



The countryside charity  
Hertfordshire

# Spring Newsletter 2025



# Thank you for your support

In our last newsletter, we wrote to you with our Winter appeal for funds – thank you so much for all your very generous donations.

Your donations have been instrumental in supporting all of our work, including our involvement in key planning appeals. Most recently we have submitted our Interested Party statement for the appeal of a 68 dwelling speculative development proposal on land at London Road and Owles Lane in Buntingford, East Hertfordshire. We have also participated as a Rule 6 Party in the Public Inquiry for a 390 dwelling speculative development proposal on Green Belt land between Piccotts End Conservation Area, Halsey Field Wildlife Site, and the River Gade chalk stream in Dacorum Borough. We await the outcome in both of these cases.

Last year we made strong representations on Draft Local Plans in Hertsmere Borough, St Albans District and Dacorum Borough, where vast areas of the Green Belt are under serious threat. We are now preparing for the upcoming Local Plan Examinations in St Albans and Dacorum, where we will keep fighting to protect the countryside from inappropriate development.

We are also continuing to campaign for sustainable energy policies, including advocating for rooftop solar over unnecessary countryside destruction – read more about this on page 4 of this newsletter.

Also, we have recently launched our campaign to tighten up the definition of ‘grey belt’ in the Government’s recently

revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Under the present definition of ‘grey belt’ virtually all of the Green Belt could be at risk. Read more about this on page 3 and in the insert with this newsletter.

Other key priorities include our ongoing opposition to Luton Airport expansion which threatens both the environment and local communities and our commitment to promoting a ‘brownfield first’ approach to development.

Current District and Borough Council data shows there is space for a minimum of 29,580 new homes on already-identified brownfield sites across Hertfordshire.

We continue to promote Hertfordshire’s countryside through community projects as well. Our annual Children’s Art Competition is currently open for entries (until 16th May) for all primary school aged children in Hertfordshire. We are also planning a new hedgerow planting project to support biodiversity, and new educational health walks.

If you wish to donate to any of our campaigns or community projects, you can do so at any time via our website: [www.cpreherts.org.uk/get-involved/make-a-donation](http://www.cpreherts.org.uk/get-involved/make-a-donation)

Thank you again for your support!



Abby Coften  
Chief Executive

## Join us at our Open House

Thursday 26th June, 10am – 2pm

We would love to see our members and supporters at our Open House at CPRE Hertfordshire offices, 31a Church Street, Welwyn. AL6 9LW

Come meet the team, learn more about our campaigns and environmental projects, and enjoy free cake and refreshments.

# Beware the new NPPF



A lot has been said about the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which was published by the Government in December after much fanfare. The NPPF is the major policy document issued to local planning authorities to guide their preparation of Local Plans and their consideration of planning applications.

It contains policy on all major land uses and indicates how planning decisions should be made. It is not the whole story of course: the actual Planning Acts are the legal documents defining the planning process, and Planning Practice Guidance issued by the Government is an online source of clarification and further detail but it does not introduce policy.

The NPPF has been the main policy document since 2012 and the revision in December, together with the publication of a subsidiary document, made some big changes with profound implications for the countryside. In summary, two main changes affect Hertfordshire significantly.

First, the revised NPPF changes the method for calculating future housing need, previously based on projections for household and population change, to calculations based on the amount of existing housing stock. The Government has also then added a factor intended to increase the number of affordable houses which particularly affects areas where house prices are highest.

The subsidiary document referred to above, issued with the revised NPPF, is the list of new housing need figures for each local planning authority in England, and the numbers are scary. Whereas figures in Stevenage and Watford have reduced, numbers everywhere else in the County have increased significantly, with the highest rise in St Albans where housing need is said to have doubled.

The second big change is the introduction of the concept of 'grey belt' which has moved on from pre-election statements about former petrol filling stations and over-grown car-parks to include virtually the whole of the Green Belt on the present definitions. This is likely to be the change with the worst implications for Hertfordshire because the legal wording in the NPPF is open to wide interpretation and removes protections for the Green Belt which have been in place since the 1950s.

So what is to be done? There was much else in the Ministerial Statement made at the time of the publication of the new NPPF, but it is clear that the Government thinks that nothing should stand in the way of economic growth, and that includes planning controls. As ever, the devil is in the detail, but we are very clear that we must face head-on the assumption that countryside has to be sacrificed for development.

Our present work with Hertfordshire MPs and District / Borough Councillors is re-emphasising the value of the countryside to decision-makers and we need people constantly to challenge the hugely damaging and wrong assumption that is "either countryside or development". There are huge opportunities in the reuse of land and brownfield regeneration and we will continue to campaign even more actively for environmental development solutions and activities, such as rooftop solar and new technologies. There is no time to lose, so join us in fighting for our precious countryside.



Chris Berry  
Planning Manager

## Lunch & Learn

Join us for our new Lunch and Learns, a series of monthly online presentations and debates on the key planning and environmental issues that matter to you and to our County.

See our website at <https://www.cpreherts.org.uk/get-involved/lunch-and-learn/> to find out more and book your place.

# Rooftop Solar: Support our Campaign

A particularly sensitive issue for CPRE Hertfordshire is the matter of ground mounted solar installations and their associated infrastructure – photovoltaic panels covering large land areas, with freight container-like metal structures housing inverters, transformers and batteries, bounded by high perimeter fencing with CCTV security cameras. We are all for renewable energy but providing it through hundreds of hectares of glass and steel structures on protected and productive land is not the most appropriate means of generation.

At present we are aware of twenty active proposals for solar plants and battery energy storage systems (BESS) in Hertfordshire. Eighteen of these are proposed for greenfield sites extending across 835 hectares of open landscapes in the countryside. About half of this land area is within the Green Belt; the other half lies within the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt as designated in the adopted East Hertfordshire and North Hertfordshire Local Plans. Disappointingly, only two of these solar / BESS proposals are for brownfield, or previously developed, sites.

What's more, most of these solar / BESS proposals are for sites comprised of Grade 2 or 3a 'Best and Most Versatile' agricultural land either in whole or in part. According to national policy this land is preferred for growing crops and enhancing the UK's domestic food security, an important consideration given that nearly half of Britain's food is imported.

With their visual intrusion and impact on Public Rights of Way, these solar plants and BESS will also have damaging effects on their local communities in terms of loss of amenity; this affects visitors to the countryside too.

There could be some relief for local communities if they were to benefit from cheaper power but so far this is not the case.

So, what can be done?

CPRE Hertfordshire supports roof-top energy generation as an obvious and feasible alternative to ground-mounted

solar installations. The acreages of new warehouses, data centres and other commercial buildings, as well as residential rooftops and canopies over car parks, provide obvious locations for solar panels which would prevent the need to use productive agricultural land and open countryside.

## The Sunshine Bill

In January, a crucial bill calling for mandatory solar on new homes had its first debate in Parliament and we spoke and met with local MPs across Hertfordshire successfully gaining support from many of them.

Unfortunately, the bill was rejected by the Government who stated that it would risk adversely impacting housing supply. It did, however, help raise awareness of and further support for our rooftop solar campaign which advocates for utilising rooftops for solar energy before building ground-mounted solar farms in the countryside.

It seems obvious to us and could be easily achieved. We need a groundswell of support to persuade the Government to require new buildings to fit solar panels as standard. Join us for our Lunch and Learn in May on Solar Energy: Creating a greener future without inappropriate development to learn more about rooftop solar and how you can support our campaign. To book on this event, visit: <https://www.cpreherts.org.uk/lunch-and-learn>

To find out more about CPRE Hertfordshire's policy on solar energy and to see our inventory of solar and BESS proposals across the county, see our Solar webpage at <https://www.cpreherts.org.uk/solar>

Abby Coften      Chris Berry  
Chief Executive      Planning Manager

### Good news!

Following strong opposition, the planning application for a 1,500 MW BESS in Aldenham, Hertsmere was withdrawn by the developer in late 2024, marking a significant win for the Green Belt.

## Save our Green Belt Appeal

With the revised National Planning Policy Framework in place which weakens Green Belt protections, our fight to save our countryside from inappropriate development continues at pace. This year we will incur extra costs on specialist legal and planning expertise at Local Plan examinations and planning appeal Inquiries across Hertfordshire.

As a small charity, we need your support. If you can make a donation however small, we would greatly appreciate it. You can donate at any time via our website: [www.cpreherts.org.uk/get-involved/make-a-donation](https://www.cpreherts.org.uk/get-involved/make-a-donation) or send a cheque made payable to CPRE Hertfordshire to: 31A Church Street, Welwyn, AL6 9LW

# What volunteering for CPRE Hertfordshire means to me



**My first encounter with the lush English countryside came through Thomas Hardy's novel "Tess of the d'Urbervilles" when I was a teenager in Croatia.**

Though Hardy's Wessex was an imaginary realm, it was based on the real-life geography of south and south-west England. The novel's vivid descriptions of England's untamed beauty left a lasting impression on me.

After moving to London, I seized every opportunity to spend my weekends hiking and exploring the countryside, both around the city and further afield. However, as the years passed, work and other commitments gradually eroded the time I could devote to my passion for nature. Everything changed when I relocated to North Hertfordshire – freed from the burden of a long daily commute, I found myself on the doorstep of magnificent open spaces, and with some spare time.

Environmental issues have always been close to my heart, from countryside protection to biodiversity preservation and climate change mitigation. When a colleague introduced me to CPRE Hertfordshire, I immediately volunteered as a content writer. The organization's practical and effective approach to preserving the green belt and protecting precious agricultural land resonated deeply with me. From day one, I felt welcomed through regular contact with other volunteers, and I valued the opportunity to expand my knowledge through CPRE's comprehensive training programs.

In 2024, I was honoured to become one of the Trustees. In this role, I continue to contribute by writing articles and social media posts, while also participating in various events promoting CPRE Hertfordshire's vital work. I wholeheartedly encourage others to consider joining CPRE Herts as a volunteer – it's an excellent way to contribute to a worthwhile cause, utilize your existing skills, develop new ones, and connect with like-minded individuals who share your values and passion for preserving our precious countryside.

Kruna Vukmirovic

## Do you enjoy meeting new people and have experience of recruiting staff or volunteers?

We are seeking a new Trustee who will be our Volunteer Coordinator. This role is a great way for you to apply your skills and experience to help the countryside, nature and the environment. The role requires approx. 4 hours per week during weekdays, and can be done flexibly to fit around your other commitments. Full details are on our website and we're happy to have an informal exploratory conversation to answer any questions. We look forward to hearing from you!

<https://www.cpreherts.org.uk/get-involved/volunteering/trustee-volunteer-coordinator/>



Allan, Krana and Chris  
Representing CPRE  
Hertfordshire at an  
event in Hitchin, June  
2024

### Join Us

If you are not already a CPRE member, please join us! It's easy to join online on our website at <http://www.cpreherts.org.uk/get-involved/become-a-member/> or email us at [office@cpreherts.org.uk](mailto:office@cpreherts.org.uk)

# Connecting our future generation with nature



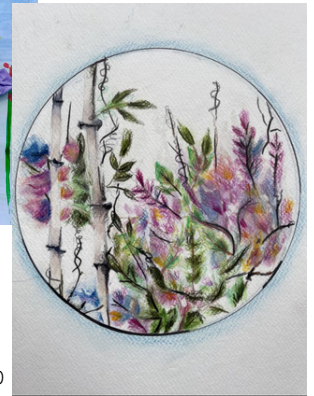
Flora, age 9



Joshua, age 6



Hunter, age 5



Helena, age 10

Our Children's Art Competition is an important part of our mission to protect, promote and enhance the Hertfordshire countryside for everyone to value and enjoy.

The competition helps young children, and their families, connect with nature and the countryside and perhaps think about it in different ways. We set a different environmental or nature related theme each year and we invite all primary school aged children throughout the county to enter and to express themselves through art. It encourages children to engage with the natural environment around them and it's fun.

We hope that as many primary schools as possible will take part in our competition. We are also delighted to receive art directly from individual children if their school decides not to participate and from children who are being home schooled. Please help us by spreading the word.

Prizes include £500 for the Overall Winning School and prizes in each age group category, plus a special ceremony in the autumn to showcase and celebrate all our young artists.

We are now taking entries for the 2025 competition; closing date is 16 May.

The theme is My Adventures in the Countryside: Camping on a summers evening, walking your dog through

woodlands, building dens in the forest. What adventures do your children love having in the countryside?

## Judges

This year we are very excited to announce that we have three artists who will be judging the entries:

Susan Cooper enjoys painting and helping others to realise they too can paint. She runs an art group, goes on painting retreats and is addicted to trying new media and techniques. During the covid restrictions, she painted pet portraits for charity and raised over £4000.

Kathy Evershed is a Landscape Painter, Teacher and Business Owner. She began classes for children from the "Shed" in her garden over 15 years ago and has since built up "Artshed" with her husband, specializing in providing Art Tuition and Art Holiday Camps in primary schools: [Shedloadsoffun.com](http://Shedloadsoffun.com)

Erin Brown is an award winning illustrator. After graduating university with a bachelor's degree in fine art, she developed a passion for stories and children's books and has worked with clients all over the world.

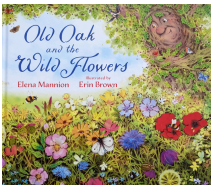
Website: <http://erinbrownillo.uk>

Gill Bryant  
Competition Coordinator

## Save the date for our AGM and Countryside Day

Join us at our AGM and Countryside Day on Saturday 11th October at Knebworth House. We will be celebrating the Hertfordshire countryside with further details to be unveiled shortly.

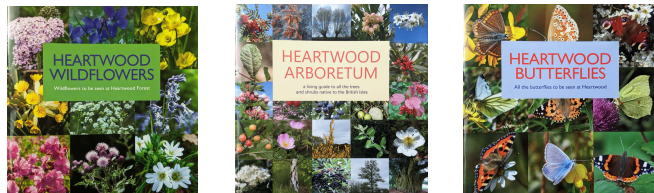
## Books



Old Oak & The Wildflowers £12.99. The latest instalment continues the story of the familiar wildlife characters from Elena Mannion's earlier books (see below). They are once again coming to grips with nature and conservation issues in their habitat.

A high quality, hard cover original edition published in May 2024 with beautiful full-colour illustrations which bring the story to life on every page. It's the perfect gift for young children or grandchildren.

Old Oak & Little Acorn £12.99, and The Happy Hedgerow £10.99, charming children's books by local author Elena Mannion, with detailed full colour illustrations by Erin Brown. They cover important conservation themes for children.

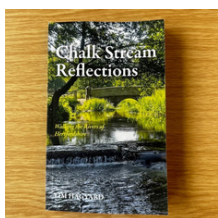


A trilogy of beautiful full-colour guidebooks produced by the Heartwood Monitoring Group of volunteers at Heartwood Forest. Each book is a high quality paperback packed with photographs and descriptive information to make species identification easy. £9.99 each

Heartwood Wildflowers, covering 170 species of wildflower that grow in Hertfordshire

Heartwood Arboretum, covering all 60 species of trees and shrubs native to the British Isles, most of which can be found across Hertfordshire

Heartwood Butterflies, featuring 30 species of butterflies to be found throughout the county



Chalkstream Reflections. In 2020, former CPRE Hertfordshire Planning Manager Tim Hagyard set out to walk the entire length of each of Hertfordshire's chalk streams. These globally-rare and precious waterways, and the wildlife habitats that they

support, are under tremendous pressure from increasing abstraction and pollution. Tim wanted to explore the health of these rivers and enjoy their beauty.

The book is enjoyable and educational but with a serious message and Tim weaves his personal reflections and recommendations into vivid descriptions of his experiences during the walk. £11.99

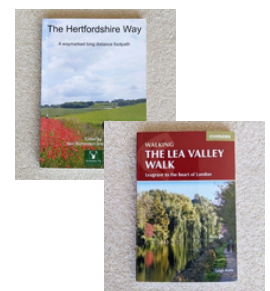
## CPRE Hertfordshire Merchandise

You can see our full product range and order online at <https://www.cpreherts.org.uk/get-involved/merchandise/> and pay with your debit or credit card or use the order form enclosed with this publication to pay by cheque or BACS. £4 p&p per order.

Please support us by placing an order today. Each sale helps fund our work to protect, promote and enhance Hertfordshire's countryside.

Two outstanding walking guidebooks. The Hertfordshire Way £10, the official guide to the 195 mile waymarked footpath around our county.

Walking The Lea Valley Walk, £12.95, part of the widely-acclaimed Cicerone series of walking books.



## Blank Greetings Cards - perfect for every occasion

Children's nature art - pack of 5 with one each of 5 different images taken from our popular Children's Art Competition. Size A6. £4.00 per pack



Four Seasons - 8 of one exclusive Hertfordshire scene per pack. Spring Bluebells, Summer Meadows, Autumn Mists or Winter Sunset. The cards measure approx. 15cm square. All images by award-winning photographer Chris Howe £8 per pack



## Heavy Cotton Tote Bags

Eye catching and functional, they also make great little gifts. Approx. 36 x 41cm with long handles to fit comfortably over the shoulder. £4 each



# Leave a gift in your will

## Protect the countryside you love

A gift in your will, no matter how large or small, can help us to continue fighting and protecting Hertfordshire's countryside, as well as supporting our local wildlife, rivers and chalk streams which are hugely under threat.

**Our mission has never been more important than now.**

Email [legacy@cpreherts.org.uk](mailto:legacy@cpreherts.org.uk) or call 01438 717587 for more information

CPRE Hertfordshire is a registered charity no. 1162419.  
CPRE Hertfordshire President: Sir Simon Bowes-Lyon.  
National CPRE Patron: His Majesty King Charles III.



The countryside charity  
Hertfordshire