

Spring-Summer 2023

# Kent Countryside *Voice*

## Up on the downs

Spreading the seeds  
of hope

## So much development...

so little benefit  
for local people

## One wild village!

The group who put nature  
at the heart of their  
community



The countryside charity  
Kent





The turtle dove is one of our fastest-declining birds - a group of villagers in east Kent are trying to reverse the slump in its fortunes (Steve Ashton)

Cover: Did you know moths could look like this? Behold the emperor moth (Steve Ashton)

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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](mailto:info@cprekent.org.uk) or call 01233 714540.

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Hilary Newport

# Director's Report

**It's hard to think that I have been in the role of director here at CPRE Kent for over 20 years now. In that time I have climbed a very steep learning curve on the subject of town planning.**

I now firmly believe I know enough about the planning system to know when I need to defer to the experts; I also firmly know that I have learnt the importance of charity organisations like CPRE in achieving real and meaningful change for the benefit of all.

Over its almost 100 years CPRE has been a significant driver for better implementation of planning requirements, helping to establish National Parks and the principle of Green Belt protection and continuing more recently with its influence on planning changes since the introduction of the original NPPF in 2012.

Of course, for every organisation lobbying for policy changes for the good of society or the environment, there will be commercial interests lobbying for their own financial benefits. The very definition of 'sustainable development', to which we must all aspire, is that the three pillars of sustainability (environment, society and the economy) must be valued equally. It is a great shame that too frequently the loudest lobbying voices belong to those with the deepest pockets.

Nobody called it sustainable development at the time, but the principle of the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act was to balance the public benefit and protection of the countryside with the need for development. For much of the time since then, the TCPA and its successors have more or less maintained the beautiful wild and farmed spaces of this small and densely populated island.

I remain no expert, but I believe that within the ever-changing constellations of government departments it was the formation of Defra at the beginning of this century that first split responsibility for protection of the environment for the other benefits of the planning regulations.

Since then, the Treasury - which has remained the ever-present pole star of the regular changes - has grown in importance and is now arguably the most important of all the government departments. It is now harder than ever to argue for policy changes that do not have benefit to the economy as their principal driver. A strong and thriving economy is of course the goal of any government, but it must not come at the expense of the environment.

The original NPPF in 2012 had laudable core principles - including delivering the transition to a climate-resilient and low-carbon economy - which together with its detailed guidance on delivering sustainable development are hard to argue against. But many millions of pounds have been spent employing legal specialists to pick apart the principles underlying sustainable development to push speculative proposals through the planning system and deliver housing estates in open countryside that are anything but sustainable.

If the current proposed changes to the NPPF are to actually help deliver the homes - particularly homes that people can afford to live in - as well as reduce our impact on the environment, then it will be organisations like CPRE that help achieve it.

CPRE is uniquely positioned to balance the concerns of local people over inappropriate planning decisions with the respect of policy-makers and politicians to achieve meaningful change for the better. I'm proud to be part of such an organisation and forever grateful to our members and supporters who help us continue to punch above our weight in influencing policy: we have big, wealthy interests undermining our influence and your funding is what helps us keep protecting the beautiful Garden of England.





The beauty of the Kent Downs is relatively unsung...  
this is Crundale (Dan Tuson)

# From tiny seeds mighty WILDLIFE grows

Dan Tuson has spearheaded the application of the government's Countryside Stewardship scheme across much of the county's agricultural landscape - he shows **David Mairs** the striking impact for nature that it has had

In a time when nature conservation can appear to have been consumed by the prevailing trend for reintroductions and the attendant newspaper headlines, TV coverage and even celebrity endorsements that increasingly accompany them, it is reassuring to know that in the heart of Kent some good old-fashioned work for the wildlife we already have is going on quietly and determinedly away from the media glare.

Dan Tuson (right) is a land management adviser with Natural England and has been helping deliver Countryside Stewardship schemes for some 22 years.

He advises on and helps secure funding for arable reversion projects, grassland restoration, the establishment of wildflower meadows, tree-planting, grazing regimes and very much more - it's a job that sees him out in the field most days, especially from May to July. Happily for him, the countryside and the people who love that countryside, the results have been little short of spectacular.

Born in 1991, Countryside Stewardship is a government scheme that offers financial incentives for farmers, foresters and land managers to look after and improve our natural environment. Depending on where it is applied, it is designed to protect and enhance the natural environment by:

- increasing biodiversity
- improving habitat
- expanding woodland areas



- improving water quality
- improving air quality
- improving natural flood management

"It used to be provided by MAFF [Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food], but now the scheme is owned by Defra - we're just the delivery body," says Tuson. "We offer technical advice on setting up projects and help put them together."

Such projects are carried out primarily on farms and so it's essential that those who do the farming are engaged with Countryside Stewardship and its aims. ▶





Duke of Burgundy has bounced back from near-extinction in the county thanks to habitat management (Richard Kinzler)



Wildflower hay is collected for transfer to new sites (Dan Tuson)

“A one-to-one approach has been key to building relationships,” says Tuson. “As with anything, there’s a range of different players - we don’t come on too official as that’s a sure way to turn them off. There’s never been a lack of funding in recent times, but sometimes in the past not enough farms were coming into the scheme - uptake has generally been lower in periods when farms receive higher prices for crops like wheat.”

It is testament to the perseverance, enthusiasm and personable nature of Tuson that the situation is being reversed to the extent that the Kent farmers providing prime habitat for wildlife can now be numbered in the hundreds. Most of those are engaged with Countryside Stewardship.

Much of Tuson’s work focuses on the Kent Downs AONB, where conversion of arable farmland to flower-rich grassland is a substantial driver of his team’s work. It’s here that I meet him - Barham Downs, to be precise - and the heart soars almost as high as the surrounding skylarks singing away as you witness quite how much impact that work has had.

Walking through a stretch that had been seeded with a wildflower mix back in 2010, the clouds of butterflies rising from the grass around us hark back to a time when such sights were common. The collapse in the country’s butterfly populations has been one of the starkest features of a wider decline in our wildlife, but you wouldn’t know it here.

Of the butterflies we see, it is the number of second-generation small blues that is the stand-out, but the range of species is rich, while a special visitor to the area earlier in the summer was a Queen of Spain fritillary - part of a small influx into Kent that drew fans from across the land. Yes, there are butterfly twitchers, too!

As for the birds, grey partridges, skylarks, whitethroats, linnets and yellowhammers thrive on the restored downland, insect-rich flower margins and nectar plots that are becoming so well established, but as in any healthy ecosystem it is a wildlife win-win across the spectrum.

“There’s a lot of grassland restoration in these valleys - the area we’re in straddles five farms, but there are 30-odd farms in the Barham Downs group in total. We encourage farmers to do arable reversion, take opportunities wherever they arise and not be too fussy about where it is. If you provide the habitat, wildlife will find it and the more of it you provide the more it becomes connected - we’re looking at long-term change.

“We’ve all been learning - for example, the provenance of our mixes of native wildflowers has been getting better. Throughout the history of stewardship schemes there has been too heavy a reliance on short-term seed mixes - quick fixes that aim to replicate the wildflower meadows of times past, but of course they don’t last and often don’t provide the larval foodplants that many of our insects need.

“It’s very easy to go off-course with mixes. Without thinking ahead, you just end up with disconnected areas of land not delivering to their fullest potential for wildlife.

“Our approach focuses less on the short-term fixes and more on creating a new generation of wildflower-rich grasslands to restore a countryside full of insects and so provide the food resource for all wildlife to thrive. And grasslands need managing, of course... grazing, hay-cutting, it’s all about one-to-one close working with each farm.”

Provenance... a buzz word that, for some at least, reaches into the esoteric world of wildflower seed mixes. Purists have, for example, pondered the traceability of cowslip seeds used on the Kent Downs. Were they brought in from Cornwall? How many seeds arrived from hay or animals being moved around in times past from other areas of the country? Alternatively, who knows where they came from and does it even matter?

Such delicacies aside, lady’s bedstraw, small scabious, marjoram, basil, common knapweed, bird’s-foot trefoil and wild carrot are among the plant species making the mix and helping create what are now, after up to 30 years of effort, good-quality chalk grassland sites providing nectar- and pollen-rich habitat.



While some places might be planted with seed mixes, natural recolonisation in others plays its part in creating wildlife habitat on a landscape scale - connectivity, whether it be between restored sites or existing chunks of downland and woodland, is everything.

“We’re trying to recreate the wildflower meadows and grasslands that were once part of the everyday countryside - we’re not so fussy about where it is,” says Tuson. “There’s a view that farmland is a sterile, inhospitable place, but many farmers across the county are doing their bit for wildlife - it’s just that most of it goes on quietly behind the scenes. And of course we still need to produce food - our schemes never try to take that away - so it’s all about working with the farms to take the less productive areas for crops and produce for wildlife instead.”

These are intriguing days in the world of nature conservation. The ridiculous levels of urban development so evident all around us are placing often intolerable stress on wildlife, but changes in government policy and (ever-critically!) funding mean that nature is still in with a fighting chance.

The Basic Payment Scheme - effectively a safety net supplementing farmers’ income - is being gradually phased out and due to end in 2027. Much of that money is instead going towards environmental schemes and for the first time the environment will be the mainstay of agricultural subsidies.

This is particularly welcome news for programmes such as Countryside Stewardship, which was formerly funded half by the UK government and half by the EU. The next round of schemes is being determined in 2024 and a substantial amount of money is being lined up for them.

One door closes, another opens...

Regardless of where the money comes from, however, one butterfly that has benefited hugely from targeted environmental land management is the Duke of Burgundy butterfly.

In 2022 the Kent population of this nationally scarce species showed a 185 per cent increase on the last recorded year (2020), with a record total of 534 butterflies counted across 13 colonies, one site hosting some 170 and another 140.

Considering the Duke of Burgundy had been on the verge of extinction in the county at the turn of the century, the uplift

is remarkable and reflects how improved understanding of specific requirements allied with active conservation work can prove so telling.

“They don’t travel much, but the females will disperse more widely,” says Tuson. “They’re not an easy butterfly to manage for as they like a scruffy, abandoned look to the grassland, almost reverting to bushes and scrub, but creating a much bigger resource of wildflower grasslands of all types means they have been able to colonise new sites - the old days of micro-managing a few isolated colonies are hopefully becoming a thing of the past.”

It’s rare that targeted conservation works for only one species and the improved habitat for the Dukes has also heralded increased numbers of dingy skipper butterflies and black-veined moths, the latter’s entire UK range being restricted to Kent.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of collaboration between conservation groups. Tuson’s Stour Valley to Stone Street Nature Recovery Network has been a cornerstone of the Dukes’ revival, but so too has Butterfly Conservation’s three-year project at Denge Wood, near Petham, where cooperation from the Woodland Trust and Forestry England also proved vital.

So too the hours of graft put in by any number of volunteers who get stuck into such manual work as gathering and spreading hay mixes - without them, the various elements that comprise Tuson’s Countryside Stewardship work would be very much poorer.

But, perhaps more than anything, he is aware of the debt we owe those farmers willing to provide for wildlife. Some in the agricultural world receive a poor press, but we can be thankful that so many are engaged with restoring and enhancing the natural wealth of our countryside.

I end my time with Tuson in a valley close to his hometown of Dover. It is a genuinely idyllic spot and only strengthens the belief of this writer that the Kent Downs should be given enhanced status in addition to their AONB designation.

Kent is losing so much countryside to urbanisation that we - people and wildlife alike - need such beautiful landscapes if we are to keep a county fit to live in. ■



The black-veined moth is confined to Kent within the UK (David Mairs)



The rolling sweep of the Kent Downs is being restored as a haven for wildlife (Dan Tuson)



Build, build, build... but it doesn't do anything for local people needing a home

# JUST WHO ARE WE SACRIFICING KENT'S COUNTRYSIDE FOR?

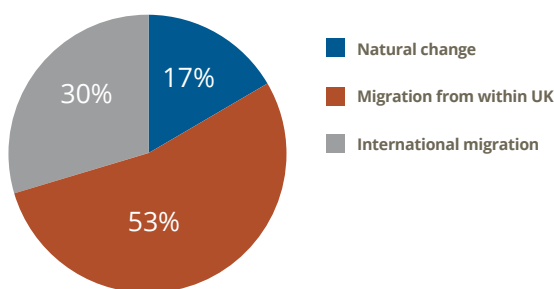
Failure to build affordable properties, a methodology based on out-of-date statistics and people moving into the county from London mean the housing onslaught on Kent does nothing to benefit our existing communities. It's time our local authorities pushed back against the madness, says CPRE Kent planner **Richard Thompson**.

A question we at CPRE Kent are often asked is exactly what is causing the massive housing numbers the county is being asked to build. As this is a topic at the heart of much of what CPRE Kent cares about, it is worth exploring and understanding in detail.

At the most basic level, it is predictions about future population growth based on past trends that set the baseline for how many houses need to be planned for. For Kent, it is an unavoidable fact that it is people moving to the county rather than natural growth (where there are more births than deaths) that has driven population growth over recent years.

Over the years 2011 to 2020, people moving to Kent accounted for 83 per cent of total population growth, against 17 per cent natural growth<sup>1</sup>. Of these people moving to Kent, the majority (64 per cent) have come from elsewhere in the UK, though mainly from London. Indeed, once movement between Kent and the rest of the country is taken into account, the internal migration net increase of 6,300 people to Kent in the year 2019-20 was effectively due to internal migration from London alone<sup>2</sup>.

Components of Kent population change 2011-2020



In terms of how these past trends are then converted into how many houses are needed for each local authority area, it used to be the case that each local authority would individually interrogate the most up-to-date demographic data and trends to come up with its own housing figure.

This figure was expected to demonstrably meet the 'housing need' for an area though could be adjusted to account for local policy and supply factors. It was, however, deemed that this method just led to protracted arguments at Local Plan examinations, particularly around exactly what constituted the 'housing need' for an area and the extent to which 'housing demand' should be met (see 'Housing by definition' box).



To overcome this, the 2018 National Planning Policy Framework introduced the Standard Method for calculating local housing need. This is a centrally-set formula-based approach intended to simplify and speed up the process of determining housing numbers. Although not mandatory, planning guidance states: “There is an expectation that the Standard Method will be used and that any other method will be used only in exceptional circumstances”. In practice, no Kent council has yet attempted to use any other method than the Standard Method.

It is, however, CPRE Kent’s view the Standard Method is fundamentally flawed. For starters, it is still the case that the Standard Method requires extremely out-of-date 2014-based household projection data to be used. This is despite 2016- and 2018-based projections having been released, each of which progressively signals lower house numbers are needed. It is also the case that 2021 census data are now becoming available that completely reset and refine existing population assumptions. There is simply no valid reason to continue to use the 2014-based data beyond the fact they artificially inflate housing numbers and so assist the current government’s desire to build 300,000 houses a year across the UK.

More fundamentally wrong, the Standard Method requires an adjustment to be made on the basis that the bigger the gap between average house prices and average wages in an area, the more houses need to be built in that area. The rationale is the deeply flawed thinking that simply increasing housing targets will bring down house prices.

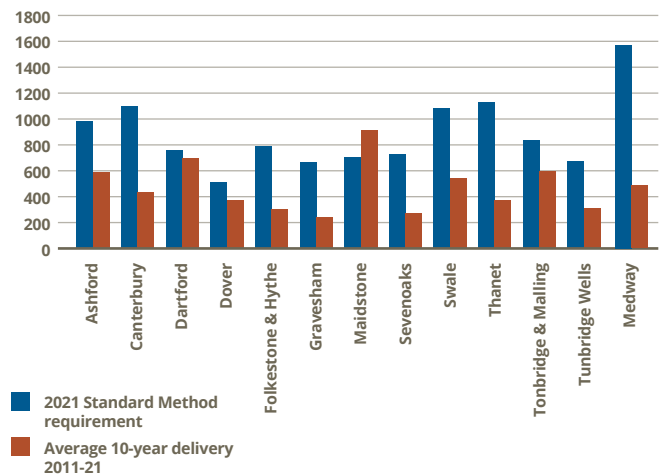
Firstly, this expects the laws of supply and demand to operate while ignoring the simple fact that housebuilders will not build at a level that over-supplies a local housing market, forcing them to reduce prices and lower profits.

Secondly, this ignores the fact that it is the supply of money and ability to pay that drives housing price inflation. As set out above, with much of the demand for housing in Kent coming from the heated property market of London, it is absurd to think that requiring Kent authorities to grant more planning permissions is going to have any discernible impact on the county’s house prices. Rather, and as we are beginning to see, what happens on the mortgage market is far more important in this regard.

Both housebuilders Persimmon and Taylor Wimpey have recently confirmed this is why they are slowing build rates in 2023. In explaining it now intends to build fewer homes in 2023, Dean Finch, chief executive of Persimmon, stated: “If we build more than we can sell, we’ll quickly run down the cash balance”<sup>3</sup>. Even more starkly, Jennie Daly, chief executive of Taylor Wimpey, said: “If we keep building at the pace we are in the hope that sales rates recover, we’d just end up creating lots of stock and come under pressure to reduce prices”<sup>4</sup>.

The consequence of the Standard Method is housing targets are being set that realistically will not be met by the market alone. Currently, across Kent the Standard Method would require some 11,947 houses a year to be built. This is almost double the 6,338 homes that on average get built each year in Kent. As set out in the table top right, for many of our districts it is well in excess of double the number they currently build<sup>5</sup>.

Standard Method housing requirement versus average housing delivery



To make matters worse, under the current system, local authorities are effectively punished if the market does not build, or plan to build, enough houses in their areas. The punishment is either having to effectively grant planning permission automatically or set out plans around how they are going to allow more houses to be built.

As it stands, and set out in the below table, only Dartford and Maidstone are currently escaping such sanctions. This is despite at last count there being either planning permissions or Local Plan allocations for some 64,611 houses in Kent expected to come forward in the next five years, the equivalent of 10.2 years of housing supply if based on average delivery over the last 10 years<sup>6</sup>. ▶

	Current five-year supply (years)	Current HDT	HDT implications	Presumption in favour of granting planning permission
Ashford	3.5	118 per cent	None	Yes
Canterbury	5.3	65 per cent	Presumption	Yes
Dartford	6.03	105 per cent	None	No
Dover	6.03	88 per cent	Action plan	No
Folkestone & Hythe	5.3	85 per cent	Action plan	No
Gravesham	3.27	57 per cent	Presumption	Yes
Maidstone	5.14	170 per cent	None	No
Sevenoaks	2.5	62 per cent	Presumption	Yes
Swale	4.6	78 per cent	Buffer	Yes
Thanet	3.6	78 per cent	Buffer	Yes
Tonbridge and Malling	3.02	63 per cent	Presumption	Yes
Tunbridge Wells	4.49	97 per cent	None	Yes
Medway	3.64	67 per cent	Presumption	Yes

The combination of the above factors means developers are effectively able to cherry-pick the sites and build the houses that are going to be most profitable to them. This will disproportionately be large family houses on greenfield sites to serve the London market demand, further exacerbating the gulf between Kent house prices and Kent medium earnings.

What they are not building are the affordable homes needed for our existing communities, in particular homes for social rent. In 2020-21, only 1.87 per cent of houses built across Kent were for social rent, with not a single social rent property built in seven out of the 13 Kent local authority areas<sup>7</sup>. Unsurprisingly, what is increasing is the number of second homes in Kent, having risen by 5.4 per cent over the last five years<sup>8</sup>.

This stuff matters. Firstly, there is no avenue to local authorities but to continue to accept and look to accommodate external market demand into their areas as dictated by past and recent trends. While such trends make a sensible starting point, there does need to be the ability for a sensible conversation as to whether our most constrained areas can continue to accommodate this demand indefinitely. At the very least, the conversation needs to be based on the most up-to-date data rather than those that are now almost 10 years old.

There is also the small matter of if the government is serious about addressing the problems associated with worsening affordability, policy efforts must concentrate explicitly on boosting supply of affordable tenures, not just overall supply in the hope developers will suddenly build affordable homes after all.

More fundamentally, the imposition of such unrealistic numbers based on arbitrary national targets only serves

to alienate local communities and local politicians, who feel they have no control over what happens to their areas. No sensible conversation can then be had about how we deliver the homes that are needed against this backdrop. This is why CPRE nationally has been at the forefront of campaigning to replace the Standard Method's arbitrary national formula approach with a more refined evidence-based approach to determining housing need.

As a result of this campaigning, and while there is still much to do, CPRE won some important concessions just before Christmas. Many of these were reflected in the revised version of the NPPF just consulted upon. There is also now far greater recognition of the flaws of the Standard Method and the unfair implications of the five-year supply and housing delivery tests. Consequently, we are seeing encouraging signs that at least some Kent councils are pushing back. This includes Thanet and Swale, who have both decided to wait to see the implications of the revised NPPF before making any rash decisions for their communities about locking in the housing numbers dictated by the current system.

Unfortunately, this message is not getting across to all our councils. Canterbury City Council in particular seems absolutely wedded to blindly imposing the targets that will more than double current building levels. This is despite it having one of the strongest arguments to demonstrate that exceptional circumstances exist to take an alternative route.

For those councils, and with local elections coming up, there is perhaps no better time to remind them there is another way. ■

## HOUSING BY DEFINITION

**Housing need** refers to the number of homes required to meet the basic shelter needs of a population, taking into account factors such as household size, income and the availability of existing housing.

**Housing demand**, on the other hand, refers to the actual number of homes that people are willing and able to buy or rent in a given market. Housing demand is driven by a range of factors, including consumer preferences, income levels and the availability of credit. Housing demand is influenced by market conditions such as supply and demand for homes, interest rates and the local economy.

### References

<sup>1</sup> Stats taken from <https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/information-and-data/facts-and-figures-about-Kent/population-and-census#tab-1,2> specifically [https://www.kent.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/13827/Births-and-deaths-bulletin.pdf](https://www.kent.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/13827/Births-and-deaths-bulletin.pdf) [https://www.kent.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/8149/Whats-causing-Kents-population-growth.pdf](https://www.kent.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/8149/Whats-causing-Kents-population-growth.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> See Kent Analytics Migration Indicators in Kent 2020

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/persimmon-to-slash-its-housebuilding-rates-in-more-challenging-year-cdhqx2zpv>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/taylor-wimpey-will-build-fewer-houses-dzk95hs67>

<sup>5</sup> Houses built data taken from [https://www.kent.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/65740/KCC-Housing-information-audit-residential-land-supply.pdf](https://www.kent.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/65740/KCC-Housing-information-audit-residential-land-supply.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.kent.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/65740/KCC-Housing-information-audit-residential-land-supply.pdf](https://www.kent.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/65740/KCC-Housing-information-audit-residential-land-supply.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.kent.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/7356/Affordable-housing-in-Kent.pdf](https://www.kent.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/7356/Affordable-housing-in-Kent.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.kent.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/81662/Housing-stock.pdf](https://www.kent.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/81662/Housing-stock.pdf)





# Chairman's Update

**John Wotton**

## Even your smallest environmental improvement can make a difference

**As members of CPRE Kent, I'm sure we all wish to live our lives in an environmentally responsible way. For those of us who live in the places that this organisation seeks to protect, namely the countryside, villages and rural towns in Kent, however, reducing carbon emissions cannot be our one overriding environmental objective. If it were, we would all move to zero-carbon homes in the city, where we could rely exclusively on public transport for our work, domestic and social lives.**

In promoting a sustainable and thriving countryside, we pursue many objectives, some environmental, some social, some economic and some cultural, and I'll offer a few examples.

We wish to improve biodiversity in the countryside, in the face of an extinction crisis affecting fauna and flora alike. We wish to promote sustainable agriculture, producing high-quality food, especially for local consumers, while improving the soil quality of farmland and the biodiversity it supports. We support a thriving local economy, which enables people in rural areas to work close to their homes, but not by building large industrial estates or retail parks on greenfield sites in the countryside. We wish to see a rapid shift towards renewable-energy generation but not at the expense of covering the countryside with large solar farms and wind farms. We wish to see new homes built to meet local needs, and to the most demanding environmental standards, but not by means of large housing estates on greenfield sites. We want to see the existing housing stock

(and commercial and industrial premises) made more thermally efficient but not by destroying the architectural character or historic interest of our towns, villages and historic buildings.

These examples show that the questions CPRE faces in formulating its policies are complex and many-faceted, both nationally and locally, involving balancing competing priorities.

CPRE seeks to be a respected and responsible advocate of practical and effective policies to protect the countryside, which might not always be headline-grabbing but should be more influential on government for our recognition that there are rarely simple answers to the problems that arise in planning, land use and the environment.

As CPRE is fundamentally an inclusive and democratic organisation, we can all play our part in making its campaigning and advocacy more effective, so I do encourage you all to participate actively in the county branch, by writing to tell us what you think, by participating in our district committees, or by joining our board of trustees. I and my fellow trustees, together with Hilary and the team at Charing, seek to participate fully in policy-making by CPRE's national and regional bodies so that the voice of the Kent branch is heard.

We all think much more carefully now about the environmental impact of our individual lifestyles. The choices each of us can make depend on our personal circumstances, but we can all make a positive contribution by our choices.

I know that my thinking has evolved over time. When we moved into our listed, timber-framed home 30 years ago, we thought we were doing the right thing by ensuring that it continued to be used as a family home, without harming its historic character and by caring for and improving a garden that had been long neglected.

Now, we are increasingly concerned about the quantity of fossil fuels we use to heat the house in winter and how our garden and fields can improve biodiversity. We are ever more careful about wasting heat and wonder how we can further reduce the carbon footprint of our home while preserving its character. The answer is probably "Only at great expense and with no guarantee of the outcome"!

In our garden and orchard, we use no pesticides or herbicides and hardly any inorganic fertiliser, but this comes at the cost of poor yields of fruit and vegetables and some badly damaged ornamental plants. We try to mow as little and as late as possible, but trying not to mow the lush, coarse grasses of our corner of the High Weald until late summer runs the risk of wrecking the most robust equipment.

We now have the chance of managing two acres ourselves, which were previously mown for hay and grazed by sheep. We are thinking in terms of 'rewilding', but our approach is far from rigorous. We've put up a fence to keep out the roe deer, planted a native hedgerow (see photo below) and transplanted some oak and hazel seedlings from nearby to kickstart the regrowth.

There ought to be animals grazing and browsing the land, to mimic a natural environment, but we've neither the time nor the expertise to run livestock, so we'll just leave things be and see what sort of scrub woodland emerges.

All this illustrates the fact that, for each individual and household, environmental choices are determined by what is affordable and practical for them.

I do urge all of you to do your best to live in an environmentally responsible way. Every improvement we make, however imperfect, can make a difference. Our future, and the future of the Kent countryside, depends upon it.







Green is the colour in Staple... **Shelley Morris** tells the uplifting story of how one group of residents have put nature at the heart of their community



From left, village children have planted a small orchard; superb views of turtle doves can be enjoyed from the reserve hide; this turtle dove was photographed from that hide (David BurrIDGE)

**Staple Wildlife Friendly Village Project grew from the loss of local habitats. The gradual depletion of wildlife sites has been caused by generations of human impact on the environment, particularly in more recent years with the pressure to build houses.**

Many of us lament this relentless decline and may feel helpless in making a difference. However, each of us can play our part in addressing this loss of habitat.

The project started in 2020 and was inspired by the first Wildlife Friendly Village at Risby in Suffolk. With the guidance of its founder, Sophie Flux, we began to establish the project. A working group was formed and a committee set up to plan a strategy for rewilding parts of the village of Staple in east Kent.

We put a proposal to the parish council to gain recognition within the village. This was well received by the councillors, who provided the initial funding to enable the group to get started.

**A constitution was drawn up with the aims:**

- To identify ways that habitats for wildlife can be improved in the parish of Staple and its immediate surrounds
- To develop and manage designated areas of land for the best interests of wildlife

- To work in conjunction with local organisations that have an interest in wildlife
- To promote wildlife-friendly actions by holding events, talks and writing articles for the parish newsletter to engage with residents and landowners
- To encourage the involvement of the wider community in the need to support wildlife

The first project we undertook was to plant three native trees, four shrubs and wildflower seeds on a piece of land owned by one of our residents. We also looked at public sites within the village confines to see where we could rewild or improve the habitat.

On the recreation ground we extended hedgerows by planting a double row of hedging plants along two boundary lines. We also sowed wildflower seeds on the edge of the car park outside the village hall.

In June 2021 we took part in the Nature Count, which the Church of England was promoting as part of its initiative Caring for God's Acre. We devised a nature trail around the churchyard, selecting key features of the area, including a medieval sundial within the church wall and the head of a



gargoyle found in the stone boundary wall by the lych gate.

We asked visitors to compare a square metre of mown and unmown grass to see how many wildflowers they could count. Not surprisingly, the unmown area held seven to 10 species per square metre whereas the mown area was practically bare of wildflowers.

The plants in this one corner of the churchyard were identified over the course of the Nature Count and a total of 33 species was found. Isn't that an amazing diversity of plants that in turn provide food and habitats for insects! This event was a good public arena for advertising the work of the group and our aims to improve village habitats.

To increase our funding, we applied for the District Council Community Grant. We were successful in receiving most of the amount for which we had bid. This money enabled us to fund bulbs and shrubs to plant in two areas of the churchyard that had been allocated to our project for rewilding. We were then able to buy three native trees to plant on a wide verge to enhance the outlook from residents' homes and provide nectar for insects from the flowering trees.

The project's working parties include bimonthly litter-picks throughout the village, including clearing the footpaths of litter. Litter-picks, bag-holders and hi-vis jackets were donated, so we can equip members with health and safety equipment each time we go out.

We hold wildlife talks to encourage and inform residents of the best ways to support biodiversity. The talks have included the story of Turtle Dove Summerfield, a project supported by the RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) that provides a small nature reserve for this endangered migratory species in the village, where birds come to nest each year. Another talk was about rewilding your garden by setting aside an uncultivated area where creatures can thrive undisturbed.

In celebration of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in 2022, the Staple Wildlife Friendly Village group planted an oak tree overlooking the recreation ground to commemorate Her Majesty's long reign as part of the Queen's Green Canopy project. A plaque was unveiled on the eve of the jubilee celebrations.

Future plans entail working with local farmers to discuss ways in which farming methods can incorporate set-aside to encourage pollinators and provide essential wildlife corridors between fields. We are also arranging a visit to Stodmarsh National Nature Reserve to watch birds, especially wildfowl.

We hope to work with other communities to inspire similar projects in Kent. There are now 64 Wildlife Friendly Communities throughout the country, though currently Staple has the only group in Kent. However, we can all become involved in this important work to make room for nature.

- **If you would like to visit the turtle dove reserve, you can make first contact through the RSPB's Nicole Khan at [nicole.khan@rspb.org.uk](mailto:nicole.khan@rspb.org.uk) ■**

**Do you care about what is happening to our Kent countryside?**

## Trustees needed

By becoming a trustee of CPRE Kent, you will help us to find positive solutions for the issues and threats facing our beautiful Kent countryside.

Your skills and experience could make a real difference.

We are a small but friendly and passionate charity with a unique vision. We are the only charity that aims to protect the wider countryside.

If you think you have got the passion and can bring something to the table, then we would love to hear from you. Call 01233 714540 or email [Vicky.ellis@cprekent.org.uk](mailto:Vicky.ellis@cprekent.org.uk) for an impartial chat.



Free Car Park

# Weald of Kent Ploughing Match




**Saturday 16th September 2023**  
Reed Court Farm, Hunton Road, Chainhurst, Tonbridge, Kent, TN12 9SX

Attractions throughout the day:

- 9 Modern & Vintage Ploughing Classes • Horse Ploughing • Trade Show • Gymkhana/Horse Show • Fun Dog Show • Terrier Racing • Hound Parades • Steam Ploughing • Have-a-Go Dog Agility • Bird of Prey Display • Tossing-the-sheaf Competition • Farmers' Market • Clay Pigeon Shooting

[www.wkpmma.co.uk](http://www.wkpmma.co.uk)



# Campaigns

## How CPRE Kent fights for our rural environment across the county

### Betteshanger Country Park

CPRE Kent has been working with Friends of Betteshanger, the RSPB and Kent Wildlife Trust to protect a rewilded colliery site that is an uplifting example of how nature can recover from the depredations of industry but is now threatened by development.

The former spoil tip of Betteshanger colliery was established as a country park some 20 years ago and now hosts an extraordinary array of wildlife, some of which is nationally rare or in rapid decline.

Water voles, turtle doves, slow worms and lizard orchids are just some of the species to make Betteshanger Country Park their home - sadly, however, in 2019 the site was sold to a company, Quinn Estates, that now wants to build a surfing lagoon and luxury hotel and spa there.

The scheme, if permitted, would destroy priority habitat, wildlife mitigation sites and the second largest colony of lizard orchids in the country. Accordingly, we joined a range of nature conservation charities in opposing the plans.

Despite the obvious need to protect this fantastic site for wildlife and local people alike, there is a risk that either planning permission could be granted or an appeal launched if the scheme is refused by Dover District Council.

That is why we are preparing to use all legal means necessary to defend the country park and its wildlife - which will be costly. We have launched a CrowdJustice appeal and are asking you to help us fight for this special place.

We intend to use raised funds to enlist expert advice and possibly legal representation towards any possible judicial review and help our campaign.

If you can donate, please visit

[www.crowdjustice.com/case/save-betteshanger-wildlife](http://www.crowdjustice.com/case/save-betteshanger-wildlife) or the CPRE Kent website, [cprekent.org.uk](http://cprekent.org.uk)

### Lower Thames Crossing

This beleaguered project has been delayed by two years... should it even be granted planning permission.

With the Planning Inspectorate only having accepted the National Highways application for a Development Consent Order in December, the announcement in March by Mark Harper, Secretary of State for Transport, represents another blow to a project that has struggled to gain traction throughout.

Mr Harper said that the DCO examination would still go ahead but, should the scheme be granted permission, construction would be delayed by two years as it is moved into NH's next five-year phase of roadbuilding.

Alex Hills, chairman of CPRE Kent's Gravesham committee, said: "Spending a lot of money on the LTC DCO when there is a good chance of the project not happening makes no sense. The government should instead press ahead replacing the oldest tunnel at Dartford with a new bridge."

### Swanscombe peninsula

Plans to develop this wildlife-rich peninsula on the Thames estuary for the country's largest theme park have been scaled back drastically. Further, the man charged with getting the London Resort project back on track - former Millenium Dome champion PY Gerbeau - has stepped down as chief executive.

The developer behind the scheme, London Resort Company Holdings (LRCH), said Mr Gerbeau quit after it withdrew its application for a Development Consent Order last year.

That withdrawal came after Natural England designated Swanscombe Marshes as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) - CPRE Kent was among the groups that had campaigned hard for the site's protection.

Another issue for the developer was the government's declaration of Tilbury, across the Thames in Essex, as a freeport, meaning the London Resort transport strategy had to be revamped.

Despite the latest issues in this long-running saga, LRCH is ploughing on with its project, which it is understood will now require less land-take on the peninsula than under the original proposal.

CPRE Kent is one the groups to have put together an alternative vision for Swanscombe that secures the peninsula for its wildlife and the community that has grown around it. To learn more about the vision and how you might be able to help, visit

[www.saveswanscombepeninsula.org.uk](http://www.saveswanscombepeninsula.org.uk) or the CPRE Kent website, [cprekent.org.uk](http://cprekent.org.uk)

### Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill

The Retained EU Law Bill alarms many who fear it could weaken environmental protection previously afforded by EU legislation.

CPRE Kent is one of the groups in Wildlife and Countryside Link - a coalition of 67 organisations supporting our natural environment - highlighting the threat of the Bill.

Ben Rider, of Wildlife and Countryside Link, said:

"The Retained EU Law Bill is a threat to more than 1,700 environmental laws and protections. The Bill could see these all lost by the end of the year, as well as countless other laws covering everything from works rights to health.

"Environmental, social and business groups have united to stop the threats posed by the Bill and are now calling on the House of Lords to stop the threat to environment, democracy and economy that it poses.

"The government must withdraw the Retained EU Law Bill immediately."





Depressing signs at Cleve Hill

- **For more on Otterpool Park, see Around the Districts (Folkestone & Hythe) on page 27.**

**Cleve Hill Solar Park**

Sadly, the environmentally destructive solar park near Faversham - the country's largest - is starting to see preparatory work, the developer having applied for planning permission to use a chunk of land as a marshalling compound for vehicles involved in the scheme.

**Environmental Land Management schemes**

Since the Brexit vote in 2016, farmers have been waiting for clarity over how government payments will replace the funding previously received from Europe.

Recent announcements have revealed some good news: instead of receiving payments simply for owning land, payments will focus on conservation and sustainable management, supporting nature- and climate-friendly farming practices with public money for public benefits.

The new Environmental Land Management system will continue the Countryside Stewardship scheme, which rewards accessibility and organic farming, and bring forward new standards under the Sustainable Farming Incentive for practices such as improving hedgerows, reducing the use of insecticides through integrated pest management and improving food supplies for winter birds.

As the scheme evolves, it will encourage wider-scale landscape projects such as creating and enhancing peatlands and woodlands.

There might be a difficult transition for many farmers, but we welcome the switch in focus to sustainable food production and environmental protection.

**Otterpool Park Garden Town**

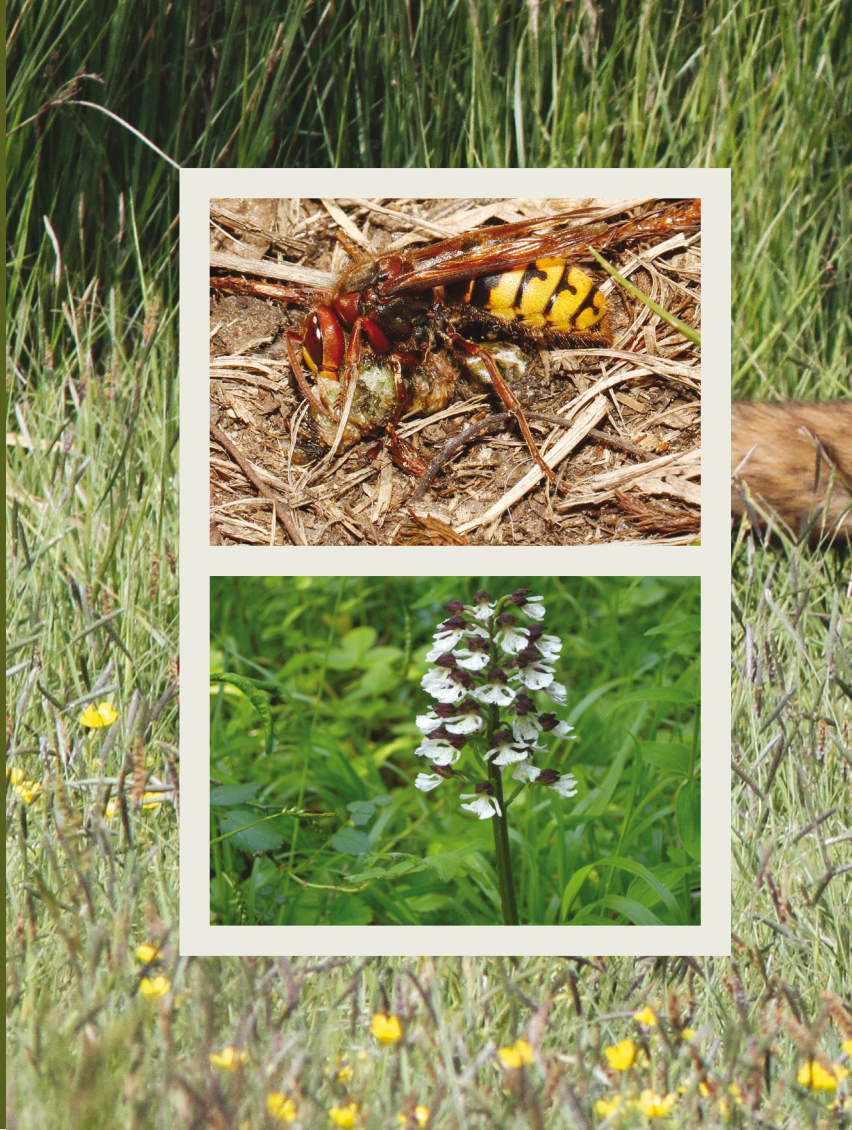
This vast scheme near Hythe (it covers more than 750 hectares) is reportedly due to go before Folkestone & Hythe District Council's planning committee on Tuesday, April 4, for outline approval. Remember, the council owns the land...

CPRE Kent attended a recent briefing at the site at which the scale of the proposed development was all too evident. The impact on the surrounding Kent Downs AONB would be substantial - for example the light pollution from a proposed 17 sports pitches - while such planning details as building three-storey properties on the site's higher ground leaves much to be desired.





# Recording flora and fauna: it's all about protection



However common or scarce you think your observation might be, it can help build a database vital to keeping a place for nature, writes **Vicky Ellis**



**Why bother recording what flora and fauna you find when you are out and about? Well, it is all about protecting what is there.**

When walking or exploring the outdoors, it is important to record what you find with your local biological records centre. In Kent's case this is the Kent & Medway Biological Records Centre (KMBRC). It holds all the county's records for flora and fauna. The date it was found, who found it, where it was found, what sex and how many.

This information is vital for the protection of our countryside because when a developer targets a site the developer's ecologist or ecological consultancy will do something called a desktop survey. This means they will consult their local biological records centre to pull up every wildlife and plant record made within a specified radius.

If no records are flagged up of protected species, or indeed of any species, then this might result in no species-specific survey being carried out. For instance, if no dormice records are flagged, either within the red-line boundary of the development site, or in the near vicinity, the ecologist might decide that no dormouse survey is required as they deem the habitat suboptimal, running the risk of any dormice potentially present on site being dismissed and overlooked altogether.

However, if people have been actively recording their sightings, either of physical dormice, or field signs such as gnawed hazel nuts or nests, then the developer must carry out a dormouse survey.

The same applies for any species, whether it be plants, invertebrates, crustaceans, reptiles, birds or mammals. You





Every wildlife record you make can work for nature (and people!). Clockwise from top left, European hornet, red fox, silver-washed fritillary, viviparous lizard and lady orchid

can record any field sign from their footprints, scats (always fun to ID!), feeding signs, sounds (such as bat calls and birdsong), burrows and nests. You do not necessarily have to see the animal itself. In fact, you are far more likely to be recording field signs than you are the physical animal.

There are many apps to help people identify species, such as iRecord and Merlin Bird ID. Currently, KMBRC only consults with iRecord when collating the data for a desktop survey. Taking a video or photograph helps a specialist to confirm the ID of your sighting, while smartphones record time, date and place the photograph was taken. You will ideally need to make a note of the grid reference, however; some use the what3words app to help pinpoint their position and the KMBRC will even accept postcodes. You can use ID sheets to help you - they can be found

online and bought for a few pounds. These sheets even cover field signs to look out for and pupae of different species. You can download a recording sheet directly from the KMBRC website.

So, this spring, get out into the fresh air and search for the wildlife and plants around you to help protect what is there. Your record, along with your name, could become historical data and held for future generations to use.

- **See our leaflet insert on recording flora and fauna for more information; it is included within this edition. If you would like to stock our leaflets to hand out, please contact the office for more information.**
- **To begin your recording journey, visit the KMBRC website at [www.kmbrc.org.uk](http://www.kmbrc.org.uk)**



# WATER SUPPLY: so many questions but are we asking the right one?

Our region receives less water per capita than Sudan, as this image from Bewl Water suggests

**Hilary Newport** fears that a wide-ranging consultation on how we provide for the future is missing possibly the most critical element of all

**The news over the last few months has been full of reports of raw sewage contaminating our rivers and coastline. It's undoubtedly something that has to be stopped, and quickly - our water environment is too fragile and precious to damage it this way.**

However, over the early months of this year we have been working on the other side of this vitally important coin: the mammoth task of maintaining a supply of water for millions of households and businesses while improving environmental outcomes.

To help with this process, all the English water-supply companies have organised on a regional basis to prepare coordinated forward plans addressing water supply for their future.

Water Resources South East (WRSE) covers our area; it is made up of the six water-supply companies that provide for customers across the region. All water companies are required to consult individually on their Water Resource Management Plans, but this is the first time they have organised on a regional basis at this scale to look at cross-company cooperation and better spatial planning as well.

We fear that the water-supply companies are facing an impossible task, forced to deal with ridiculously high housing targets that are difficult to justify - and particularly so in a densely populated area of the country that receives less water per capita than Sudan.

The measures proposed in the draft WRSE plan include:

- **Leakage reduction:** this is the first and most obvious means of assuring stability of supply and is a part of the forward plans of each of the water-supply companies in the region. However, in too many cases

the investment over the last few years has not kept pace with the deterioration of water mains - particularly in the extreme weather events of last year. Investment in repairing leaks must be increased and accelerated.

- **Demand reduction:** all water-supply companies have measures in place to help customers reduce their water consumption, but these do not go far enough. Smart meters that help consumers manage their use wisely in times of water stress would be an important improvement. Government has a part to play in making sure that building regulations are strengthened rapidly, including demanding rainwater storage in all new-build so we no longer have to use water treated to drinking standards to flush our toilets.
- **Reducing abstraction** to protect the ground sources of chalk streams, which is a welcome step provided the most at-risk catchments are prioritised.
- **A range of transregional transfers**, which would be a step toward delivering a 'national grid' for water but come with increased risks of introducing invasive species and potential for ecological disruption if water from different catchments has differing pH, temperature or mineral composition.
- **Waste-water recycling:** usually considered a sustainable and relatively cheap option, allowing treated wastewater to be discharged for re-abstraction elsewhere followed by treatment to drinking standards. However, customers will need to be reassured that the twice-treated water will be free from residual endocrine-disrupting hormones and dangerous 'forever chemicals'.



More contentious proposals for the region include desalination (very energy-intensive) and - from Thames Water's Management Plan - an above-ground reservoir in Oxfordshire that would have unacceptable impacts on climate, biodiversity and safety. The embodied carbon of its construction, the risk of catastrophic leakage and above all the cost make this our least preferred option of the regional proposals.

Of course, in scrutinising a consultation such as this, it's important to focus on the questions actually being asked: the water companies have a statutory duty to consult on these proposals and they are obliged to factor in the projections for housing growth from the government's Standard Method, which we have long argued is inappropriate in the pressured South East (see article on pages 8-10). An organisation such as ours would be remiss not to make our preferences clear in the face of these consultation questions.

The real question - the one not asked in the consultation - focuses on the challenge of the very high housing targets that the water-supply companies are obliged to factor in to their projections for investment and new infrastructure.

The supporting documentation for the draft WRSE plan includes a table of the annual housing targets for

every local authority within the WRSE members' supply areas. This mammoth task includes a compilation and comparison of 21 different population projections for each local authority in the region, from the lowest (based on population projections from the recent 2018 ONS figures) of 402,000 to the highest (5.12 million over the same 30 years). The latter number is based on the Standard Method for calculating housing need, as laid out in the NPPF, and is based on the government ambition to achieve 300,000 new homes per year.

The WRSE draft plan is based on the second-highest of these projections, aiming to meet the needs of a population increase of 4.5 million people over the 30 years to 2050. This is 10 times greater than the population growth for the region as calculated by the most reliable sources of data.

We believe that such major infrastructure and environmental decisions should not be based on targets that are an aggregate of overestimates across the region; there is a great risk that funding decisions will be based on projections that before long will be accepted as flawed. We are therefore calling for a rethink on the actual number of homes that the South East needs, rather than an inflated projection of demand that holds little relevance to the environmental capacity of the region. ■

# Let June bloom! (and beyond...)



Are you taking part in  
**Let June Bloom?**

**After last year's incredible start, it will soon be time to Let June Bloom again, writes Vicky Ellis.**

CPRE Kent launched this very special campaign in which we asked people to give wildlife a real chance to thrive by not cutting back the plants on which so much of it depends.

Plantlife's No Mow May is fantastic in helping protect our beautiful spring flora, but it's worthy of being taken just that little bit further - and that's where Let June Bloom comes in!

As most of us sadly know all too well, the country's insect population is declining terrifyingly quickly, but Let June Bloom can help give our insects the opportunity to prosper and in turn help our larger fauna.

Many wonderful wildflowers and insects come alive during

June. Plants such as poppy, evening primrose and wild foxglove all bloom in this month, while insects that hatch in June include large white, small white and small blue butterflies.

June also sees the hatching of caterpillars such as copper underwing, garden tiger and gypsy moth, along with insect larvae including sawflies and beetles. Bees such as red-tailed bumblebee and wool carder bee are all very active during this lovely month.

Allowing June to bloom means wildflowers can carry on providing pollen for many insect species, allowing eggs of moths, butterflies and beetles to hatch and feed and so help our insect population thrive. And we all want that!

• **If you would like to take part in this year's Let June Bloom, please contact the office for more information.**

# The RIVER wild

The Stour is a gem for people and nature alike, as **Lauren Baker** of the Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership reveals



Beavers have been back on the Stour for at least 15 years (Lauren Baker)

**Flowing more than 55 miles through the east Kent countryside, the River Stour is not only a stunning watercourse to visit but also home to a fantastic diversity of wildlife.**

The second longest river in Kent - the longest is the Medway - the Stour passes through agricultural land, woods, marshes and reedbeds, as well as sprawling urban areas.

The Great Stour rises as a spring in Lenham and flows to Ashford. It is here the Great Stour is met by the East Stour, which has its source in Postling; the Great Stour continues its way through Wye, Godmersham, Chilham and Chartham to Canterbury. From the historic city it flows out past Fordwich towards Grove Ferry - it is about halfway along this stretch that the river becomes tidal.

At Plucks Gutter the confluence with the Little Stour and the River Wantsum can be found. From this point, the river is referred to as the River Stour, the mouth of which lies in Pegwell Bay, forming part of a National Nature Reserve.

There are some 200 chalk rivers in the world; 85 per cent are in England and the majority of these are in the south of the country. Some of the key characteristics of a chalk river, which can be seen along the course of the Stour, include crystal-clear waters, clean gravel beds, relatively stable temperatures and a consistent flow. It is these features that allow the river to support a fantastic diversity of flora and fauna.

Under the surface of our rivers lives an incredible array of invertebrates that often goes unnoticed, but without these creatures there would be no healthy river ecosystems. From damselfly nymphs to freshwater shrimps, water boatmen to leeches, mayfly nymphs to cased caddis, the range in shapes and sizes these invertebrates take is extraordinary and often unseen unless we're participating in some river-dipping or taking kick samples.

Invertebrates are indicator species and can tell us a lot about the health of our rivers as all are susceptible to pollution, some more than others. By studying which invertebrates are present or absent we can investigate pollution issues such as siltation, low oxygen levels and chemical pollution.

At 10 sites across the Stour catchment, Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership (KSCP) volunteers complete riverfly monitoring surveys. These surveys are completed monthly when possible and allow us to observe the populations of caddisflies, up-wing flies and freshwater shrimps. We follow a survey technique from the Riverfly Partnership, which is replicated at hundreds of sites on watercourses across the UK and supported by the Environment Agency.

Fish kills from pollution are obvious, with fish on the surface gasping for air or dead, but the demise of riverflies would go unnoticed. Without riverflies the river ecosystem would collapse, so monitoring their populations allows us to be proactive in responding to pollution threats. More information on these surveys can be found on the Riverfly Partnership website or by contacting KSCP.

Another species that is an indicator of the health of a river is white-clawed crayfish. Listed as a keystone species for freshwater habitats, it thrives in well oxygenated, clear and clean water and doesn't like fast-flowing water. It also requires a range of refuges (size and type) such as stones, tree roots and burrows to shelter from strong water flows and predators. This makes chalk streams and rivers a particularly good habitat for white-clawed crayfish. Our largest freshwater native crustacean, it is sensitive to pollution and cannot survive with high levels of silt in the flow or deposited around its habitat.

Across the UK, white-clawed crayfish populations are declining rapidly and it is on the IUCN Red List of



**Threatened Species.** This is due to loss of habitat and poor water quality but particularly the impact of the invasive American signal crayfish. The invader is much larger and outcompetes the smaller white-clawed crayfish, also carrying a plague fatal to the white-claweds.

In the upper stretches of the Great Stour catchment we are lucky enough to still have a few separate small but breeding populations of white-clawed crayfish. These are monitored by the Environment Agency and KSCP. We know there are signal crayfish in the Stour catchment, but so far they have been restricted to the lower reaches of the river and nearby lakes.

KSCP and other organisations cannot be complacent when it comes to how fast and far signal crayfish can travel. KSCP formed and leads the East Kent White-Clawed Crayfish Partnership. Work will include supporting landowners to improve habitat for white-clawed crayfish and a breeding programme that can help raise awareness of the species and also supply crayfish for repopulating safe areas. The group will also identify and establish Ark sites - bodies of water that will support white-clawed crayfish and are far enough away and otherwise protected from invasive species.

In summer the air around the Stour is alive with insects, many of which have emerged from the river. Mayflies create dancing clouds above the surface, caddisflies flit from perch to perch and dragonflies and damselflies add a splash of colour as they whizz around.

Among the Odonata is a relative newcomer to the Stour catchment but one that is spreading quickly: the willow emerald damselfly. Before the turn of the century this species had been recorded in the UK on just two occasions. Then one was recorded in south-east Suffolk in 2007, followed by a boom of 400 records in the same general area two years later. Since then, the willow emerald has spread rapidly across south-east England

and is found in the Stour catchment. Just shy of 400 individuals were found in one day near Westbere in August 2019.

With such a rapid spread and natural colonisation, the British Dragonfly Society is keen to further understand and study this species. It developed Willow Emerald Watch, which provides information on how to identify and distinguish the willow emerald from other emerald species as well as how to report sightings.

The Stour catchment is home to three charismatic riparian mammals: water vole, otter and beaver.

Water voles underwent one of the most serious declines of any mammal in Britain in the 20th century. They have been lost from 94 per cent of locations where they were once common and sadly the Stour Valley is one of these areas.

Thankfully, it is not all bad news as KSCP's most recent survey showed population increases at some sites in the Lower Stour Marshes. However, these surveys were carried out over 10 years ago and due to limited funding KSCP has been unable to replicate these surveys. While out on tasks and completing Internal Drainage Board surveys, KSCP staff are always on the lookout for signs and the animals themselves. Some volunteers have been lucky enough to spot water voles over the last few years, including one photographed in the heart of Canterbury in 2022.

The decline in the water vole population can be attributed to habitat loss but also the introduction of the American mink to our watercourses. Many reports of a streamlined mammal swimming in the Stour turn out to be mink, but sightings of otters have been increasing over the last few years. In the late 1950s, otters were close to extinction in Britain but, thanks to a ban on hunting in 1978 and improvements to water quality, numbers have risen again.

Being elusive, largely nocturnal and covering a wide ▶



Water voles have suffered one of the most serious declines of any British mammal (Simon Pettman)



There are small breeding populations of white-clawed crayfish in the upper stretches of the Great Stour catchment (KSCP)



Below: so rarely seen, this otter was captured on a camera trap (Simon Pettman)

range, otters are sighted only occasionally and are still relatively rare, so any information relating to them is important to note. Field signs such as spraint, tracks, slides, rolling patches or feeding activity are just as important to record and help build a picture of the presence of the otter across the Stour Valley. These can be reported to KSCP as well as the Kent & Medway Biological Records Centre. The National Otter Survey is due to be published this year and will provide further information on the species in the county.

Over the last few years, one riparian mammal has had increasing coverage in the Stour Valley as its population has grown: the beaver. Once extinct in Britain, beavers have been back on the Stour for at least 15 years, but it is only in recent times that people have really become aware of their presence here. Surveys commissioned by the East Kent Beaver Advisory Group in 2018 indicate that Kent has the second most widely

distributed population of beavers in England. Further surveys took place in February and March this year and it is hoped we gain a greater understanding of the potential population size of beavers in the Stour Valley and their distribution.

In October 2022, the beaver was listed in Schedule 2 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, making it a protected species, and it an offence to “deliberately capture, injure, kill or disturb beavers or damage and destroy their breeding sites or resting places” without a licence from Natural England.

Beavers are crepuscular, meaning most sightings have been at dawn or dusk, but their activity on the riverbanks is another key indicator of their presence. Field signs such as gnawed branches, felled trees, tracks and feeding stations consisting of piles of debarked branches can be found from Canterbury downstream as well as along the Little Stour. Lodges are also present on the River Stour and there are many in wetland habitats by the Lower Stour. Early this year, a beaver was seen at Conningbrook Lakes on the edge of Ashford - the first recording of a beaver upstream of Canterbury and a significant discovery. Any beaver sightings, as well as information about fresh field signs, can be reported to East Kent Beaver Advisory Group by emailing [beavers@wildlifegateway.org.uk](mailto:beavers@wildlifegateway.org.uk)

This is just a quick overview of some of the wildlife that calls the Stour home; there is of course a much wider diversity of species reliant on the river and its tributaries. A few minutes spent on the riverbank can provide a perfect mindful moment as the water flows past, kingfishers flash by and eels wiggle among the weed.

Unfortunately, however, and like the majority of watercourses in Britain, the health of the Stour is not what it should be. Increasing demand for water, over-abstraction, pollution from wastewater-treatment works and agricultural run-off, siltation and litter are some of the issues faced. Climate change and its effects on rivers is an ongoing issue and one that will develop as long as global warming persists.

The River Stour has precious chalk stream habitat we should treasure and protect to ensure future generations can enjoy its wonder. Let's not let white-clawed crayfish, water voles and other riparian species go extinct in the next few decades - rather, let's strive to have more good-news stories like the recovery of the otter, the reintroduction of the beaver and the discovery of willow emerald damselflies!

- **Lauren Baker works for Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership and has been delivering the Our Stour project for the last five years**
- **To learn more about the Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership, phone 03000 410900 or email [kentishstour@kent.gov.uk](mailto:kentishstour@kent.gov.uk) ■**



Yet more high-quality farmland is destroyed by the inexorable march of housing development

# Build better on brownfield - for wildlife and food security

Environmental campaigner **Lucy Philip** urges us to sign a petition and help push it toward parliamentary debate and potentially new environmental planning law

**More than 60,000 people have signed the national petition to protect nature from the currently uncontrollable over-development by volume builders: Halt harmful housing with new environmental planning law at [www.change.org/HaltHarmfulHousing](http://www.change.org/HaltHarmfulHousing)**

Bad planning policies are pushing us further into terrifying climate-nature crises - we are losing our wildlife and our food security. The building industry is adding heavily to the carbon load, therefore helping overheat our planet and cause extreme and non-cyclical weather patterns.

**We can't save our wildlife if we don't save its habitats.**

But together we can, through this timely petition campaign, demanding strong ecological policy change for planning law in direct line with the Climate Change Act 2008 and the climate emergency declarations of 2019. We need climate planning law.

We must take the power from the hands of the developers - as it stands they can build pretty much what they like, where they like. They prefer greenfield sites to maximise their profits, building over farms and natural habitats at scale - nature is not their concern. All the while they are enabled by inflated housing targets from central government, which seems to say it wants to protect nature but, for financial gain, acts ecocidally against it.

We now need new, strong legislation to make sure nature is fully protected before it declines even further and we lose more species, not to mention the struggling bees we rely on to pollinate our crops. No more volume building on greenfield sites, no more loopholes. Developers must only be allowed to build low-energy homes for communities - not for investment funds.

**We know there is space for 1.32 million homes to be built on suitable brownfield.**

Developers must urgently be legally stopped trashing our countryside, our carbon sinks and our communities. It is a climate emergency, after all!

Please sign the petition and share to all your contacts on email, on social media and in conversation. If it reaches 100,000, we can force a debate in Parliament - and finally turn this nature crisis around.

**Halt harmful housing with new environmental planning law:**

**[www.change.org/HaltHarmfulHousing](http://www.change.org/HaltHarmfulHousing)**

## Summary

Planning policy needs to be in direct line with the Climate Change Act and the climate emergency declarations:

- It must protect nature and existing communities, instead of developers' profits
- It must protect farmland to remain as farmland, with no change of use
- It must protect natural spaces
- It must have a brownfield-first policy
- It must ban volume development
- It must only permit Passivhaus-style (low-energy) houses

## Because....

1. **We cannot save our dwindling wildlife if we don't save its habitat**
2. **We cannot protect our food security if we build over our farms**
3. **We cannot cut carbon by building over our carbon sinks and building energy-heavy houses**



# 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**

- A timetable for a review of the adopted Local Plan will be confirmed once the council has confirmed its response to the nutrient-neutrality issue (poor water quality) at Stodmarsh NNR.

## **Canterbury**

- Regulation 18 consultation (issues and options) took place last summer. A further Regulation 18 consultation took place from October 2022-January 2023.

## **Dartford**

- Stage 2 examination hearings took place from November 8-December 1, 2022. A further hearing session took place on March 9 (gypsies and travellers).

## **Dover**

- Regulation 19 consultation took place from October December 2022. The council's Local Development Scheme indicates the Plan is scheduled for examination towards the end of 2023, with adoption in 2024.

## **Folkestone & Hythe**

- Places and Polices Local Plan was adopted on September 16, 2020. The Core Strategy Review was adopted on March 30, 2022.

## **Gravesham**

- The next round of consultation is awaiting resolution of issues surrounding traffic modelling in connection with the Lower Thames Crossing and is now expected to take place from September-October 2023. Examination is programmed for July 2024, with adoption at the end of that year.

## **Maidstone**

- After receipt of the inspector's interim report, the Plan will move forward to Stage 2 hearings. Hearing dates have been set for three weeks in May and June.

## **Medway**

- Local Plan work is progressing with a recent Call for Sites, with the next round of consultation expected in the summer and autumn of this year.

## **Sevenoaks**

- After the withdrawal of the council's draft Local Plan, a fresh round of Regulation 18 consultation has taken place (November 2022-January 2023). A further round of Regulation 18 consultation is scheduled to take place this autumn.

## **Swale**

- The council has resolved to postpone further consultation until the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill has gained Royal Assent and guidance is published, giving greater certainty in relation to the Local Plan system.

## **Thanet**

- A revised Local Development Scheme was published June 2022. Regulation 18 consultation is now scheduled for September 2023, Regulation 19 September 2024, examination 2025 and adoption 2026.



## Tonbridge and Malling

- A new Local Development Scheme was published in March 2022. Regulation 18 consultation took place from September-November 2022. Regulation 19 consultation is expected to take place from August-October 2023.

## Tunbridge Wells

- After examination hearings, the inspector's initial findings were published in November 2022. The inspector is awaiting further clarification from the council on how it proposes to address a number of issues, including release of Green Belt for a new garden settlement at Tudeley.

District	Plan	Jan-Mar 2023	Apr-Jun 2023	Jul-Sep 2023	Oct-Dec 2023	Jan-Mar 2024	Apr-Jun 2024	Jul-Sep 2024	Notes
Ashford	Local Plan 2040		Consultation	Consultation					Adopted February 2019
Canterbury	Local Plan 2040		Consultation		Examination				Adopted 13.7.17
Dartford	Local Plan 2036	Examination		Adoption					
Dover	Local Plan 2020-2040				Examination			Adoption	
Folkestone & Hythe	Places and Policies Local Plan								Adopted 16.9.20
	Core Strategy Review 2020								Adopted 30.03.22
Gravesham	Core Strategy Review and Allocations DPD 2036				Consultation			Examination	
Maidstone	Local Plan 2022-2037		Examination		Adoption				Adopted 25.10.17
Medway	Local Plan 2019-2037			Consultation					
Sevenoaks	Local Plan 2015- 2035				Consultation	Consultation		Examination	
Swale	Local Plan 2022-2038							Consultation	Adopted 26.7.17
Thanet	Local Plan 2020-2031			Consultation				Consultation	Adopted 9.7.20
Tonbridge & Malling	Local Plan 2031			Consultation			Examination		
Tunbridge Wells	Local Plan 2033		Adoption						

### 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): hearings 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.**

- For guidance on Local Plans, see FAQs at [www.cprekent.org.uk](http://www.cprekent.org.uk)





# 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

- We are preparing for a busy time in the borough, with work on the Local Plan beginning immediately after the elections in May, when a new council leader will be appointed. The Land Mapping Commission work will be an important factor in the new Local Plan, providing protection for the overall rural character of the borough alongside the site allocations for homes.

## Canterbury - Nick Blake

- Our branch has been focusing on what is the worst draft Local Plan (LP) to which Canterbury has been a victim. The Office of National Statistics (ONS) predicts population growth for England up to that date of 6.5 per cent, but using the unexplained government formula the population growth in the LP for the Canterbury district is set at about 40 per cent. For the city itself, it is something like 90 per cent. The LP makes no mention of the impact of this on the setting of the World Heritage Site. Indeed, there is virtually no analysis of the impact on the countryside environs of the city of such huge development. Not a single drawing or photograph is inserted into the LP to explain that damage. An important aspect of any LP, surely, is a visual impact assessment of its proposals. They assert, of course, that all the larger sites are designed with 'garden city principles' and yet Ebenezer Howard's 1899 ideas were never meant to be used for suburban extensions. They were for new free-standing settlements, benefiting from purchase of land at farmland prices. We seem too scared of landowners to employ that principle 125 years later. Again, every site identified by Canterbury City Council for development is described by it as 'sustainable' but with absolutely no reasons given for that status. It is just an ill-applied mantra. Much of the LP, especially its major road schemes, appears to be impractical and shown on plans that are too small in scale for a proper assessment. However, even at that size, they clearly indicate massive blight on the homes of many residents, who of course were not visited or consulted. Sadly, I don't believe the LP is fit for purpose. The last LP at least had public meetings, but this time any exposure of the council to public scrutiny has been very limited. My personal view is that public action should be taken against this Local Plan, with maybe a petition of no confidence in the council. It will be informative to see how other Kent districts have been treated in their draft Plans.

## Dartford and Gravesham - committee

- Earlier in the year, committee chairman Alex Hills supported Client Earth when it lobbied MPs on air pollution. There is increasing recognition of the deadly effects of air pollution by politicians of all parties. We need to keep pressure on our MPs to ensure more progress is made on improving air quality during and after the next election. If people were more aware of the effects of air pollution and how relatively poor our air is in comparison with the rest of Europe, more effort would be placed to fix this problem. The Covid-19 lockdowns showed many people how polluted our air really is.
- The Lower Thames Crossing proposal is now going through the Development Consent Order process. We will continue to work with all our partners to try to stop this insanely costly project that will only increase traffic and not achieve its objectives, including that of relieving congestion at the Dartford Crossing. If the Highways Agency had gone for a new bridge at Dartford in 2012, it would have been built long ago.



- The 'Right to Buy' has led to a chronic shortage of social housing. However, it is important that it is built in the right place. We are fighting a social-housing application in Istead Rise because it is in the wrong place. The Right to Buy legislation makes it difficult to protect social housing for future generations when there is no reciprocal obligation to replace or rebuild social-housing stock.
- We are also fighting fundamentally flawed Housing Needs Assessments that measure desire, not need, and fail to address the needs of residents. It is time the focus is put on building what communities need, not what developers and the government want to build, and then only when it is truly sustainable. Many services in the area are already at breaking point, yet the focus remains on housing targets.

### Dover - Derek Wanstall

- The main issue is still Betteshanger Country Park - if allowed to become a commercial development, much wildlife will be lost. There is already a lagoon complex nearby at Sandwich - why do we need a second? With the mining museum, cycle track and supporting events already established, nature should be protected, not chased away.  
With a 120-bed hotel and water feature, there will be greater pollution and increased numbers of vehicles using the A258 to Deal, through an area already suffering near-constant hold-ups and with a roundabout that is now over capacity at Upper Deal. It has been acknowledged that the close-by village of Sholden has been over-developed, with the county council recognising that increased traffic is causing hold-ups when vehicles try to access outer roads.
- With more developments approved and started, the increase in traffic is changing residents' quality of life. With car-parking in Deal so hard to find, no doubt the town will suffer.
- Dover port seems to be working well, but we never know what changes can come about in the future.

### Folkestone & Hythe - Graham Horner

- We were heartened by the decision to put the ugly Princes Parade project on hold - but saddened by the news that the whole show might be sold to a private developer, and a company with what some have said is a patchy business history. Let's hope for some sense and cancellation of the whole project.
- We understand the same approach, a complete sell-off, might be taken for Otterpool Park Garden Town once outline planning permission has been secured. At the time of writing, the planning committee is reportedly due to consider the application on April 4. The objectives of private developers and district councils are not the same and we worry about the quality of the outcome should the project be 'reprivatised'. On the other hand, ratepayers would doubtless welcome the apparent reduction in financial risk to the council a sale would offer. Either way, Otterpool Park needs some high-quality management to see it through and close attention paid to it by the council as it will represent the main source of new housing in the district for the next 40 years.
- There is a proposal for an 18MW solar array (22ha) next to Stone Street at Pent Farm. It is entirely inside the AONB and in full view from the North Downs Way. We will be objecting because of that. Of course, renewable energy is what we want, but one has to ask what is the point of designating AONB if it's not to protect it from acres of steel structures. A planning application was supposed to be submitted in February, but we haven't seen it yet. The same developer withdrew two solar-array applications in AONB in Tunbridge Wells borough in the face of opposition by CPRE Kent and others.
- Civic societies in the district are coming together to start work on a long-awaited Local List of Heritage Assets. This is something our Historic Buildings Committee has been championing for many years, but councils have not had the resources to progress. And many of them have not been trusting of civic societies to do it the way they want (if indeed they could find time to decide exactly what they did want). Let's hope for some cooperation so the historic buildings we love but that don't make it to the national list are celebrated and protected. Some good work has been done in Sevenoaks and in Thanet on these lists.

### Maidstone - vacant

- Much of the end of last year was spent at examination hearings into the Maidstone Local Plan. These had been significantly delayed because of the late submission of relevant evidence by the council. We have now heard from the inspector that consideration of the Local Plan will move forward to the next round of hearings.  
In moving to the Stage 2 hearings, the district committee is very disappointed that the inspector has decided that the two proposed garden villages at Heathlands (Lenham) and Lidsing (on the Medway border) should remain in the Plan. However, the Leeds/Langley corridor, which was identified as a broad location for the development of some 4,000 homes, has been dismissed from the Plan.  
We continue to be grateful for the support staff at Charing for their advice and assistance with the Local Plan and will be cheering them on at the next round of Local Plan hearing sessions, to be held in May and June.

### Sevenoaks - Nigel Britten

- As reported last autumn, Sevenoaks District Council launched its first Local Plan consultation over the Christmas period and we duly responded. Unlike predecessors, this draft did not include specific proposals for housing sites, probably the most sensitive issue in a Green Belt area. The Plan will focus on using all available brownfield land first, but that might not be enough to meet housing provision as determined centrally by a formula. The government is proposing to scrap compulsory housing targets, so much depends on when this will come into effect and therefore whether the council will have to find sites in the Green Belt.
- Councillors refused permission for plans by the Chevening House Estate that included proposals to screen the property from views of the M25 (though not visible from the house) by building four mounds, one of them 40ft high. The estate appealed. Local people turned out in force at the hearing and many spoke strongly against the proposals, as did CPRE Kent, but sadly the inspector backed the estate's



appeal. So now we can 'look forward to' 150,00 highly polluting HGV deliveries over five or more years to create mounds up to 40ft high, basically of landfill. If only they had planted trees 40 years ago for everyone's benefit instead.

- Converting unwanted farm buildings for other uses can make good sense, most of all for buildings in the vernacular style and still in good condition. But allowing the change of use from agricultural to residential needs careful thought, particularly where several buildings are involved. Domestic use in place of farming activity brings with it a very different look in the countryside: domestic clutter, much coming and going on rural lanes, lighting and noise. It can make for tricky decisions when we are asked for support - or more often the opposite.
- Our committee is still looking for a secretary to relieve our present and very long-serving secretary, Dr Susan Pittman, now 30 years in the job. New committee members are needed more than ever. If you want to help, please email [ncbritten@outlook.com](mailto:ncbritten@outlook.com)

### Swale - Peter Blandon

- For an authority without an 'up-to-date' Local Plan, Swale Borough Council appears incredibly relaxed. As reported last time, the November meeting of the Local Plan development committee was cancelled, then the January one was postponed. There has, however, been a February meeting, meaning that the Plan development committee has met three times in the last eight months. The latest meeting did not discuss the Local Plan as such. Rather, the members discussed the response of Swale to the NPPF consultation as part of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill. In fact, the Local Plan has only been discussed once in public in the past three meetings.
- There has been no real change in Swale except for two items. An application has finally been submitted for what was a 'garden village' proposal in the area around Bobbing to the immediate west of the A249. The area covered by the application is slightly smaller than that originally envisaged and now the development does not, at the moment at any rate, link up to Newington on the A2. There remains a gap between Newington and the proposed new building. Thus, two of the five original garden-village proposals that appeared at the very beginning of this Plan revision are now formal applications. One other proposal is almost certain to appear soon. The idea of garden villages was rejected in the abortive Regulation 19 Plan that appeared suddenly in February 2021.
- The second item is the interesting decision relating to Pond Farm. This is an area of land just west of Newington on the south side of the A2. Gladman put in an application several years ago for up to 330 homes and 60 residential and care "units" and it was refused by Swale Borough Council. At the appeal, CPRE Kent successfully argued against the development on air-quality grounds and the appeal failed. True to form, Gladman put in another application and this has now also been refused by Swale. The grounds for refusal were landscape issues, air quality, the fact the site lay outside the village boundary and it was not allocated in the Local Plan. So, maybe Gladman will appeal again...

### Thanet - Geoff Orton

- Firstly, our best wishes to our doughty chairman (and CPRE Kent trustee) David Morrish, who is seriously ill. He it was who set us up in the slipstream of the Local Plan that awoke us all to the invasion of 12,000 houses on Grade I farmland - since extended to 20,000. We shall be awash with executive homes for non-executive salaries (where actually employed). But fortunately, post-Amersham by-election, Michael Gove (Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) has bethought himself and there are now murmurs of 'bottom-uppery'. We shall see, but thoughts are turning to local party manifestos for May 5th.
- Water is fairly basic - I am told not to expect any desalination plant in Herne Bay much before the 2040s, so Minnis and Pegwell Bays are well over my horizon. There is a difficulty over the toxic residue - Mr Morrish tells me there are massive outcries from anchovy fishermen in Spain, where dumping in the Med has polluted stocks to death. Planet Thanet might have to resign itself to becoming the Great Unwashed?
- Our strategic local planner and the All-Party Climate Emergency Committee are being urged to absorb the implications of the



# Collection boxes

We would like to thank the following businesses for making CPRE Kent collection boxes available to their customers:

- **The Charing Stores**  
4 High Street, Charing  
TN27 0HU
- **Perry Court Farm**  
Canterbury Road, Wye  
TN25 4ES
- **Premier Stores**  
14B Godfrey Gardens  
Chartham CT4 7TT
- **Chilham Farm Shop**  
Canterbury Road  
Chilham CT4 8DX

If you would like to have a collection box on your premises, or know of someone who might, please let us know at [info@cprekent.org.uk](mailto:info@cprekent.org.uk) Otherwise, do please feel free to patronise the above businesses... and you can drop in a few pennies while you're there.



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

recent Environmental Improvement Plan (and the Kent Tree Plan, which rather curiously excludes us despite being up there in the Top 10 'canopy-less' districts, in company with Orkney and Shetland). Which is as good a reason as any to join the growing cohort of councils 'pausing' their LP consultations while Mr Gove consults on the amended NPPF.

- Our long-term empties are up 18 per cent over one year - way above all the adjacent districts (check out the Empty Homes Agency) and in addition our Airbnb growth has been exacerbating local homelessness. Do we actually need infrastructure-poor new estates?
- Manston airport trundles on: at present, objectors are shopping around to find a complaisant High Court judge for a review of the prospects of judicial review. The lawyers must be kept off the breadline - Legal Aid money trees are not what they were!

### Tunbridge Wells - Peter Tavner

- Following the Examination in Public of the Tunbridge Wells Local Plan, the inspector has published his initial findings. He has raised serious concerns about proposals in the draft Plan. The central issue identified is the ability to determine whether exceptional circumstances exist to release sites from the Green Belt, especially given that the two largest allocations - Tudeley village and Paddock Wood - are identified as resulting in 'high' levels of harm to the Green Belt. In response to this specific issue, the borough council has proposed that it undertake a comparative assessment of all reasonable alternatives, with this work having regard to the contribution of individual sites to Green Belt purposes. The inspector has also raised issues concerning the proposal for the new settlement at Tudeley relating to location and accessibility, infrastructure (the proposed Five Oak Green bypass) and deliverability. Overall, the council accepts that further work is required yet remains committed to having an adopted Local Plan in place as soon as practicable. We remain unclear on timescales given the potential scale of this work programme. In the meantime, our committee continues to review planning applications of concern. In particular, the borough faces applications for solar farms. Recent solar applications awaiting a decision include those at Brook Farm, Five Oak Green and Alders Road, Capel, while two others, at Netters Farm, Benenden, and Lower Ellenden Farm, Hawkhurst, were withdrawn.
- The committee remains stretched given the volume of applications and the scrutiny needed for the ongoing Local Plan. If any local CPRE Kent members would like to volunteer and participate, their services would be warmly welcomed.

### Historic Buildings - John Wotton

- The committee met in April, July, October and January. A number of issues were brought to the attention of the committee or discussed by members between meetings during the year. This speaks of an active and engaged committee, which is pleasing to report.
- Members have assisted the branch in responding to consultations on draft Local Plans around the county.
- We have continued to review threats to heritage assets across Kent, commenting ourselves or providing advice and assistance to district committees. We prepared an objection to an application to build five homes at Cellar Hill, Lynsted, which was refused on heritage grounds (among others) and objected to the partial demolition of The Princess Royal in Folkestone. Consideration has been given to objecting to the renewed application for major development at Highsted, CPRE Kent having submitted a comprehensive objection to the previous application. The committee objected to a proposed extension to Brooksdon, High Street, Cranbrook.
- Several members of the committee attended a seminar on Adapting Historic Homes for Energy Efficiency, organised by government.
- We hope that the Gravett Award for Architectural Drawing will again be made this academic year to a student at the Kent School of Architecture and Planning.
- Through the good offices of committee member Susan Pittman, we were able to visit the disused but well-preserved steam engine foundry of Thomas Wood & Sons at Crockenhill. Susan kindly invited those making the visit to coffee beforehand at her home nearby. We were shown around by Edward Wood, the current owner, who is passionate about the history of the business and hopes a way can be found of preserving this remarkable example of Kent's industrial heritage. The collection of foundry machinery, old traction engines and other relics of an earlier age of agriculture was remarkable.
- The newest member of our committee, Paul Townson, who is the owner of Frogmal Farmhouse, a fine listed building near Faversham that he is in the course of restoring, invited the committee to view the work in progress. We duly came in two groups in November and were fascinated by the building and hugely impressed by the quality of the work that Paul and his partner, Mark, are undertaking to restore the building after many years of neglect and unwise alterations. We are very grateful to Paul for providing us with this unique insight into the challenges of this multi-year restoration project.
- A KHBC plaque was presented, for the first time in several years, to Sir Robert Worcester, the owner of Grade I-listed Allington Castle, on the occasion of his hosting a networking dinner there in May for national CPRE, whose trustees were making a visit to Kent.
- Sadly, during 2022, Paul Rowe, a longstanding and highly regarded member of the committee, passed away. Paul practised as a chartered surveyor with a speciality in historic buildings, about which he cared passionately. We shall all miss him.
- Craig Webster resigned from the committee during the year and we are grateful to him for his full reports on heritage issues in Canterbury. We remain in need of new members, especially to cover Ashford, Dartford, Gravesham, Maidstone and Medway.
- I hope that during the coming year we will be able to make a greater impact on the conservation of heritage assets than has been possible in the constrained circumstances of the pandemic years.





Eyes to the skies at Christ Church primary school in Folkestone

# Out and about

One of the highlights of the CPRE year is Star Count, the annual citizen science project in which we are all - expert and novice alike - invited to look to the night sky and count the number of stars we can see within the constellation of Orion.

More than 3,000 people across the country took part, making it the country's biggest citizen science project of its kind. Among them were a group at Monkton Nature Reserve who were taking part in a joint event between CPRE Kent and our friends at Thanet Countryside Trust.

There was a handsome turnout and along with the chance to enjoy friendly company we could all tuck into lashings of leek and potato soup with rolls. Glorious!

Along the coast at Folkestone, teacher and CPRE Kent supporter Catherine Avery organised a Star Count event at Christ Church primary school for pupils and parents. Again, a good number showed to make it an evening to remember... hopefully, all enjoyed it and we'll have Star Counters in the area for many years to come.

Aside from sharing the wonders of a night sky, there is a practical element to Star Count in that it helps measure levels of light pollution.

CPRE is calling for stronger planning policy to combat that light pollution. With the National Planning Policy Framework under review, we are fighting for stronger policies in Local Plans to ensure dark skies are protected.

• To learn more about Star Count and light pollution, visit [www.cprekent.org.uk](http://www.cprekent.org.uk) and search the relevant terms

## Events 2023

Where we've been... and where we're going to be

Farm Expo, Detling  
Wednesday, March 1

Living Land, Detling  
Thursday, May 4

Kent Garden Show, Detling  
Saturday-Monday, May 27-29

Kent County Show, Detling  
Friday-Sunday, July 7-9

WKPM, New Barn Farm, Hawkenbury  
Saturday, September 16

EKPM, Little Mongeham  
Wednesday, September 27

Green Christmas Fair, Faversham  
Date to be confirmed

Christmas lunch  
Date to be confirmed

## Help protect the future of Kent's countryside with a legacy gift

By remembering CPRE Kent when considering your will, you can help ensure we will be here protecting the Kent countryside well into the future.

If you are thinking of having a will written, or have an existing will, please think about leaving a gift, no matter how small, to CPRE Kent.

To find out more, contact Vicky Ellis 01233 714540 [vicky.ellis@cprekent.org.uk](mailto:vicky.ellis@cprekent.org.uk)



# 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 light pollution 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.

Let us know it is a gift and we will send a card and small present to make it special.

You can write to us at:

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

email [info@cprekent.org.uk](mailto:info@cprekent.org.uk);

or phone us on 01233 714540.



## Buy from us

### Insect hotels, bird boxes and welly-boot planters!

Bring the countryside into your garden and help raise funds for CPRE Kent by buying some of our nature-friendly merchandise.

Each item is priced at just £10.

All are available by emailing [info@cprekent.org.uk](mailto:info@cprekent.org.uk) or by calling Vicky on 01233 714540.

## Lottery results



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

### October 22

Ms V Lawrence £50  
Mr M Loveday £30  
Mrs M Whitebread £20  
Mr E Sweeny £10

### November 22

Mr M Loveday £50  
Mr P Whitestone £30  
Miss H Butcher £20  
Mr & Mrs Bartley £10

### December 22

Mr L Wallace £150  
Mr C Catt £100  
Mr M Loveday £50  
Mr J Gandon £50

### January 23

Mr J Gandon £50  
Mr M Loveday £30  
Mrs P Pollock £20

### February 23

Mr S Winn  
Mr R Stickland  
Mr M Loveday

### March 23

Mr M Loveday £50  
Ms J Kostelnyk £30  
Ms J Barton £20

CPRE Kent (the Kent Branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England) is a company limited by guarantee registered in England, number 4335730, registered charity number 1092012.

### CPRE Kent,

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

T: 01233 714540 E: [info@cprekent.org.uk](mailto:info@cprekent.org.uk)



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[www.oakcreative.co.uk](http://www.oakcreative.co.uk)



The countryside you cherish is disappearing fast as greenfield land is swallowed up

Noise and light pollution are destroying the tranquillity of our countryside. Our village and rural communities are under threat. We are fighting for a beautiful and thriving countryside that all of us can enjoy for generations to come.



The countryside charity  
Kent

Please join us to help protect the countryside we all love  
CPRE membership starts at just £5 per month

Title	Full name		
Address			
			Postcode
Telephone	Email		

We would like to update you on our campaigns and fundraising from time to time. Please tick here if you are happy for us to contact you by:

Phone <input type="checkbox"/>	Email <input type="checkbox"/>	Post <input type="checkbox"/>
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If you would like your partner and/or family to also enjoy CPRE membership, please add their details:

Title	Full name

Direct debit is the easiest way to pay and helps us plan our work.

I wish to give the monthly amount of £5  £10  I'd rather pay £  per month/year (delete as appropriate)

If a UK taxpayer, please complete the Gift Aid form below.

Boost your donation by 25p for every £1 you donate. Simply tick the box below and complete the declaration below. Thank you!

*giftaid it*

Please treat as Gift Aid all donations and subscriptions I make from the date of this declaration until I notify you otherwise. I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

If your circumstances change, or you want to cancel your declaration, please contact us on 01233 714540

Full name	
Signature	
Date	

**Instruction to your bank or building society to pay by Direct Debit**

Name of your bank or building society

To: The Manager	Bank/building society name

Name(s) of account holder(s)

--

Bank/building society account number

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Branch sort code

--	--	--	--	--

Service user number

7	2	4	2	4	5
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Reference (for office use only)

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Instruction to your bank or building society

Please pay CPRE Direct Debits from the account detailed in this Instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this Instruction may remain with CPRE and, if so, details will be passed electronically to my bank/building society.

Signature(s)
Date

Banks and building societies may not accept Direct Debit Instructions for some types of account.

