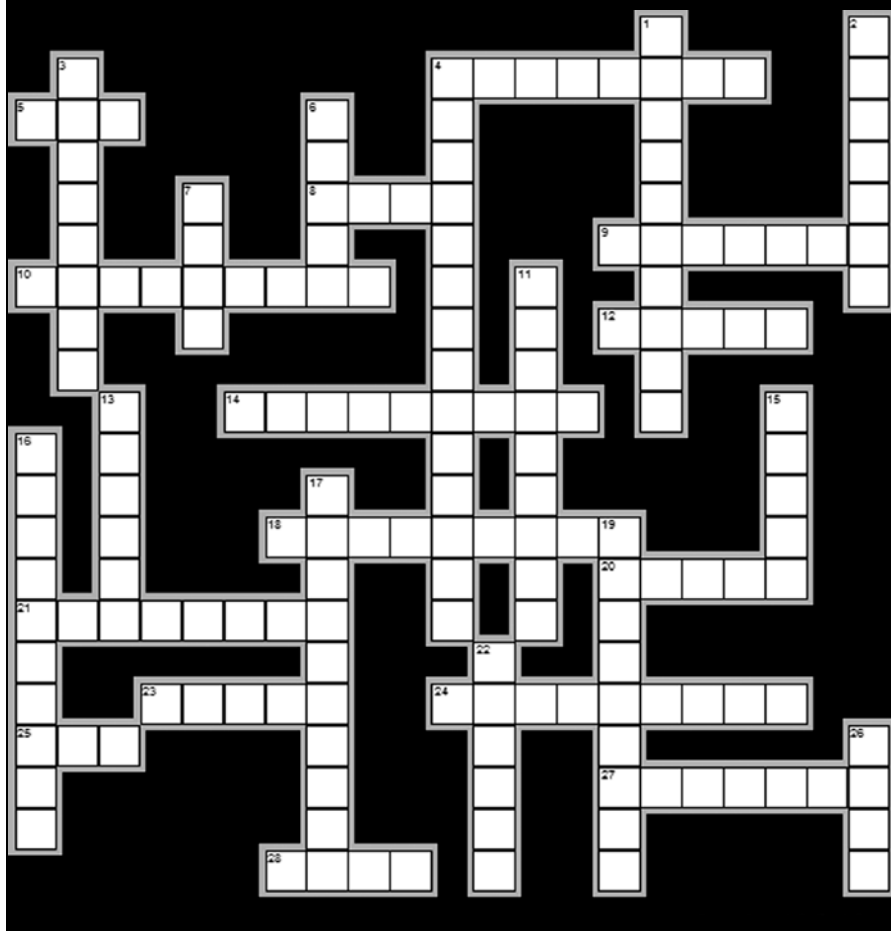
Monday 16 November Swale District Committee annual meeting.

Other events to be confirmed for this year

Following the huge success of our Local Development Framework (LDF) workshops for Parish Councils in Sevenoaks, we will be running similar events this year in other Districts. Details are to be confirmed

* **Event details to be confirmed. Keep an eye out in our Viewpoint newsletter for more information.**

How well do you know Kent?



Sharpen your pencil and test your knowledge of Kent with our new Protect Kent crossword! Solutions are available on the Protect Kent website

Across

- 4 A high point for children? (4,4)
 5 Beer needs to take a leap (3)
 8 Like a National Park, but not Bona Fide? (4)
 9 Radio station and grammar school remain unbeaten (7)
 10 They nearly had to change the name of this town after the storm of '87! (9)
 12 This isle sounds a bit corny (5)
 14 The smallest pub or a lettuce? (6,3)
 18 A judge's hammer, well-meaning, lays down the Kentish laws (9)
 20 This castle can be found in Sidcup North (5)
 21 Winnie the Pooh would like to drink from this stream near Kemsing (8)
 23 Anne lost her head over this place (5)
 24 Wealden town once had a port but still has a steam train (9)
 25 A heathen temple (3)
 27 Protect Kent branch out from here (7)
 28 Flying from here should be capped (4)

Down

- 1 Power station south of Ashford? (10)
 2 Idle talking with bacon (7)
 3 Sago Che revolutionised, micro-brewer in Maidstone (8)
 4 Not to be confused with its northern neighbour (9,5)
 6 Teachers used to get board of this rock (5)
 7 The Garden of England (4)
 11 Lost from Kent but still at the centre of the world (9)
 13 His life at Down House was evolutionary (6)
 15 An officer of the Cinque Ports whose duty was to arrest debtors and convey them to Dover Castle. Broad mixed up (5)
 16 Thorn Snow fell on the capital of Dover (5,5)
 17 "Stronghold of the Kent People" (10)
 19 Sounds like a female prison (9)
 22 Divides the Kentish Men from the Men of Kent (6)
 26 This trading town can lead (4)

Have your say: you will be heard

Dear reader,

You will have noticed this Spring issue of Kent Voice has been redesigned to be more focused on people.

Without the interest, opinions and dedication of our readers, members and

supporters, Protect Kent would not survive. We should like to give you this page of the magazine to have your say on any issues you feel strongly about in the county. It could be a planning application down the road or a major development proposal in

your district. If you have something to say, please write to us at: Protect Kent, 3 Evegate Park Barn, Station Road, Smeeth, Ashford, Kent, TN25 6SX or e-mail us at info@protectkent.org.uk.

Make your voice heard!

It's vital that we pool our resources to help county

As someone who moved to Kent only six years ago, I am very aware and appreciative both of the county's strong profile and the important work undertaken by the CPRE to preserve the countryside and rural identity.

I am privileged to be director of finance and resources at Hadlow, one of the UK's leading land-based colleges. The aims of the CPRE are closely and inextricably linked with those of Hadlow College and I am acutely aware of the responsibilities implicit in the provision of education and training for careers in the rural sector.

The faculties at Hadlow, which include landscape management and countryside management as well as agriculture and commercial horticulture, have strong associations and synergy with the work undertaken by the CPRE.

We face diverse challenges relating to changes in land use.

The loss of habitats is resulting in a loss of species and reduced biodiversity. At the same time, issues identified with climate change indicate the urgency attached to procuring food security. This in turn puts pressure on farmers and growers to increase both their output and cropping periods.

Ever since the 1930s, when car ownership first began to expand, access to the countryside for recreational and social purposes has continued to grow.

Although the growing numbers of visitors benefits the rural economy, and the tourist industry is an important contributor to the county's resources, overuse of the countryside has many undesirable consequences. An objective balance between managing the countryside and allowing the public to access it must somehow be achieved.

Demand for more housing and other developments and creation of bigger and



Broadview Gardens at Hadlow College

better roads and associated infrastructure must also be considered. While interest in our beloved and fragile countryside unites us all, differing priorities and conflicting interests can divide the many bodies and institutions that work so passionately, strenuously and tirelessly to defend the county of Kent. This can only lead to weakening the endeavour we hold so dear.

There is an urgent need to pool ideas and so procure holistic solutions.

Mark Lumsdon-Taylor, director, finance and resources, Hadlow College

External check needed on the planners

Until quite recently, the planning powers of district councils were, to some extent, subject to the views that county councils could, by statute, express.

However, this has now not been the case for some while, and district councils can, for example, determine planning applications in respect of land in their ownership without any statutory input from county councils, save in a limited number of cases.

It is difficult to resist the comment that district councils must always be tempted to

grant consent to such applications, especially when the development brings financial benefit, in the way of council and business taxes etc.

To a member of the public attending planning committee meetings, it appears that the councillors are very much influenced by the report presented by property services/ estates departments, and it is difficult to accept that the same objectivity is applied, in comparison with applications that do not involve council owned land.

Quite what can be done, I do not know, but in my view there is a definite need for some kind of outside check. Perhaps county councils could be involved on large-scale applications, or recognised amenity groups such as the CPRE and parish councils be given the right of appeal against consents where they have objected.

There could also be a prohibition against property services/estates departments commenting on any application, regardless of size, and this might go some way to reassuring the public about the very necessary independence of a planning committee.

What do readers think?

Finally, I deplore the ever-increasing importance of finance in relation to such planning applications, and it seems to be that this overrides all other considerations, to the detriment of the land involved, and to the character of the district concerned.

Barrie Gore, chairman, Canterbury district committee

Round-up from the coun

Ashford



HILARY MOORBY

As usual, Ashford has numerous consultation documents from the borough council on which to comment, the latest being “urban housing sites”. The council has extended its definition of “urban” and many of the sites are greenfield and even on defined open spaces.

Planning of the “urban villages” on the fringe of Ashford is going ahead despite the credit crunch. The chairman attended a three-day inquiry by Design workshop on Chilmington Green, and the first detailed application on Cheeseman’s Green has just arrived. Both will eventually contain 6,000-7,000 houses.

Canterbury



BARRIE GORE

Canterbury City Council has published its draft environmental policy, to which we have responded. Like the curate’s egg, it is good in parts, but we are disappointed that it is only very recently that recycling procedures are being brought into operation at the University of Kent and in the council’s own offices. Better late than never.

The council has also published the consultants’ latest report on a possible new park and ride site at Wincheap, upon which we have also commented. The report suggests that the current park and ride site at Wincheap could be enlarged by a two or three-storey decked building, providing about 1,500 spaces (including the existing provision on the current Wincheap site). The consultants come down firmly against a site on Thanington Recreation Ground, or at Cockerling Farm – for which relief, much thanks.

However, the report pays no heed to the rapid changes in people’s use of transport, i.e. increased use of free bus passes by retired people, the new high-speed rail link to London from Canterbury West starting this year, the lessening numbers of car journeys (perhaps caused by fuel costs – but could it be a growing realisation that shopping trips are a luxury and not a necessity?) into the city as shown by a 12-14% reduction in the use of the current park and ride sites, the very heavy use by students at the University of Kent of the excellent, frequent and late-running buses. I could go on. What a fourth site is really all about is persuading people outside

A fine show of daffodils at Crundale herald winter’s end



Canterbury district not to shop on their own doorsteps, but to pollute the countryside to shop in Canterbury – at the same time perhaps weakening retail businesses in their own towns.

Another site is definitely not required for people living in Canterbury district for whom the current sites are sufficient, especially as the New Dover Road site is to be expanded to provide 210 extra spaces.

Dover



GLYN THOMAS

The Dover committee representations at the appeal hearing into the proposed North Dover wind farm, which has been dismissed by the inspector.

The committee’s other preoccupation has been with the Dover LDF core strategy Submission Document. As with the wind farm, the input of senior planner Brian Lloyd has transformed and enhanced the quality of the response. The basic position is that

the committee objects to the core strategy as it stands and although our response is still, at the time of preparing this report, under discussion, we are likely to make the following points:

- Dover District Council aims at 14,000 additional homes by 2026 – a figure inconsistent with the likely recommendations of the South East Plan;
- The council’s preferred option in March 2008 was for 10,000 houses and its reasons for increasing this figure are not well argued;
- The council has not listened to public opinion on this issue;
- The target of 14,000 houses would require an annual rate of completions higher than has ever been achieved – continuously maintained for 18 years!
- The high growth strategy relies on inward migration into the district and this is highly unlikely given the increased housing provision in the other east Kent districts;
- The high growth strategy would necessitate well over 50% of the development being on greenfield sites, which is contrary to national and regional policies;

ty's district committees



■ The high-speed railway service has been used to support the hope that employment opportunities will improve in the district, thus justifying much more housing. However, the council also argues that it will enable more commuting into London, which could have the opposite effect;

■ Market conditions are now less favourable generally than was the case when the predictions of greatly improved employment prospects were made and recovery is unlikely to be sufficiently rapid to justify a euphoric approach to the matter.

Environment

GRAHAM WARREN



I attended the fifth and sixth meetings of the Climate Change Forum. Meeting No 5 had climate change and agriculture as its main theme, with the main presentation by Kevin Atwood of the National Farmers' Union on the future of farming. Aspects discussed included the significance of increases in

commodity prices, population growth and acreage uptake for biofuel production. Mr Atwood expressed concern with respect to the very low level of investment in research which reflected the current low priority given to agriculture.

As to the future impact of climate change in the south east, the view in Kent was that there was unlikely to be any fundamental change in land use, with wheat remaining the principal crop. Flood protection will remain an issue in light of the increasingly pessimistic forecasts of sea level rise and associated coastal flooding.

It was concluded that further attention should be given by the forum to changes in land use, accompanied by a reassessment of vulnerable areas. The NFU, however, sees little value in planning for climate change or other significant factors; it is essentially reactive and driven by the prevailing national flood alleviation and land use policies.

Meeting No 6 had the topic Wildlife and Climate Change in Kent, presented by Richard Moyses. It was explained that, where in past years the main focus of nature conservation activity was on the protection of designated areas, the challenge of climate change and development pressures required that we now also look to new areas that have potential as natural habitats and provide sustainable links between what would otherwise remain as isolated reserves.

All this, with the aim of arresting the steep decline in biodiversity and establishing a more coherent and resilient ecological landscape, is envisaged in the Habitats Directive and biodiversity strategies and is set out in the draft South East Plan.

Maidstone

FELICITY SIMPSON

The AXA/Kent International Gateway remains the principal issue for the Maidstone committee. This awful proposal for huge warehouses would cover much of the 280-acre site of the green rural countryside between Thurnham and Hollingbourne, all within the North Downs Special Landscape Area, near Bearsted.

The excuse for such inappropriate development is that a road/rail freight interchange on the same site and for which some of the warehouse space would be used, would get freight off the roads of Kent. This is a complete myth: such a development would greatly increase the road traffic, not only on the M20 but on all the roads around Maidstone. The quality of life of residents

would be destroyed and Maidstone would become known as "that horrible place with all of those ugly warehouses, with cranes, gantries and lights visible 24/7/365, accompanied by loud noise".

Submissions to Maidstone Council's planning department had to be in by 6 February and many thousands were sent, especially following the special meeting arranged by Kent County Council, attended by more than 300 who braved the snow. The opposition to the AXA/KIG proposals was universal. CPRE Kent's new chairman, Richard Knox-Johnston, pledged support to the fight, and I spoke briefly to oppose the scheme.

One of my new points is that the real objective of the development was based on the trade patterns that accompanied the frenzy of shopping that has proved financially unsustainable. Therefore, the idea of warehouse development should be rethought with far fewer such freight depots being required. Also, the value of agricultural products and the importance of food sustainability has increased. With the uncertainty of fuel prices and the reduction in food supplies, more agricultural land requires protection from large-scale building projects.

However, the situation has changed: AXA/KIG has appealed to Hazel Blears, secretary of state for communities and local government.

It is obvious that AXA/KIG are desperate to have the application determined while this government is in power and while there is a South East England Development Agency determining the economic development of Kent. Were planning policies given a proper consideration, such large-scale built development on green rural countryside within a SLA, and on gault clay (one of the most unstable of geological strata) generating vast numbers of lorry movements around Maidstone with adverse effects on the quality of life of so many people, would be a "no-no" from its inception, but the fear and perception is that politics will be the determining factor.

However, politics does take some account of people power, so the battle for Maidstone is well under way and many people are rallying to the cause spearheaded by STOPKIG, the chairman of which is Richard Horton, now a member of the CPRE Kent board. The responses to the plans must be technically accurate so that they challenge effectively the AXA/KIG evidence, including the nonsense about the scheme's benefits in

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Round-up from the coun

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terms of employment (mainly low-paid jobs).

There have been many other planning applications to deal with. Although house building has almost stopped in Maidstone, there are still plans coming through, so there will be a resumption at some point, perhaps stimulated by central government allocating funding for more affordable homes.

Maidstone has an affordable housing deficit, so such homes are required in Maidstone, mainly on brownfield sites within the settlement areas. More parish councils are also investigating the provision of affordable homes on rural exception sites. That approach is in general supported by CPRE Maidstone providing that the scheme has been well researched and well designed and is not too large: 10-12 homes would seem an upper limit else it becomes a mini “council estate”.

Gary Thomas is continuing to work on the paper about ways of enhancing urban Maidstone, which is timely, because Maidstone Council has initiated a competition for improving the High Street and surrounding areas on a budget of £4million.

Medway

DAVID MURR



As far as protecting Medway’s countryside is concerned, there have been a number of encouraging new initiatives by the council and its partners in recent months. Consultation has started on a strategy for managing and improving the Gillingham Riverside Country Park and it is intended to extend this to other existing and planned country parks, notably those at Grain and Horsted.

There has been some debate about just what constitutes an “official” country

park and what the main aims should be in managing them. At Ranscombe Farm near Cobham, this has centred on whether public access should be encouraged for the whole park, or if some areas should be managed for conservation. It seems logical that a “country” park should be in the country – in a generally rural setting, not just a bit of token countryside hemmed in by built development.

It remains to be seen that if promoting projects such as the Medway Green Grid and Thames Gateway Parklands, Medway’s rural fringe and the hinterland to our important coastal areas will be given enough government support to offset the huge amounts of building being sanctioned. With work on Medway’s Local Development Framework now restarted, it is hoped that the new planning structures will continue to support the policies for local landscapes and countryside that the local plan contains.

A Medway Green Grid Forum has been set up by the council to consult with a wide range of organisations on how to improve links between open spaces and access to these from the urban areas. CPRE is now working closely with the Medway Countryside Forum and the professional help given to the forum on planning issues by the Kent branch office is much appreciated.

Sevenoaks

NIGEL BRITTEN



Following the two successful briefing events for parish councils on the Local Development Framework (LDF), we have been working on the LDF core strategy itself which was published for initial consultation in January. A LDF seems a dry subject – the terminology alone is forbidding enough – but

it could hardly be more significant, given the pressures for new housing, our Green Belt location and the fact that so much of the district is in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. So it is a relief to know that at least until 2026 all of the housing development required under the South East Plan can be built outside of the Green Belt. According to the core strategy the draft policy on development is:

■ To safeguard the countryside around the district’s main towns and villages and promote change within them by making the best use of previously developed land;
 ■ To focus the majority of new housing, employment and retail development in the towns of Sevenoaks, Swanley and Edenbridge with smaller-scale development in the larger villages that have a more limited range of facilities.

“Development in larger villages” raises questions and we were not at all happy with the way the council classified villages – the “settlement hierarchy” – to indicate which villages could take more and which less development. Consultation on the final draft of the core strategy will not take place until the autumn.

We were very disappointed that in spite of considerable local opposition, Kent County Council gave itself planning permission to extend the car park at Lullingstone Visitors’ Centre. What was intended to be a modest interpretation centre is becoming a bloated country park café with a music and alcohol licence, 123 car parking places and three coach bays. Is there any wonder we stress the need to safeguard the countryside, as the core strategy puts it, and enforce Green Belt and AONB policies?

Early last year advertisement boards started appearing on roundabouts, sanctioned by Kent County Council. We opposed the planning applications which Sevenoaks

400 Club

HERE are the prizes that have been awarded since the last edition of *Kent Voice*.

October: £40 to T Sheridan (114), £25 to RG Whitelegg (314), £20 to Mrs M Page (200) and £15 to P Massey (43), RG Hope (32), HR Balston (217) and Mrs BM Vassilieff (299).

November: £40 to AG Thorpe (77), £25 to Mrs B Gray (333), £20 to Mr & Mrs T Guy (368) and £15 to M Longmore (162), DW Eddison (148), Mrs GM Scales (112) and Mr & Mrs RB O’Neill (264).

December: £350 to M Crux (319), £75

to Mr & Mrs JS Orr (208), £25 to LG Holt (37) and Mrs S Humphrey (131) and £15 to Mrs S Corall (270).

A new club started in January. Prizes for this have been awarded as follows:

January: £40 to Mrs EC Jessup (261), £30 to Mrs JE Ahmed (60), £25 to Mr & Mrs J Twyman (18) and LR Horscroft (228) and £20 to Mrs J Roberson (66), HR Balston (168) and Mr & Mrs J Mercy (199).

February: £40 to Mrs P Pollock (307), £30 to Mrs PA Castle (91), £25 to Mrs C Copleston (216) and P Stevens (134)

and £20 to RG Whitelegg (110) and AP Koolman (165).

March: £40 to Mrs M Palmer (240), £30 to Mrs AM Hone (320), £25 to AP Koolman (165) and Mrs J Drew (150) and £20 to Mrs MH Franks (68) and W Meadows (340).

We still have a few shares available. £8 will now give you eight chances to win prizes of between £20 and £200, so if you would like to join for the remainder of the year please contact Sandra in the branch office on 01303 815182.

ty's committees

District Council demanded that KCC submitted. Now we can report the good news that all six appeals against refusal of planning permission have been dismissed. The inspector said he disregarded permissions granted elsewhere because each case had to be treated on its merits, and he found none. Some of the locations were urban, such as Edenbridge, and others rural but he considered all to be alien to their settings.

Shepway

PAUL SMALLWOOD

The Shepway Committee has considered an interesting application for an industrial regeneration scheme in the remote hamlet of Selsted in the North Downs AONB.

Originally, it would have provided employment for 120 persons, but that is now reduced to 68. The application said that it was a farm diversification project, though the farm no longer functions.

Sellidge is beset with the prospect of a possible anaerobic incinerator and a lorry park; now a spectral proposal by a farmer has appeared to put a huge composting operation involving 45,000 tons of organic waste, including sewage, just outside the village.

Swale

MALCOLM MOORE



Swale Council is now getting on with the preliminaries to the LDF and a rash of consultation documents is appearing.

It is still fairly quiet on the planning application front but we have put in objections to several small applications affecting rural properties. The main worry is one by the so-called Kent Science Park which wants to extend outside the security fence and build an office block on a 10-acre site between the boundary and the M2. We have objected. Our other worry is the effect of the proposed extension on traffic on the rural roads and on the roads through Sittingbourne. We have little doubt that if the application is approved it will be only the first of many that will destroy the rural nature of the area.

Thanet

COLIN BRIDGE

We reported on the huge pressures challenging Thanet in Kent Voice last

autumn. Thanet Earth is now built and operating, producing salad crops which are finding their way into shops across the county.

Meanwhile Thanet District Council has voted in principle to approve the first phase of the China Gateway project, despite the uncertainty over the allocation of land for the second and third phases.

And at another council meeting in February, rumours that a major air cargo company were interested in moving their operations to Manston were enough to persuade Thanet Council members to vote overwhelmingly in favour of extending the permitted hours of operation for freight flights at the airport.

Promises of the jobs that will be created by expanding freight operations at Manston have, in our opinion, been greatly overstated and the erosion of the restrictions to night flying present a very real threat to the rights of residents to undisturbed sleep.

Tonbridge & Malling

JOHN CANNON

Tonbridge & Malling Committee has been looking at a preliminary transport appraisal covering the A228 and Junction 4 of the M20, writes.

We are looking at this appraisal in the light of the proposed development of: Holborough Valley (some 1,000 homes); Leybourne Grange (700 dwellings); near New Hythe (370 dwellings); Peters Village (1,000 dwellings plus a new river crossing to access A228), together with the continuing development of Kings Hill, West Malling.

Tunbridge Wells

ELIZABETH AKENHEAD

The Tunbridge Wells committee (with a great deal of help from all the staff at Smeeth) held a conference on alternative energy at the Assembly Hall Theatre in January. After Greg Clark, the local MP, had agreed to open the conference, he was appointed as the Conservative spokesman for energy, so our initiative could not have been better timed.

Our committee has shrunk to only four people, following Sir Brian Cubbon's and Ian Burn's retirement. Both these members have made a huge contribution (Sir Brian as our chairman) and will be sorely missed. I have taken over as acting chairman.

Kent Voice

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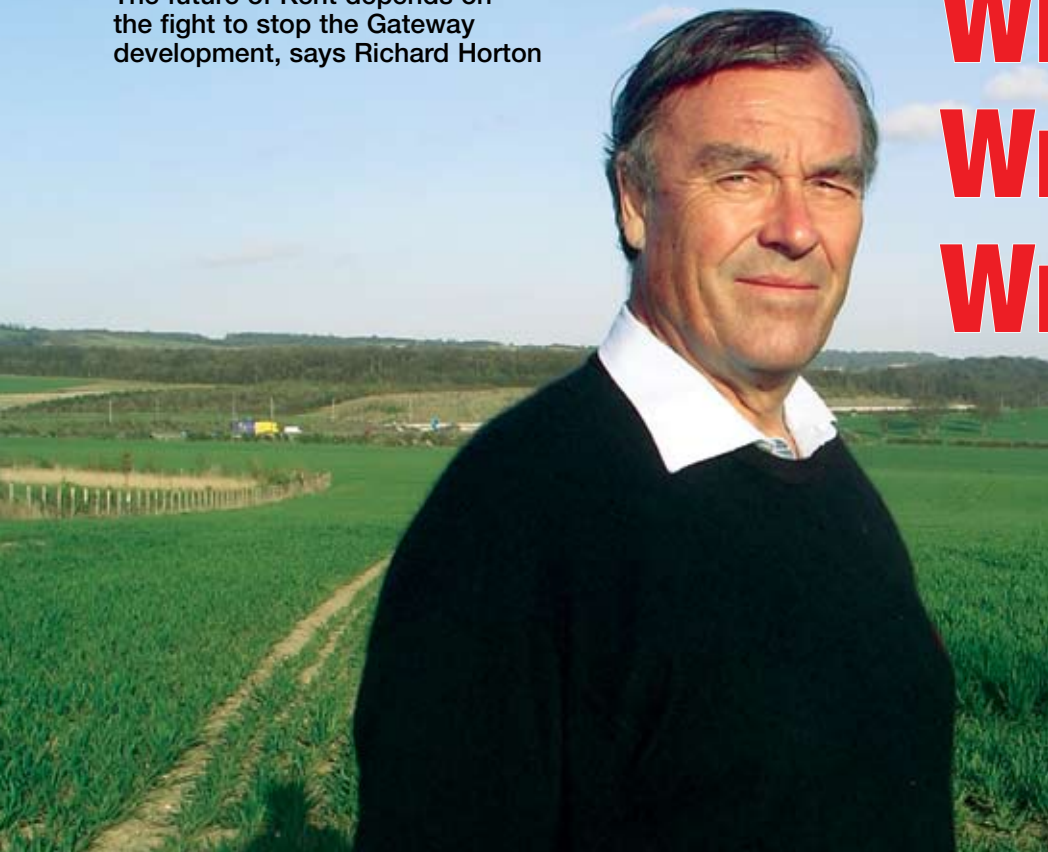
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The future of Kent depends on the fight to stop the Gateway development, says Richard Horton

Wrong idea
Wrong site
Wrong time



Kent International Gateway, backed by the AXA Insurance Group, is a proposal for a rail freight interchange and commercial development between junction 8 of the M20 at Hollingbourne westwards to Thurnham Lane. Bearsted village and the A20 are to the south with the M20 to the north. The site occupies 276 acres and its current planning designation is as a special landscape area, intended to protect the adjoining North Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the ancient village of Bearsted.

The planning application was submitted towards the end of 2007. The transport secretary, through the Highways Agency, imposed an article 14 direction because he was not satisfied the proposal did not have an adverse impact on the M20 and the safety of people using it. A direction remains in place today. In addition, Maidstone Council requested further information from the applicant which, we have been told, has been less than helpful in providing it.

Had Maidstone held a planning committee meeting to decide the application, it could only have refused it, because that is the effect of the article 14 direction. This is regardless of the practicality that the applicant is still unable to show that the proposal does not have an unacceptable impact on the strategic national road network.

However, despite this, the applicant entered an appeal on the ground that Maidstone had failed to determine the application. The appeal has been validated by the communities secretary through the Planning Inspectorate. Current

information suggests

The planning authority is being sidelined in a undemocratic plan that would sacrifice agricultural land in the 'national interest' – better known as commercial profit, writes **Richard Horton**

that a public inquiry will be held in October. Further, the secretary of state has reserved the decision to herself so there is no guarantee she will follow the recommendation of the planning inspector appointed to take the inquiry.

The result of all this is that the only planning decision on this huge application will be made by a government minister who will have not even attended the planning inquiry to hear the evidence! There is no appeal from her decision, unless it is on a point of law alone. Maidstone, as the planning authority will have been sidelined.

Maidstone has received thousands of objections to the application. Kent County Council opposes the application as does the local MP, Hugh Robertson. In the absence of Maidstone being yet able to express an opinion, a number of Maidstone parishes have formed an opposition group. Protect Kent is working with Stopkig.org, the single-purpose opposition group.

A proposal of this size must have an immense impact on the locality and its future. If allowed, it will determine the future development of Maidstone borough – and it will have been forced on its people against their wishes.

There are many other concerns ranging from public health; noise light and other pollution;



policing and fire risk; effect on infrastructure and services; and spoiling a beautiful piece of countryside. The general view is the applicant has failed to make a case that justifies planning permission. But the process and progress of this application are showing signs of political interference. The real concern is that planning grounds will be ignored in favour of a political decision, which is why we make no apology for the overt political tone of this comment.

How many more communities are going to be forced to make sacrifices "in the national interest", frequently a euphemism for "commercial interest"? Today's global economic crisis must make us reflect on our values. Yes, we all aspire to reducing pollution generated by road vehicles, but is concreting over 276 acres of agricultural land in Kent to facilitate the distribution of produce transported from agricultural land in southern Europe the way forward? Does the "national interest" justify expecting more than 100,000 people of the borough of Maidstone to put up with the pollution and inconvenience generated by the thousands of daily vehicle movements to a site that currently is visited by the occasional tractor?



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