

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

AUTUMN/WINTER 2018



THE RIGHT HOMES IN THE RIGHT PLACE

The consensus of all the speakers was that we all want to protect the countryside and enhance it, yet we must accept that more houses are needed. The only solution is to promote the right kind of development in the places where it is needed most. Lack of affordable housing is seen as an urban issue but it is having a very real impact on our villages too, particularly as rural wages tend to be low.

Chris Lewis, CPRE Somerset Chair said "Across Somerset, we are regularly faced with planning applications for large housing estates stuck on the edge of villages, often largely executive style homes, most of which are too expensive for local people to afford. At this event, we wanted to show how rural communities can help themselves by finding innovative ways to provide good quality, affordable housing for local people. Only in this way will our villages be able to thrive and support valued services like shops and schools."

Minutes of the official 2018 AGM proceedings and copies of the slides used by the speakers are available on request.

Without affordable housing our villages will die

This was the message heard by over 70 people at our AGM held at Glastonbury Town Hall in October.

Our audience was made up of CPRE Somerset members along with many representatives from Parish Councils and also staff from Housing Associations and Local Authorities. Our speakers were Shaun Spiers, Chief Executive of the Green Alliance, Tim Crabtree of Wessex Community Assets, Lois Lane of CPRE, Jane Birch of the Community Council for Somerset and William Habershon, a local developer.

Did You Know?

In 2017 there were 17,332 households on local authority waiting lists in Somerset but only 260 new homes for social rent were built. At that build rate, it would take 66 years to meet the backlog. What this country used to spend building council houses, it now spends on housing benefit, subsidising rent paid to private landlords.

CPRE is campaigning hard to get rural affordable housing higher up the political agenda and to ensure that rural Councils are among those able to borrow money to build more social housing.

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PLANNING UPDATE

Mendip

Mendip District Council staff have now logged all the comments on the Local Plan Part 2 and are preparing their responses. There is encouraging news from Frome that peoples' concerns are being listened to. A field on the edge of Frome, known as Cuckoo Hill, was allocated for housing land in the draft Local Plan and local residents spent much of this year fighting a proposal for 96 homes to be built there. This application has now been withdrawn but there was the worry that another application was inevitable. However, it appears that Mendip DC are now recommending that Cuckoo Hill is removed from the allocation for housing as there are questions over the environmental sensitivity of the location. This will be discussed by full Council in December.

Waste of Space - but not for much longer.....?



Part of the derelict Saxonvale site in Frome

Mendip DC has bought some of the derelict Saxonvale site in the heart of Frome and will be working with a property development company to try to regenerate the site. The plan is to deliver a high quality commercial and urban living development, which will provide a mix of uses, and accommodation. The site has lain unused for over 20 years since light engineering works closed down but it has proved difficult to regenerate due to it having multiple ownership. Frome has an allocation of a further 2000 homes so the pressure is on surrounding greenfield land unless work at Saxonvale moves forward. We welcome this positive progress and look forward to getting involved and trying to ensure the development is as sustainable and attractive as possible.

The application for an M&S Food Store in Street, on the site of Oaklands Nursery has been withdrawn. This scheme would have encouraged car dependent, out of town shopping and we are pleased to see it is not being pursued at the present time.

A proposed car showroom in Beckington was refused. We had argued that the scale and nature of the development was inappropriate to this rural setting.

We attended an appeal by Redrow Homes regarding a plan for 19 homes plus 8 affordable homes in Beckington on a site not allocated for development. The developers argued that Mendip did not have an adequate supply of new houses coming on stream to meet its target. If this scheme had been allowed there could have been far reaching consequences for other villages across Mendip. However, the Inspector dismissed this argument and the appeal was refused.

Sedgemoor

We have submitted detailed comments on the Proposed Main Modifications to the Sedgemoor Local Plan. There is a worrying weakening of the language in their policies regarding development in rural areas, which they attribute as a response to the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). For instance, the policy that used to read "*Development in the countryside will be strictly controlled*" now says it "*will be appropriately controlled*". Another policy says Sedgemoor will now "*encourage*" rather than "*prioritise*" use of previously developed land.

We submitted a detailed objection to proposals for 145 dwellings in the village of Woolavington. The Sedgemoor Local Plan does allocate up to 150 homes to Woolavington during the life of the plan but we find it totally inappropriate that this huge number of new homes should be built in one go in one estate on the edge of the village. The scale of this development will make it impossible for it to be integrated with the character and identity of the village. Furthermore, large housing developments should have at least 40% affordable homes to fit with the Sedgemoor Local Plan yet only 30% of the units in this scheme would be affordable units and none of these would be available for social rent. This is a major application on greenfield land and we cannot see any reason why the developers should be able to reduce these figures below the expected levels. There are also potential adverse landscape impacts as the site will be visible from Glastonbury Tor and the Polden Ridge. The application is still under consideration.

PLANNING UPDATE

South Somerset

In our last issue, we said we were pleased that an application for up to 130 homes in Henstridge was refused. As expected, Gladman Homes have since submitted an appeal which was heard in September and has, unfortunately, just been allowed by the Inspector. His main reason for allowing this development appears to be the fact that South Somerset District Council (SSDC) cannot demonstrate that it has a 5 year housing land supply, so many of its housing policies are rendered "out of date" and can be overruled. A large housing estate will now be built in Henstridge which is totally out of scale with the size of the village. Its location on the edge of the village will lead to increased car-dependency in an area where there are places with no footway for pedestrians. The local community were strongly against this proposal and so were SSDC but the decision has been taken out of their hands.

This is very sad for Henstridge and is a perfect example of how overly-high housing numbers in the Local Plan are directly leading to actual harm to the character of our villages. CPRE volunteers spoke up against these housing numbers at the time the Local Plan was written but our voices were not heard. Interestingly, CPRE Devon has recently launched a report which challenges the housing numbers in Devon. An independent study has shown that an average of 4,300 dwellings per year are actually needed across Devon rather than the 5,800 demanded by the relevant Local Plans covering the county. It would be fascinating to see what housing numbers in Somerset are actually needed, compared with those imposed on us by Government targets.



Another housing scheme which has reappeared after initial refusal is a proposal for 24 dwellings near the Fox & Hounds pub in Charlton Adam. At the same time there is another application for a further 12 houses elsewhere in the village.

The Save The Charltons group feel their village is being targeted by developers and are working hard to present strong evidence as to why these schemes should not be allowed to go ahead. We are working with them and have submitted a robust objection saying the revised scheme still poses the same threats to village character as the previous one.

Taunton Deane

Gladman Homes submitted an appeal against the refusal by Taunton Deane Borough Council (TDBC) to allow 95 dwellings in Wiveliscombe. The large estate would have extended into open countryside outside settlement limits and was not an allocated site so we objected. Happily, the appeal has been withdrawn.

In May, we objected to an outline application for up to 180 dwellings with public open space at Cheddon Road, Taunton. Yet again, this was Gladman Homes, applying for a large scale development on land not allocated in the Local Plan. In our view, this would be an unacceptable intrusion of development into open countryside which is of local landscape and environmental value.



Taunton's cyclists launching their campaign for better routes

We are big fans of Taunton Area Cycling Campaign, a voluntary group who are asking their Local Authorities to support a bid for £10 million so that the cycling network in the Taunton area can be transformed. As a Garden Town, Taunton should be leading the way in providing sustainable travel options and green corridors so we are backing their campaign for safer cycle routes. If you agree, visit their website <https://thetacc.org.uk/> and sign the petition.

West Somerset

A large mobile phone mast at Warren Farm in Exmoor National Park has been allowed, despite many objections, including our own.

We attended a public exhibition of plans for a 135 acre solar farm, between Washford and Watchet. There is much public opposition to this scheme due its sheer size and the loss of such a large area of farmland. There is also concern that it will be visible from the Quantock Hills and Exmoor National Park. So far, no application has been submitted.

LANDSCAPE PAINTING AWARD

We are proud to sponsor a prize for best landscape painting in the Bruton Art Society summer exhibition. This year's winning painting is "Nunney IV" by Pauline Bullard MA, who lives in Nunney and is passionate in her support of the castle's preservation.



Restoring our Historic Signposts

Thanks to the Hinkley Point C Community Fund, we can now offer grants to Parish Councils within 10 miles of Hinkley C who wish to restore their historic fingerposts.



Somerset was one of just four counties that did not remove their old fingerpost signs in the 1960s. Sadly, many of these popular features are now deteriorating as Somerset County Council no longer has the funds to repair them.

We have contacted all Parish Councils in the project area directly to invite expressions of interest and we look forward to seeing some great results over the next two years. Advice and support is available on how to carry out surveys and assess what works are needed - and volunteers can attend free workshops on Highway Safety Awareness, run by Somerset County Council. Parish Councils will be need to match fund any grant we offer. If the project is a success, we hope to apply for other funding to be able to help Parish Councils elsewhere in Somerset.



These pictures from Cheddon Fitzpaine Parish Council show what a difference people can make!

PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION



The ghost of an oak tree stands sentinel on former farmland now Porlock Marsh - Sue Locke's winning entry

We had some wonderful and very varied entries to our photography competition celebrating Somerset's Changing landscapes. Our trio of judges - made up of our Chairman, Chris Lewis, professional photographer Kit Houghton and County Gazette Editor, Paul Jones - all gave points to their favourites. The overall winner, who receives a prize of £100 is Sue Locke, for her striking image of Porlock marsh - above.

Meanwhile, readers of the County Gazette voted for their own favourite in September and the clear winner was Quantocks Sunset by Shannon Warner - she receives a prize of £50 from the County Gazette.



Quantocks Sunset by Shannon Warner - winner of the County Gazette readers' vote

Many congratulations to Sue and Shannon and thanks to everyone who entered our competition. You can see the best of the other entries on our website.

VILLAGE SHOP OF THE YEAR 2018



Staff and volunteers from Spaxton Community Stores receiving their prize from Becky Collier, CPRE Somerset at the awards evening in October.

Judging for our new award for the Best Somerset Village Shop took place in September. We visited three shops along with Tim Lethaby, Editor of the Western Gazette, Mid Somerset Series, Frome Standard and Somerset Guardian, and Neil Bliss from Magna Housing, who are the main sponsor of the Village of the Year Awards. At the Awards Evening in October, we were delighted to announce our winner as **Spaxton Community Stores**.

This community-run shop hugely impressed us with their range of local produce, positive spirit and friendly volunteers. They make a conscious effort to keep their prices low but still make a good profit – which is ploughed back into the shop and available for grants to local community projects. Their prize is £100 plus a commemorative plate.

Runner up, winning £50, was Kingsbury Community Stores in Kingsbury Episcopi. Again, this shop is run by volunteers and offers a great facility, located in the new Community Centre, along with a community cafe. Also shortlisted was Keinton Stores in Keinton Mandeville, whose owner, AJ, has turned the shop into a much loved community hub.

We hope that this Award will encourage people to appreciate our village shops and to support them whenever they can. We look forward to seeing more entries next year!

EVENTS



Anaerobic digester plant producing power to make cheese at Wyke Farms

Calling all cheese fans!

Would you like to come and visit one of Somerset's oldest and well known cheese companies and see how they run their operations using green energy?

We have arranged a group visit for CPRE members and guests to the Wyke Farms Sustainable Energy Centre at Wyke Champflower, nr Bruton on **Friday 22nd March 2019 from 10.30am to midday**. The visit will include a presentation about cheese making in their purpose built visitor centre and a tour of the 100% green anaerobic digestion plant plus, of course, some cheese tasting!

The visit is **free of charge for CPRE members** and we invite a donation of £5.00 from non-members to help towards our admin costs. Numbers are limited so, if you would like to come, please **book your place** via admin@cpresomerset.org.uk or 0845 269 4206



Spaxton Community Stores impressed the judges with their range of local produce and friendly volunteers

BRANCH NEWS

Videos

With funding from CPRE South West, we have created two new videos explaining our work. At less than two minutes long, these videos are the ideal length to use on social media and at events. They will be a useful tool in raising awareness of key issues affecting rural Somerset and encouraging people to support us. Those who came to our recent AGM have already had a chance to view the one covering Housing in Somerset. You can find them both via our website or search for CPRE Somerset on YouTube. Please do take a look and tell us what you think - and share them too!

Volunteer News

Sadly, Stuart Eyles has had to step down as trustee due to work commitments. We thank him for his time with us and his useful input to our meetings.

We are happy to welcome Hugh Williams as our newest trustee. Hugh lives near Crewkerne and is retired after a career in information technology services which took him around the world. He is particularly interested in traditional country crafts and heritage buildings and is keen to explore ways of increasing our membership and fundraising.

We have been approached by a couple of other potential Trustees so we will hopefully be up to our full quota soon. We can always find roles for willing volunteers so do get in touch if you would like to help our branch, even if you only have a few hours to spare now and then.

We had a successful day at the Green Scythe Fair near Muchelney in June. Many thanks to volunteers Chris Vernon, Janette and Phil who helped to run the stall on such a hot and busy day. Events like this are always fun and we enjoy meeting many interesting people and sharing ideas of how we can work together for our countryside. If you would like to help run the stand next year, please get in touch.



With our new videos we are exploring new ways of raising the profile of CPRE Somerset and explaining important issues affecting Somerset's countryside.

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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. 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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