

# Spring Newsletter

## 2026

Photo - Snowdrops at St Pauls Walden Bury by Elizabeth Hamilton



CPRE Patron: His Majesty The King

100  
YEARS



Campaign to Protect  
Rural England  
Hertfordshire

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# Message from our CEO

We have a fresh look this year, in part to celebrate National CPRE's centenary but you may have also noticed the restoration of Campaign to Protect Rural England in our branding. This reconnection to what our charity stands for is an intentional move at this time. Our campaigning to protect the English countryside over the past 100 years has helped our countryside to remain a thriving, accessible, and sustainable landscape. And it's never been more important to protect and promote the countryside and the green spaces we love, than now.

We start the year with another revision to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), once again weakening the protections of the Green Belt and enabling misuse of the term 'grey belt' to mislead us into thinking grey belt sites are disused and derelict land.

In Hertfordshire, we are up against a Green Belt land grab under the guise of grey belt. Since the government introduced its concept of grey belt, we've responded to 65 planning applications covering 1,138 hectares (or about 1,600 football pitches) of Green Belt countryside that have argued that the site is grey belt. These proposals comprise 10,000 dwellings, 8 commercial solar farms, 2 data centres and 1 standalone battery energy storage system. And all of these sites are greenfield countryside; none are on brownfield or previously developed land.

More shocking still is that if we look at the existing unimplemented planning consents, identified brownfield land, and long-term empty homes across England, this adds up to more than the Government's 1.5 million new homes target!

But our fight to protect the Green Belt will not cease. Thanks to many of our members signing our Save Our Green Belt petition last year which achieved 42,000 signatures nationally, we are in a strong position with many MPs who support our arguments

wholeheartedly and continue to raise our Green Belt concerns in Parliament. We are now in Phase 2 of the campaign, with our video, reports and MP meetings in full swing along with inclusion in our Local Election Manifesto. We urge you to add your voice to our campaign by writing to your MP on this matter so that we can achieve our target for a debate in Parliament.



Land east of Oxhey Lane, Carpenders Park, Three Rivers District - the planning application argues this is grey belt

Whilst protecting our countryside remains our priority, we have made significant progress in our mission to enhance the countryside with the launch of our Hedgerow Heroes project last September following our successful application for funding. The project has been a huge success, we have welcomed nearly 100 volunteers from all walks of life to help us reach our 2.1 kilometers hedgerow planting target including Capel Manor students, volunteers from the Give It Forward Today charity who marked Tu b'Shvat by planting hedgerows, students at Sele school in Hertford, and new and existing CPRE Hertfordshire volunteers. Working alongside Herts and Middlesex Butterfly Conservation, we have specifically chosen butterfly-friendly plants to help stop the decline of species native to Hertfordshire such as the White Letter Hairstreak.

As we join National CPRE in celebrating 100 years of protecting our countryside, we hope you can celebrate with us. This year's AGM and Countryside

Day will be held on Saturday 3 October at Hatfield House, an ideal setting in the heart of our county to celebrate the value our countryside brings. And alongside our Centenary Countryside Day we also have a number of important milestone events this year that you can get involved with, including our walking challenge, our adult and children's photography competition and our special musical event at St Paul's Walden Bury (more info on pages 9 and 10).

We are a small charity and your donations make a huge difference to our work. If you wish to donate to any of our campaigns or community projects, you can do so at any time via our website:

[cpreherts.org.uk/get-involved/make-a-donation/](https://cpreherts.org.uk/get-involved/make-a-donation/)

**Abby Coften**  
Chief Executive



Land south of Shootersway, Berkhamsted, Dacorum Borough - the planning application argues this is grey belt

# Planning update

A lot has happened in the planning world since our last newsletter and I regret that most of it is damaging as far as protection of the countryside is concerned. I should say first though that our parliamentary petition result of over 42,000 signatures (by the November deadline) was a tremendous result, and awareness of the dangers of grey belt is definitely growing.

## National issues

The two major Government documents which cause gravest concern are the Planning and Infrastructure Act which received Royal Assent on 18 December 2025 and a new draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which was published for public consultation on 16 December 2025. The Government seems to specialise in Christmas presents for planners, and you will remember that the previous revised NPPF was published in December 2024!

The two documents may be seen together to promote heavily the Government's pro-development agenda. This has wide support amongst Labour MPs of course, including those in Hertfordshire, but awareness is growing of just how damaging the Government's approach is to the countryside whether it is protected by Green Belt and National Landscape designations, or not.

In the new draft NPPF, grey belt is reinforced as a means of dismantling Green Belt protection. Further constraints to development are proposed to be removed by the promotion of development around railway stations and outside of settlements. The deadline for public response to the new draft NPPF was March 10th and we have published our response on the website.

The Planning and Infrastructure Act reduces protections for nature and local democratic control over planning decisions, and we salute Chris Hinchliff MP for North East Hertfordshire for seeking amendments and continuing to fight the causes of nature and the countryside. The loss of local democratic control over development decisions is

also a key element of the Act which strikes at the heart of the planning system.

As if that weren't enough, we have the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill going through parliament, which reorganises local government completely, merging Borough and District Councils and abolishing County Councils. This will affect Local Plans throughout Hertfordshire and we are clearly in for a period of real uncertainty while decisions are being made on the number and size of new unitary councils.



Land off Sandridgebury Lane, St Albans, St Albans District - the planning application argues this is grey belt

## Local plans

While we are on Local Plans, we are in the final stages of Examinations in Public for both St Albans and Dacorum. It is hard not to think that this is going through the motions with so much uncertainty ahead (see above) but a major review have also been announced by Welwyn Hatfield and work continues on the Local Plans for Three Rivers and Hertsmere.

The proposals by Welwyn Hatfield Council for their new Local Plan are dreadful with up to 36 new Green Belt releases. On the other hand, Three Rivers District Council deserves a special mention as the Council has raised the ire of the Minister by challenging the housing need figures imposed by central government. We support fully Three Rivers' resistance to imposed housing targets which will decimate the Green Belt that makes up over 75% of the District area.

## Applications and appeals

In the meantime, the planning applications keep coming in unabated; most of them quoting grey belt. There is a sense that objections on the basis of local conditions are increasingly pointless given the onslaught of pro-development policy and guidance but that is not our position.

As I have mentioned previously we are raising more strategic issues in our responses these days, as well as supporting local objections, and at some point the tide must turn. We support strongly the Motion passed recently by North Hertfordshire Council deploring the government's approach on grey belt as it is clear to Councillors that their decisions are being tremendously fettered. We would like to see more Councils take this kind of action.

## Other matters

Outside our direct involvement in the planning process, we are re-doubling our efforts with local MPs, urging them to seek amendments to the

legislation which is so damaging. We are working with the London Green Belt Council on a joint paper on grey belt that will be aimed at legislators as well as raising awareness amongst constituents.

This will coordinate with our own Hertfordshire campaign to Save the Green Belt and indeed defend the principle of protection because we believe that Government is weakening on protection of National Landscapes too. If the Government believes that the countryside is expendable it should say so, and not hide behind legislation that pays lip service to environmental protection while promoting the opposite.

The fight is on in earnest and we will work with any and all groups who share our concerns. In this CPRE centenary year we celebrate the establishment of an institution which campaigned successfully for National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Green Belt and it seems as though we may need to do it again!

**Chris Berry**  
Planning Manager



Land south of A507 near Cumberlow Green, Clothall, North Herts District - the planning application argues this is grey belt

# Local plan overview

District Plan	Comments & Key Milestones	Potential Adoption
Broxbourne Local Plan 2018-2033	Due for review 2025. Review in progress.	Adopted June 2020
Dacorum Local Plan to 2041	Stage 3 of the Local Plan Examination due to start w/c 3rd March 2026. CPRE Hertfordshire participated in Stages 1 and 2.	2026
East Herts District Plan 2011-2033	Full Local Plan Review in progress – work on ‘New’ District Plan due to start early 2026.	Current Plan Adopted Oct 2018 (New District Plan due 2028)
Hertsmere Local Plan 2024 to 2040	Additional Reg 18 consultation completed May 2024. <a href="#">See CPRE Hertfordshire response on our website</a> Further Reg 18 consultation due Jan – Mar 2026 .	2027
North Herts Local Plan 2011-2031	Due for review 2023. Full Local Plan Review in progress – Reg 18 consultation awaited (was due late 2025).	Current Plan Adopted Nov 2022 (Reviewed Local Plan due 2027)
St Albans Local Plan to 2041	Local Plan Examination hearings took place in 2025. CPRE Hertfordshire participated. Main Modifications next stage.	2026
Stevenage Local Plan 2011-2031	Due for review 2024. Partial review in progress.	Adopted May 2019
Three Rivers Local Plan to 2041	In Feb 2026, the Government placed a holding direction on the Local Plan due to a significant housing shortfall. CPRE Hertfordshire submitted comments on Parts 4 and 5 Reg 18 consultations. <a href="#">See our responses on our website.</a>	2026
Watford Local Plan 2021-2038	Due for review 2027	Adopted October 2022

District Plan	Comments & Key Milestones	Potential Adoption
Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan 2016-2036	Due for review 2026. Full Review & Update Reg 18 consultation expected Feb 2026.	Current Plan Adopted Oct 2023 (Reviewed Local Plan due 2043)
South West Hertfordshire* Joint Strategic Plan to 2050	Reg 18 consultation completed Nov 2022. <a href="#">See CPRE Hertfordshire response on our website</a> . Vision and Objectives endorsed by the councils Nov 2023. Next stage consultation on scale and pattern of growth – dates to be confirmed.	TBC
North East Central Hertfordshire** Joint Strategic	Joint Vision 2050 published for consultation Dec 2024. <a href="#">See CPRE Hertfordshire response on our website</a>	TBC
Hertfordshire Minerals & Waste Local Plan to 2040	Reg 18 consultation completed Oct 2022. <a href="#">See CPRE Hertfordshire response on our website</a> Reg 19 consultation timetable to be confirmed.	TBC

\* Five district councils (Dacorum, Hertsmeire, St Albans, Three Rivers & Watford) and Hertfordshire County Council are working on the South West Herts Joint Strategic Plan <https://www.swhertsplan.com/>

\*\* Five district councils (Broxbourne, East Herts, North Herts, Stevenage & Welwyn Hatfield) and Hertfordshire County Council are working on the North East Central Herts Joint Strategic Plan <https://www.eastherts.gov.uk/planning-and-building/north-east-central-hertfordshire-vision-2050-consultation>

**Reg 18 Public Consultation:** Early stage consultation – may include Issues and Options, Preferred Options and first draft plan.

**Reg 19 Public Consultation:** Pre-submission draft plan – representations invited as to whether the plan is legally compliant and meets the test of soundness in the National Planning Policy Framework NPPF.

**Examination:** Public hearing held by independent Planning Inspector to assess merits of Submitted Local Plan policies and their soundness.

# Centenary celebrations

Help us celebrate 100 years of National CPRE with our special events!



## CPRE Hertfordshire Photography Competition (January-June 2026)

Are you a keen photographer with a love of the countryside? Enter our CPRE Hertfordshire Photography Competition to celebrate Hertfordshire's beautiful green spaces.

Whether it's capturing the peaceful waterways of our unique chalk streams and rivers, the stunning scenery of the Chilterns National Landscape or the beauty of our ancient woodlands, our competition encourages everyone to explore, appreciate and celebrate Hertfordshire's countryside.

The competition launched in January and will close on Friday 12th June. There are three categories including Children's Photographer of the Year (10 years and below), Children's Photographer of the Year (11 – 17 years) and Adult Photographer of the Year (18+).

For further information, visit our webpage here:

[cpreherts.org.uk/getinvolved/events/cpre-hertfordshire-photography-competition/](https://cpreherts.org.uk/getinvolved/events/cpre-hertfordshire-photography-competition/)



or scan me

## AGM and Countryside Day 2026



Save the date for our AGM and Countryside Day 2026 on **Saturday 3rd October** at **Hatfield House**.

Join us for a day of celebratory activities including countryside talks and workshops as well as enjoying the beautiful grounds of Hatfield House.

To RSVP your planned attendance and to receive your ticket and full agenda, please email: [abby@cpreherts.org.uk](mailto:abby@cpreherts.org.uk)

Limited tickets available  
Don't delay!



## St Paul's Walden Bury Open Garden and Music Event, 5 July 2026

Come enjoy an afternoon of exploring the beautiful garden of St Paul's Walden Bury while listening to live music.

CPRE Hertfordshire President Sir Simon Bowes Lyon KCVO is kindly hosting an Open Garden with Music event at his home in St Paul's Walden Bury to celebrate the centenary of National CPRE. All funds raised will be donated to CPRE Hertfordshire.

Live music will be provided by The Cambridge University Brass Quintet and by the Welwyn Harmony Chorus – Hertfordshire's only ladies' barbershop chorus.

- ◆ **Date:** Sunday 5th July 2026
- ◆ **Time:** 2 pm to 6 pm
- ◆ **Tickets:** £20 per adult, children's tickets are free

For further information, visit our webpage here:  
[cpreherts.org.uk/getinvolved/events/st-pauls-walden-bury-open-garden-and-music-event-5-july-2026/](https://cpreherts.org.uk/getinvolved/events/st-pauls-walden-bury-open-garden-and-music-event-5-july-2026/)



## Our 'Walk 100 Miles' challenge (January-September 2026)



CPRE Hertfordshire is promoting our self-guided walks for our supporters to enjoy through our **'Walk 100 Miles' challenge**.

Join our 'Walk 100 Miles' challenge and help raise funds to continue our work protecting Hertfordshire's countryside for generations to come. Walk as many miles as you can or the full 100 miles – the main mission is to enjoy Hertfordshire's countryside!



Choose from our range of three dozen walking routes all mapped on our website covering the breadth of Hertfordshire's countryside. These have been specially devised by our CPRE Hertfordshire volunteers for their beautiful views and unique landscapes.

For further information, visit our webpage here:  
[cpreherts.org.uk/get-involved/events/our-walk-100-miles-challenge/](https://cpreherts.org.uk/get-involved/events/our-walk-100-miles-challenge/)

# AGM and Countryside Day invitation



Saturday 3rd October at Hatfield House

Join us for a special celebratory centenary Countryside Day to celebrate our County including:

- ◆ talks
- ◆ countryside stalls
- ◆ activities
- ◆ walks of the estate
- ◆ workshops

Please let us know early if you can make it, limited tickets available!  
RSVP YOUR ATTENDANCE: [abby@cpreherts.org.uk](mailto:abby@cpreherts.org.uk)



# Hedgerows update

(Editor's note – In our last newsletter we announced our new CPRE Hertfordshire Hedgerow Heroes project. The project aims to plant at least 2,100 metres of new hedgerows through the winter months, and as we go to press in early March, we're delighted to report that we are on track to meet or exceed this target.)

## CPRE Hertfordshire Hedgerow Heroes – project update

January and February have been a good test for our planting, and it's a testament to the work of our volunteers that many of the whips we planted in November and December are still standing. The wind and rain have done their best to undo our hard work, but our hedgerows have got off to a great start, and within a few years I'm sure the fieldfares, hedgehogs, overwintering butterflies and all the other species that live in our wintery landscape will thank us for the shelter.

## Shelter for wildlife and livestock

Hedges don't just offer respite from the elements to those who stand within their branches. There is evidence that they warm whole fields by acting as shelterbelts, reducing windchill across nearby ground, which can often be a few degrees warmer than the other side of a hedge. This is a lifeline not just for overwintering livestock that shelter behind it, but for the wildlife that uses them to crisscross the otherwise wind-battered landscape. Cattle and sheep in more hedged landscapes typically have less stress and therefore use less energy over winter than those in more open ones, meaning the farmer will have happier, healthier animals in the long run.

## Nature's drainage system: hedges and water management

You may notice on your winter walks (if you have good wellies!) that the ground around hedgerows is often a lot less waterlogged than a footpath or

open field. The porous nature of hedgerow soil, pockmarked by complex root systems and earthworm activity, means that water drains more easily into the land, infiltrating down to aquifers or groundwater. This, alongside interception by the branches and stems, reduces the peaks of flooding, by slowing the flow of rainfall further up catchment before it reaches the main channel.

In Wales, the careful placement of tree strips, analogous to hedgerows, reduced the size of flood peaks by 40%. Hedges are therefore an essential tool in making our landscapes more resilient in the face of increased rainfall due to climate change. By restoring the hedgerow network in Hertfordshire, we can help safeguard the towns downstream, relieving pressure on hard flood defence infrastructure.

To see these benefits, we need to get hedges planted now, so our landscapes are resilient in the future.

- James Lunt, Hedgerow Heroes Project Officer



Our Hedgerow Heroes take a tea break on-site



# Volunteering

As always, we are extremely grateful to all our volunteers for the support they give us in all areas of CPRE Hertfordshire.

In the past 6 months we have welcomed many new volunteers particularly through our Hedgerows Heroes project and as our projects grow, we are always seeking new volunteers.

If you would like to explore our new volunteer opportunities please get in touch: [volunteering@cpreherts.org.uk](mailto:volunteering@cpreherts.org.uk) and we will be happy to share our current opportunities with you.

## Diane Pettit – Our thanks for her dedication to CPRE Hertfordshire for over 20 years



Diane has been volunteering for CPRE Hertfordshire for over 20 years - four hours every Monday morning come rain or shine. She has now decided to retire.

During her volunteering Diane has supported CPRE Hertfordshire in so many ways. She has maintained databases, stuffed newsletters, come in on extra days to help where needed, fulfilled merchandise orders, checked gift aid compliance, helped to pack the boxes to take to events and attended them to help with teas, run the raffle, sell merchandise or stand in the middle of a field “manning” our stall. She has always been willing to try something new and help where she can.

Diane has been a CPRE member for 25 years. She promotes the charity to friends and to members of various groups to which she belongs, distributing newsletters and merchandise order forms, encouraging others to join and/or donate. She has been a great asset to the charity. We extend our huge appreciation for everything she has done for us, and we wish her well in her retirement.

## Gill Bryant – Our thanks for her support to CPRE Hertfordshire over 11 years

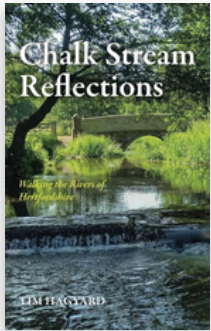


We would like to extend a sincere thank you to Gill Bryant for her dedicated work over the past 11 years.

She has been a valued member of the team at CPRE Hertfordshire in the role of Office Manager, overseeing administrative systems, facility maintenance, booking events, and office supplies along with supporting with the organisation of the AGM and the Children’s Art Competition.

While we are sad to see Gill leave, we wish her the very best in her next chapter.

# Our books, cards and gifts



## Chalk Stream Reflections

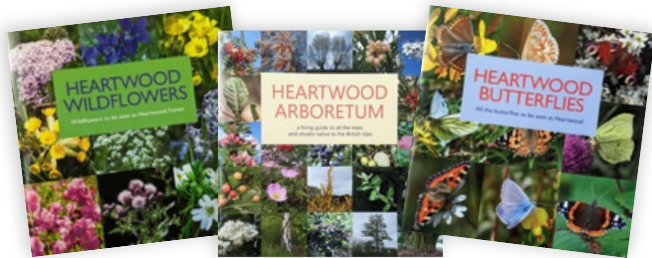
£11.99

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.

## Heartwood Wildlife Guidebooks

£9.99 each

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



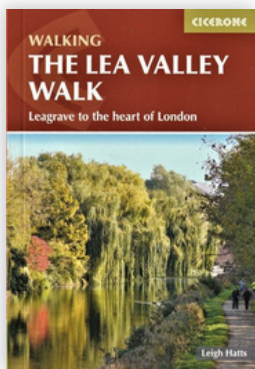
## Children's Nature Books

Charming children's books by local author Elena Mannion, with detailed full colour illustrations by Erin Brown. They cover important conservation themes and are suitable for children aged 4+.



'Old Oak & Little Acorn' and 'Old Oak and the Wild Flowers' £12.99

'The Happy Hedgerow' £10.99



## Walking The Lea Valley Walk

£12.95

The Lea Valley Walk, part of the widely-acclaimed Cicerone series of walking books. The Lea is Hertfordshire's principal river, flowing from its source at Legrave near Luton through much of the county before reaching the Thames. The Lea Valley Walk covers 53½ miles and was formally opened in 1993.

The Cicerone guide (third edition published in 2015) is full of information about the river and its valley, and is the essential companion for walkers undertaking this scenic and varied route.

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



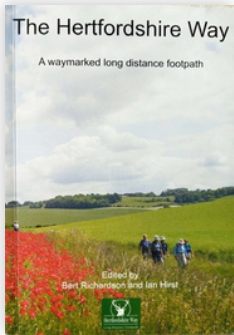
Show your support with our heavy cotton tote bags

### Heavy Cotton Tote Bag

£4 each

Our heavy cotton tote bags have our logo on a plain background on one side, and the logo with our colourful 'swoosh' on the other side.

Each bag is approximately 36 x 41 cm

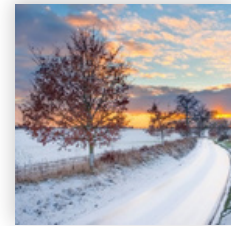
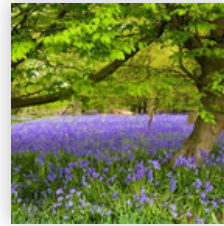


### The Hertfordshire Way

£10

The most up-to-date edition of the essential guidebook to The Hertfordshire Way (third edition published in 2017). Edited by Bert Richardson and Ian Hirst, this is the official guide to the 195 mile waymarked footpath.

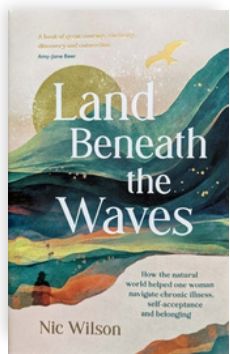
The route is fully waymarked and this guidebook makes it easy to follow. The book has route maps and guidance notes, as well as contextual information about points of interest along the way, including notes on history, architecture, wildlife, waterways, folklore, and famous local residents.



### Spring Bluebells and Winter Sunset blank greetings Cards

£5 per pack

Our blank greetings cards are a year-round best-seller. Sold in packs of eight cards of one design. Choose either Spring Bluebells or Winter Sunset. Cards are approximately 15cm square. Images by local award-winning photographer and long-time CPRE Hertfordshire supporter Chris Howe.



### Land Beneath the Waves

£18.99

Land Beneath the Waves by local author Nic Wilson is a moving and revealing memoir of living with chronic illness and how our relationship with the natural world can help. This book inspires us to develop a meaningful bond with

our local natural spaces and landscapes, illuminating a hopeful path for a better future.



### Children's Nature Art Greetings Cards

£4 per pack

We've selected some of the winning artworks from our Children's Art Competition to make charming and colourful blank greetings cards. A pack of five blank cards, one each of the five different images shown here.

Cards are A6 size (10.5 cm x 14.8 cm)

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You can see our full product range and order online at

↓

[cpreherts.org.uk/get-involved/merchandise](http://cpreherts.org.uk/get-involved/merchandise)

You can pay online with a debit or credit card, or use the enclosed order form for payment via cheque or BACS.

**£4 p&p per order**

# 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 info



### CPRE Hertfordshire Officers and Staff

**President:** Sir Simon Bowes-Lyon, KCVO

**Honorary Life Vice Presidents:** Dorothy Abel Smith, MBE, Nicholas Halsey TD, DL, Dr Mervyn Miller, Anthony Eastwood, David Irving, Elizabeth Hamilton, Kevin FitzGerald TD, DL, Peter Waine OBE

**Honorary Vice President:** Ralph Abel Smith

**Officers:** Hon. Chairman: Peter Waine OBE, Vice Chair: Adam Hopwood, Hon. Treasurer: Steve Wiltshire

**Board of Trustees:** Peter Waine OBE, Elizabeth Hamilton, Steve Wiltshire, Adam Hopwood, Kruna Vukmirovic, Paul Harding, Andrew Anastasiou, Catherine Roberg

**Staff:** Chief Executive: Abby Coften, Planning Manager: Chris Berry, Planning Assistant: Linda Brookes

CPRE Hertfordshire is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. Registered charity number: 1162419.

**Bankers:** Barclays Bank plc, Welwyn Garden City

**CPRE Patron:** His Majesty The King

100  
YEARS



Campaign to Protect  
Rural England  
Hertfordshire