



Moooving - by Anita Harvey

Our countryside during lockdown - and after.....

Well, this has certainly been a spring like no other.

In order to stop the spread of coronavirus, we have all faced unprecedented changes to our daily lives and have been forced to spend more time than ever at home. Times have been tough with jobs at risk, travel disrupted, schools closed and events cancelled. The worst impact has, of course, been the loss of loved ones and we offer our deepest sympathies to anyone who has been affected by this cruel disease.

Some restrictions are easing now but we are still uncertain how things will unfold in the coming months and how our daily lives will be affected.

No one would say it's been easy but it is clear that some good things have come out of the crisis – like a stronger sense of community and a deeper appreciation of our local green spaces and the joy of spending time outdoors in nature.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could all grasp hold of these positive changes and strive to keep them going, so that they become accepted as the "new normal"? We've put together a list of things we would like to hang on to as a positive legacy of the strange times of spring 2020.

Learning lessons from lockdown

Here's our personal list - please do let us know yours.....

Let's try not to forget the stillness and the sound of bees and birdsong as traffic levels in the early parts of lockdown fell to those not seen since the 1950s.

Let's challenge our leaders and place-makers to make safe walking and cycling routes a priority in rural areas, as well as towns and cities.

Let's hold on to the joy of those empty blue skies and the tranquillity of starlit nights.

Let's think twice before we resort to polluting air travel and let's continue to speak out against developments which cause unnecessary light pollution, blocking our starry skies.

Let's remember to chat to our neighbours and to look inside ourselves to find ways to make our rural communities stronger.

Let's continue to make time to explore our local areas and appreciate how lucky we are to live in Somerset.

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Reasons to be cheerful - photo competition

We are all facing unprecedented restrictions on our daily lives due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Our freedom to go outside has been extremely limited and still is, for some people. Others feel anxious and worried about venturing outside.

But, we all know how wonderful it can be to be in the great outdoors and that even the smallest details can be fascinating and uplifting. That's why we decided to give our 2020 photo competition the theme – "Reasons To Be Cheerful" .

If you're able to get out into nature, in a way that keeps you and others around you safe, why not take some photos and send them to us to share?



Janet Stean

Even if you can't get out and about, you could still send in pictures from your garden or even the view from your window - or a favourite photo you have taken in the last two years.

We'd really love to see photos of the little things about the countryside that are keeping you going in these difficult times. Best of all are photos of people enjoying the outdoors but, if this is not possible, then close up details from being outside in nature, in the park or even your garden are great. We have had lots of entries already and some are included in this newsletter to give you a flavour. We post many more regularly on our social media pages.



Neighbourly isolation - Jeff Hutson

Competition entry is FREE and the closing date is 31st August so there is still plenty of time. The winner will receive a £100 prize.

Details of how to enter and competition rules are on our website - or get in touch and we can send them to you.

Send your entries to admin@cpresomerset.org.uk

Explore, enjoy and respect our countryside

Welcome back to rural England. As lockdown measures are lifted we are starting to see the number of visitors increase.

DEFRA and the NFU have encouraged farmers to use signage to notify where footpaths are narrow and social distancing may be hard to maintain. Where routes pass through farmyards, users are politely encouraged to respect local residents and workers by following social distancing guidelines and consider using alternative routes. At access points, the public is reminded of the need to take hygiene precautions and wash hands regularly.

We would like to take this opportunity to remind all our members and supporters when visiting any part of the countryside to follow the Countryside Code and also be aware of the Safer Access To Green Spaces guidance.

Remember.....

- Think about avoiding travel to popular beauty spots; car parks and some sites have been extremely busy, making social distancing difficult
- Gates may be tied open, so walkers do not need to touch them – please leave gates as you find them
- Stay on marked paths, following any local signage that may be in place to protect sensitive wildlife and habitats.
- Keep dogs under effective control
- Take your litter home with you
- Do not use barbecues as they risk causing wildfires
- Wash your hands when you get home

Can you spare two minutes?

One of the best things about the relaxing of lockdown has been getting back outside and enjoying wonderful views again whilst getting close to nature. However, isn't it depressing and infuriating when we see how quickly litter has also returned to our countryside? Many of our beauty spots and country lanes are once again speckled with fast food wrappers, bottles and cans.

We need your help to tackle our litter problem. Can you spare a few minutes each week to tidy up your local patch?

We are happy to announce that we have received national CPRE funding for a litter project here in Somerset and we would love it if you could join in.

We are looking for 100 volunteers to:

- Carry out regular litterpicks in their local area in their own time
- Share their results and successes with other volunteers
- Sign up to a "plastic pledge" to try to use less single use plastic

We will kit out our volunteers with all the necessary equipment including gloves, a litter-picker and a hi-viz tabard and you can do your local litterpick whenever you like and as often as needed.

You might want to do it as part of your regular dog walk, or your walk to the shops or you could make it a social event with friends once a week.

Whenever you do your local litter pick, we would love to see the results of your efforts. Maybe you could share the funniest thing you picked up – or score points for the most revolting item! Most importantly, you will not be alone - you will be encouraged to keep in touch with our new army of volunteers online and we will be arranging a special event for our volunteers in spring 2021 (covid-permitting).

Some people have already got started. One of our CPRE members, Martin Roundell Greene sent us this email during lockdown: "On our daily exercise walks from home in Ilminster, my wife and I have taken to picking up litter. We arm ourselves with plastic bags and gloves, and choose a different route every day. The amount of litter is a bit depressing, but picking it gives purpose to our walk and makes us feel virtuous and superior to the dirty, lazy, ignorant people who dropped it there in the first place".

We also have funding to establish five 2-minute litter pick stations at popular visitor spots.

These are wooden A-boards equipped with bags and litter-pickers for people to borrow to do a quick tidy up as part of their visit. Boards are hosted by visitor centres, cafes or businesses that look after them. If you run a business in the countryside where litter is a problem and you would like a board, please contact us.



If you feel inspired to get involved, please get in touch with Becky Collier, Branch Manager

admin@cpresomerset.org.uk 0845 269 4206



Litter-picking can be rewarding - and strangely addictive!

Planning update

CPRE Somerset is pro-development when it is in the right place and of the right sort. All too often we see the opposite.

The County continues to be bombarded by planning applications for housing estates in inappropriate locations, driven by government targets that have little to do with local need. We particularly deplore the loss of greenfield before brownfield sites are built out.

The problem is compounded when a local planning authority cannot show a five year housing land supply: then the 'presumption in favour of development' kicks in, unless significant harm can be demonstrated. Attempts to industrialise the Somerset countryside in areas not allocated for industry present further threats.

Here are some of our more high profile current battles:

Mendip

The housing estate sprawl around Wells proceeds apace and now threatens to obliterate the historic gaps between the cathedral city and its surrounding villages. We objected to a proposal for 148 houses which, if permitted, would have reduced the important separation between Wells and Wookey Hole. The site is also on the boundary of the Mendip Hills AONB, with potential long term impact on its setting and dark night skies. It lies wholly within the parish boundary of St Cuthbert (Out), which since 2011 has seen a 200% increase in the population of its North ward due to new builds, whereas government statistics predict a rise in the UK population of just 11% to 2041. We were delighted when this was refused (2019/ 2883/OTS).

We opposed 6 dwellings proposed for the 'Special Landscape Feature' of Wearyall Hill, Glastonbury, which would harm the landscape character of the Isle of Avalon.

In Norton St Philip we opposed 38 Dwellings on land designated as a green space in the Neighbourhood Plan (2019/2976/FUL).



Over 5 acres of land has been excavated at Swang Farm this spring. A notification was accepted for "levelling to ease agricultural use of the field".

Sedgemoor

Over the years, we have made various challenges to Sedgemoor DC about the bizarre planning situation at Swang Farm near Cannington but have made little progress. This is a large scale, industrialised biomass digester site that takes in waste and crops. The farm operation appears to be subservient to the industrial business of selling energy generated by anaerobic digesters, with all crops grown on the farm fed into the digesters as genuine food waste becomes scarcer. Despite their industrial purpose, Sedgemoor DC has routinely nodded through the company's agricultural notifications with little scrutiny resulting in significant concreting and excavation of the countryside. We have endorsed and circulated a new report from a local CPRE member asking for comments from Councillors and officers. It will be interesting to see if this situation is finally taken seriously.

At Hamp Bridge we objected to nine dwellings proposed on a greenfield site in an extreme flood zone area, on land not identified for housing development (37/19/00124).

We successfully objected to plans to operate heavy machinery at Callow Rock Quarry 24 hours a day within the Mendip Hills AONB (17/19/00104).

Planning update

We rely on our watchful members and volunteers to keep us informed of inappropriate planning applications which might harm our countryside. Please keep up the good work!



Boo - by Maryanne Weatherley

South Somerset

Our focus has been on trying to prevent the swamping of our historic villages and market towns by inappropriate development, because the smaller settlements are the ones that are most vulnerable to losing their character.

We opposed plans to build 200 houses on the edge of Castle Cary which would have harmed in equal measure the rural settings of both the market town itself and its Victorian railway station. SSDC responded to our concerns by commissioning a heritage assessment which confirmed that the proposal conflicted with the council's heritage protection policy. To our delight, this was recently refused (19/01840/OUT).

We opposed 185 dwellings just north of Brimsmore which is not identified as a strategic location (19/03242/OUT).

In Wincanton we fought an application for 210 houses, being ribbon development sprawling into open countryside, which threatened the compact identity of the historic hill-top market town (19/01593/OUT). This too has just been refused.

In the tiny village of Lovington 9 houses have been proposed within one of the main open spaces giving the village its dispersed character, and within the unspoilt rural setting of its 300 year old village primary school (18/04044/OUT).

In Curry Rivel we have opposed an application to build five large houses in the former orchard of the Grade 2 star listed Middlethorpe House. (20/01325/FUL)

Adjacent to Queen Camel, a large scale solar farm is proposed next to an existing one at Sutton Bridge: the combined footprint of the two is larger than the settlement itself (20/00952/FUL). If permitted, a large swathe of the village's landscape setting would then be dominated by the solar installations, associated buildings and CCTV cameras on poles. In our view, the applicant's current meagre offer of community benefits represents a small fraction of what could be due if solar is brought within the Community Benefits Framework in 2021, as the government proposes. At the very least we think this application should be deferred pending clarification.

We are fighting an application in Kingstone for an industrial building to be sited in open countryside on a narrow rural lane, intended for the use of people converging on the site from distant towns to build carnival floats (18/02609/FUL).

In Cricket St Thomas we opposed an application to import 169,000 tonnes of construction waste with 16 movements a day over two years, to level three golf fairways.

Somerset West & Taunton

In Stogursey we objected to a proposal for 35 dwellings that, if permitted, will dominate the southern flanks of this historic village. It would be laid out in a series of suburban cul-de-sacs completely at odds with the linear character of the village, and would intrude visually on views from the castle (3/32/19/023).

In Rockwell Green, on the edge of Wellington, we are fighting an application for 18 dwellings on land which lies outside the town's development boundary (43/20/0025).

We consider that five large dwellings proposed on the edge of Bicknoller will harm the visual appearance of the village (3/01/20/003).

We took part in the Exmoor Landscape Advisory Group meeting (via zoom), sharing discussions on ash dieback and the importance of buildings in providing habitats for bats and birds.



Blossom in fields, Stogumber by Vanessa

Branch update

We're still here!

Our staff and volunteers are used to working from home so we were able to adapt quickly to lockdown. Instead of having Trustee meetings in village halls, we now meet on Zoom, which has worked well.

Of course, we have had to change some of our plans - particularly regarding events. We missed the usual fun of battling sunshine and showers at the Green Scythe Fair this year and our planned visit to Brown & Forrest Smokery in May had to be postponed. The Charity Commission has advised that charities can postpone their AGMs until mass gatherings are feasible again. Our AGM is due to take place in October and plans would normally be well underway by now. Given the present uncertainty, we have decided to postpone the AGM until further notice as explained in the enclosed letter.

Unfortunately, the start of lockdown coincided with the loss of our Planner, Judith Chubb-Whittle, as she was offered the role of Landscape Planning Officer with the Mendip Hills AONB. Judith made an enormous difference during her time with us and we wish her well. We did not seek to replace Judith straightaway as it seemed that planning work might quieten down during lockdown - how wrong we were! Things are as busy as ever now so we are actively recruiting for a replacement and hope to have a part-time Planner in post soon. We are very grateful for the generous donations made to our 2020 appeal to support our planning work. We have ringfenced the appeal money to be used to support the work of the new planner. Meanwhile, we have a small but dedicated team of planning volunteers who have been working extra hard, responding to requests for help and submitting quality, evidence based comments on significant planning cases.



Eaker Hill, near Chewtown Mendip - Ben Croxford

Due to the wonders of modern technology, our volunteers have been able to speak up, alongside local community representatives, at several virtual planning committee meetings. The public can view proceedings via a YouTube video feed and councillors and speakers register the day before to get access codes so they can speak up at the meeting. This new system has worked well for us, particularly in South Somerset, with some significant "wins" - you can read more on our "Planning update" pages.

However, there is no doubt that some are disadvantaged by the inability to meet in person. We have heard from some smaller community groups, such as Parish Meetings, that have struggled to be able to address planning issues in the time allowed as they do not have the facilities, or fast enough broadband speeds, to be able to hold or to attend online meetings. In these circumstances, we are asking District Councils to allow time extensions so that rural communities are not disadvantaged.

Restoring historic signposts

Inevitably, the lockdown has made it very difficult for volunteers to carry out any work restoring signposts. Luckily, Woolavington Parish Council completed work on their four fingerposts before the restrictions. The signs were dismantled by Somerset Forge Ltd and taken to their yard where they were stripped of layers of paint and treated for rust. They were then repainted in the original 1940s colours and returned in mid-March. Thanks to support from the Hinkley C Community Fund, we were able to provide a grant towards the cost of this specialist and skilled work.

Happily, we have been able to extend the project period so if you know of any signposts within 10 miles of Hinkley in need of a face lift, do get in touch.



Before and after: Sedgemoor Road, Woolavington - one of four signposts restored in Woolavington, with help from CPRE Somerset and Hinkley C Community Fund

You are amazing - thank you!

In our last newsletter, we explained our new focus on active fundraising so that we can work more effectively for the Somerset countryside and rural communities. Here's an update...

Appeal

Last time, we included a direct appeal for extra help to pay for our planning work. We have had an amazing response from our generous and loyal CPRE members and the appeal has raised over £2700 - thank you. Particular thanks for everyone who included a gift aid declaration as this allows to claim 25% back from the Treasury. The money raised through the appeal is ring-fenced in our budget so it is reserved specially for professional planning support.

Lottery Club

Thank you to everyone who has bought tickets for our new lottery club. The monthly prize currently stands at £33 and this amount will go up every time we sell more tickets. Half of the money raised goes towards our core funds, helping us to keep our charity running. A ticket costs £12 and this enters you into 12 draws over the coming year, so you have every chance of winning more than once. Details of recent winners are in the panel below. Anyone over 16 can join our lottery club, you don't have to be a CPRE member. To join, get in touch by email or phone or visit our website where you can download a form.

Legacies

We have received £385 from donations made in memory of John Wilfred Foden who died in late December, just before his 93rd birthday. Mr Foden loved the countryside so his family chose CPRE Somerset as the charity to receive donations at his funeral. John Foden was formerly the deputy county architect for Somerset and was a past chairman of the Taunton Civic Society, and the Somerset Art Galleries Trust. A donation like this makes a huge difference to us and we are very grateful to Mr Foden and his family for thinking of CPRE Somerset. and supporting our work.

Leave A Gift In Your Will

It's easy to leave a gift in your will to CPRE Somerset and you can always change your mind. Just let your wishes be known to your solicitor when you make or update your will, and give them these details:

CPRE Somerset - registered charity number: 1100860

Our address: 8 Rowdens Road, Wells, Somerset BA5 1TU

Easyfundraising

It's simple - choose CPRE Somerset as your charity on www.easyfundraising.org.uk and we get a small donation everytime you shop online. The more people that support us, the more the pennies add up and can really help with our running costs.



photo by Caroline Gent

Lucky Lottery Winners

We draw the lottery once a month, using a random number generator. All ticket numbers are entered into 12 consecutive draws over 12 months. The more tickets you buy, the higher your chances of winning and the higher the prize money.

Here are our lucky winners so far:

March - Maggie Seward - prize £23.50

April - Chris Lewis - prize £28.50

May - Richard Clark - prize £31.50

June - Maggie Seward - prize £32.00



Every ticket
helps us to raise
vital funds for
our charity

Get involved

Volunteer with CPRE

We have vacancies for two new Trustees and a great opportunity for someone special to become our new Chair.

We are delighted to welcome Fiona Wilkie as our newest Trustee. Fiona lives on a small farm near Axbridge and has a passion for countryside issues, including looking after local footpaths. She is a Justice of the Peace, Parish Councillor and works as senior Business Manager within Higher Education.

Become a Trustee

We are keen to hear from anyone who might be interested in becoming a Trustee - especially people from Somerset West & Taunton district.

Lead the way

This is a challenging time for any charity but also a time to grasp new opportunities. We are looking for someone with the vision and commitment to lead CPRE Somerset as our Chair for the next few years. You will; be supported by an enthusiastic team of trustees, volunteers and staff and can enjoy the chance to network with other CPREs across the country and the team at national CPRE.

To find out more about volunteering with us, please contact our Manager, Becky Collier.

Who We Are

Roger Martin President

Trustees

Chris Lewis Chair

David Julian Mendip

Don Parkinson South Somerset

Fletcher Robinson South Somerset

Tim Whittingham Sedgemoor

Hugh Williams South Somerset

Fiona Wilkie Sedgemoor

John Roberts Honorary Treasurer

Becky Collier Branch Manager



Trustees meeting - before the pandemic - at Coronation Hall, Burrowbridge

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The countryside charity
Somerset