

# SOMERSET VOICE



Campaign to Protect  
Rural England  
Standing up for your countryside

The newsletter of the **SOMERSET BRANCH** of  
the Campaign to Protect Rural England

SPRING/SUMMER 2018

## PLANNING FOR PEOPLE



*188 new homes are being built on the site of the former  
Thales defence factory in Wells*

Love it or loathe it, the planning system affects all of us. The Government is currently reviewing the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), and all CPRE branches are having a say in the consultation as it will have a significant bearing on our countryside and communities for many years to come.

It is vital that the system is made fairer. Here in Somerset, we have seen cases where housebuilders are able to wriggle out of their responsibilities by claiming that they can't afford to build the number of affordable homes which they originally promised.

Last autumn, Taunton Deane Borough Council allowed 1600 new homes in Staplegrove. Shockingly, only 15% of these will be affordable, as the developers say that the 25% required of them by the Local Plan would not be viable, i.e. they would not make enough profit. That is a huge loss of affordable homes - and Taunton is supposed to be a model of good practice as a garden town. Loopholes like this result in large scale estates of market housing so the "haves" end up with a nice choice of houses to buy but the "have nots" who need affordable homes to rent are excluded. Meanwhile, developers profits rise and our green fields continue to be dug up.

Even in a rural county like Somerset, there is huge potential to make more of our brownfield land. There are 247 hectares of brownfield land available here, according to District Council Brownfield Registers; that could be enough for almost 6000 homes. The Government needs to improve incentives for developers so that all new-builds are on brownfield where possible. Meanwhile, Government statistics show that there are around 7000 vacant properties in Somerset.

***Surely our green fields should be a last resort, not the first choice?***

### CPRE's Vision for a Fairer Planning System

We believe it is possible to build the homes we need without destroying our much-loved countryside. Genuinely sustainable development is possible if local people have a voice in a strong planning system that:

- Respects neighbourhood and local plans.
- Ensures development is based on genuine need not market demand.
- Delivers more affordable homes by closing legal loopholes that put developer profits first.
- Adopts a true 'brownfield first' approach
- Protects our countryside for future generations

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# PLANNING UPDATE

## Mendip

Our Mendip District Group kicked off the year with a meeting to look at the Mendip Local Plan Part 2. This small group of volunteers, guided by Liz Payne, our Planner, painstakingly leafed through the whole plan which sets out housing allocations in Mendip's villages and towns as well as Local Green Spaces. Having the input of CPRE members like this strengthens our understanding of local issues and enabled Liz to submit a detailed and thorough response to the consultation. The Local Plan Part 2, when adopted, will steer future development across Mendip until 2029.

We continue to work closely with staff of the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Unit, particularly on planning cases affecting the AONB and its setting.



We have put in a strong objection to an application for 96 dwellings on a sloping field known as Cuckoo Hill in Frome. The area has a history of flooding, there are problems with access and the site is a long way from any services or amenities. More than anything, we feel it is unnecessary to allow this attractive field on the edge of town to be built on while Mendip district already has a good supply of housing land available elsewhere.

We have also objected to a proposed car showroom in Beckington as the proposed scale and type of development is totally inappropriate to this rural setting.

We expressed grave concerns over a proposed "glamping" development at Sharpham which would have, in our opinion, had an adverse impact on the open landscape, wildlife value and tranquillity of the Somerset Levels. The application has been withdrawn.



Plans have been submitted for an M&S Food Store in Street, on the site of Oaklands Nursery on a large roundabout. We feel that the current nursery use of this site in the open countryside between Street and Glastonbury has relatively low visual impact and there is still a sense of openness which would be lost with the introduction of a large single building and extensive parking area. The proposed food store has no links whatsoever to the town centre and encourages car dependent, out of town shopping.

We are concerned about ambitions to build a new road to the north of Glastonbury Tor to allievate congestion in the town centre. It is very early days and it may never come to fruition but we are alarmed at the potential landscape impacts such a project could have on this treasured landmark and its setting and will keep an eye on any developments.

Despite our best efforts and the hard work of local campaigners, plans to create three large tips for quarry spoil at Moons Hill on the ridge of the Mendips were recently approved.

## Sedgemoor

We spoke out against an application for change of use of a redundant quarry in Cheddar Gorge. The proposal was to place 21 log cabins and a site manager's cabin in Chelms Combe Quarry, Tuttors Hill. We were concerned about impacts on the landscape and on the tranquillity of this area. The application has since been withdrawn.

An extension to Callow Rock quarry, near Cheddar, was recently approved by Somerset County Council's Regulation Committee. This will extend the life of the quarry by another 25 years. Alongside the Mendip Hills AONB Unit and the Mendip Society, we had spoken out against this extension due to the impact on the landscape and the effect of quarry traffic on inadequate local roads.

# PLANNING UPDATE

## South Somerset

In January, we submitted our comments on the South Somerset District Council (SSDC) Local Plan Review. We urged SSDC to be firmer when facing planning applications for housing in villages and market towns as many of these are suffering from excessive housing development whilst planned extensions to larger towns are not being taken forward. SSDC still cannot demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply which makes it harder to refuse inappropriate housing applications - but not impossible.

Something which seemed to take everyone by surprise was the inclusion of a proposal for a new garden town comprising 15,000 new dwellings, employment land and a new university at Sparkford. We were contacted by several local people and Parish Councils who were astonished that this idea could just pop up out of the blue and was being accepted as a serious proposition by being included in the Local Plan Review. Our response is that this location is totally unsuitable for a development of this size as sustainable transport links are virtually non-existent, the likelihood of funding a new university in this area is very low, the promise of new high tech jobs is unsubstantiated and such a settlement would cause irreparable damage to the Sparkford Vale.

We were pleased that an application for up to 130 homes in Henstridge was refused. This large housing estate would have been totally out of scale with the size of the village and its location on the edge of the village would have led to increased car-dependency. However, Gladman Homes have recently submitted an appeal so we will be working with local people to do our best to defeat this proposal again.

Another success, after a fight of almost two years by CPRE volunteers, was the refusal at appeal of a housing development in Lovington. The application was for 6 dwellings with land for up to 4 affordable dwellings in open countryside at the entrance to the village. The Inspector found that the proposal would fail to reinforce local distinctiveness, fail to respect local context and would be harmful to the character of the surrounding area as well as the wider landscape.

We objected to an appeal to allow a 900 vehicle storage facility at Dimmer Lane, near Castle Cary. This development would have seen at least 6 car transporters move in and out of the site every day, on narrow, unsuitable roads. The appeal was recently dismissed by the Inspector.

## Taunton Deane

In February, we submitted our response to the Highway's England revised consultation on the A358 improvements, east of Taunton. This time there were three routes to choose from, rather than the single option put forward in the 2017 consultation. Of the three, the "pink route" appeared to be the least disruptive and visually damaging to the countryside and the surrounding villages although still having a significant adverse impact. Needless to say, the pink route is the most expensive! We repeated CPRE evidence which clearly shows that new roads are not the answer as they only generate more traffic in the long run. We are also supporting Taunton Area Cycling Campaign who are calling for a new cyclepath to be provided if this upgrade goes ahead.

We objected to a scheme for 95 dwellings in Wiveliscombe. The estate would extend into open countryside outside settlement limits, was out of scale with the size of the Wiveliscombe and was not an allocated site. The application was refused in March.



After lying derelict for 10 years, the large brownfield site at Firepool, Taunton was recently given the go ahead for a multi million pound development.

We hope to see a quality, well-designed development that enhances what Taunton already has to offer.

## West Somerset

We are in contact with Exmoor Young Voices, a project that addresses problems like employment, transport and housing facing young people in Exmoor. We hope to be able to work together in future as we share many similar concerns.

Planning issues in West Somerset have included an application for a replacement, much taller mobile phone mast in a visually sensitive area of the National Park and an application for a pop up cafe including yurt, trailers and a new track in Crowcombe.

# THANK YOU FOR YOUR AMAZING GENEROSITY

Just before Christmas, we wrote to all our members asking if they could donate to our Save Our Somerset countryside appeal. Our members already support us through their subscriptions but we felt we needed to ask for just a little bit more at this time. Donations to the appeal will help us retain our professional planning help so that we can more effectively stand up for Somerset's countryside.

Well, we have been **genuinely amazed** by the huge generosity and loyalty of our members! We have had donations from over 50 members so far, **totalling over £2,750**, including Gift Aid! This is far more than we had hoped for so thank you very much indeed.

If you would like to add to this total, please send us a cheque payable to "CPRE Somerset" and include a signed Gift Aid declaration if you can.

## More Fundraising News

Many thanks to the people of Henstridge, South Somerset, who attended the Lent Lunch organised by CPRE member Patricia Thompson which raised £100 for CPRE Somerset. We were nominated as the beneficiary charity for this year's lunch as we had recently helped to fight off the threat of a large housing development in the village.

The recent trips we have organised to Porlock Bay Oysters and to Cheddar Ales have helped to raise some funds for CPRE Somerset as we include a small donation in the cost of tickets. Fundraising can be fun!



Have you signed up to **Easyfundraising** yet? It costs you absolutely nothing as the donations come from the retailer when you shop online and is really easy to set up at [www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/cpresomerset](http://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/cpresomerset) That one extra click from you could add up to a real difference to us.

Finally, please remember us in your will. You just need our address and our registered charity number: 1100860 - your solicitor can take care of the rest. Thank you.

# PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION



CPRE Somerset is 50 years old this year - we were first established as a group in our own right in spring 1968. To celebrate this, we are launching a new photography competition with the theme of **Somerset's Changing Landscape**. We are proud to have the Somerset County Gazette as our partners and we will be working with them in the next few months to publicise the competition and ensure we get a good range of entries. We will launch the competition to coincide with Somerset Day on 11th May. We hope to exhibit the best 50 entries in September and will announce the winner at our AGM. First prize is £100.

We really want to see some interesting and thought provoking entries, especially photos of people enjoying the countryside, people working the land or just showing what makes Somerset special to them.

Competition entry is **FREE** and you may enter up to 3 photographs with the theme of "**Somerset's Changing Landscape**". Closing date is midnight on 31st July.

To submit each photograph, please email them as attachments to [admin@cpresomerset.org.uk](mailto:admin@cpresomerset.org.uk) with the following information:

- Photographer's name
- Address
- Email address and telephone number
- Location of photo
- Date photo taken
- Name of photograph/caption (max 20 words)

Full terms and conditions are on our website.

# SOMERSET'S BEST VILLAGE SHOP



*Cattistock Stores, Dorset's Best Village Shop 2017  
Photo: Rupert Hardy, CPRE Dorset*

CPRE Somerset is delighted to be sponsoring a new award for the Best Somerset Village Shop. We want rural Somerset to be a great place to live and work, with thriving villages and good local amenities. We hope that this new Award will encourage people to appreciate the value of our village shops and to support them whenever they can.

The competition from supermarkets is tough, with chains now operating smaller "local" stores and offering home deliveries, so many village shops are struggling to survive. Our new Somerset's Best Village Shop Award will champion those outstanding shops in Somerset that really make a difference to their communities and we will show others what can be done. We will be looking for rural shops that:

- Offer great customer service
- Act as a community hub
- Go that little bit further with the products and services they offer
- Promote local produce
- Have an attractive display

Our Award is a new sub category in Somerset Live's Village of the Year Award which is sponsored by Magna Housing, TrueSpeed Broadband and has Somerset Wildlife Trust as its Charity Partner. There is a prize of £100 for the winner and £50 for the runner up. Nominations must come from shop customers or members of the local community. To nominate your local shop, look for the entry form in various local newspapers - Wells Journal, Shepton Mallet Journal, Cheddar Valley Gazette, Central Somerset Gazette, Frome Standard, Somerset Guardian and Western Gazette or online at [www.somersetlive.co.uk](http://www.somersetlive.co.uk) Closing date is 14th June 2018.

## EVENTS

In March, CPRE members and friends enjoyed a fascinating day with Roger Hall from Porlock Bay Oysters. We had a talk in the village hall, followed by lunch complete with oyster tasting - as you can see, there were no leftovers! Then it was time to put our wellies on for our carefully timed visit to the oyster beds at low tide.



Porlock Bay Oysters is the first Pacific Oyster site in England & Wales to achieve the top A classification for water quality from the Food Standards Agency. The project has taken years of careful planning with tremendous start up support from the local community. All profits made will be used for the benefit of the community of Porlock. Porlock Bay Oysters have now started supplying local restaurants and food outlets and are already employing seven part time staff.

With snow still on the Exmoor hills, it was certainly bracing but it was a thoroughly enjoyable day. Thank you to Roger and to all who came along.

At the time of writing, we are just taking final bookings for our tour of Cheddar Ales Brewery in the company of the Head Brewer. The event is on 3rd May so by the time you read this, we will have tasted the ales on offer and enjoyed our fish and chips! Look out for a report on our website and in the next newsletter.

If you have any suggestions for future trips and tours which we could organise for members and friends, do get in touch. Outings like this help us to stay in touch with our members and help to raise funds for our branch - and they are great fun too!

# BRANCH NEWS

## Green Scythe Fair - Sunday 10th June

Look out for CPRE Somerset volunteers and our bright green gazebo at the Green Scythe Fair, Thorney Lakes, Muchelney. We always have a busy and enjoyable time at this event and enjoy meeting CPRE members old and new. If you want free entry to the fair, why not volunteer to help run the stand for a couple of hours, then the rest of the day is yours to look around. We always need willing helpers who are happy to chat to the public and you really don't have to be an expert! Please get in touch if you can help.

## Keeping in Contact

As part of the CPRE national network and as a registered charity in our own right, CPRE Somerset takes your privacy very seriously. With the new General Data Protection Regulations becoming law on 25th May, we have been taking a close look at how we handle and store the data of our members. Please be assured that we never share your data with anyone and we will only continue to contact you by email if you have given your consent to let us do so.

## Volunteer News

We are very pleased to welcome long term CPRE member Stuart Eyles as a new Trustee. Stuart has recently retired after a career in the Royal Navy and the defence industry. He has a wide experience of project and business management plus a love of the countryside, having grown up in rural Devon and lived in Somerset for 28 years. Stuart is monitoring planning cases in Mendip district.

Fletcher Robinson, our South Somerset Trustee and Planning Volunteer, is now monitoring weekly planning lists for the whole of South Somerset, which is no mean feat - thank you Fletcher!

We have room for two more Trustees so do get in touch if you would like to get involved in planning the future of your CPRE branch.



*We will be at the Green Scythe Fair on 10th June - come rain or shine!*

## Who We Are

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### Branch Executive Committee & Trustees

<b>John Roberts</b>	<b>Hon. Treasurer &amp; Company Secretary</b>
<b>Chris Lewis</b>	<b>Branch Chair &amp; Mendip</b>
<b>Stuart Eyles</b>	<b>Mendip</b>
<b>David Lloyd</b>	<b>Taunton Deane</b>
<b>Cathy Nicholls</b>	<b>West Somerset</b>
<b>Don Parkinson</b>	<b>Taunton Deane</b>
<b>Fletcher Robinson</b>	<b>South Somerset</b>
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*This newsletter is published twice a year by CPRE Somerset and is sent free to all members of CPRE Somerset Branch. The branch currently has around 750 members. If you would like to submit an article or letter for possible inclusion in the next issue, please send it to Becky Collier, Branch Manager. Contributors are responsible for their own views.*



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