



The countryside charity
Hertfordshire

Winter Newsletter 2021

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A view from the chair



I am honoured to have been appointed chairman of CPRE Hertfordshire and would like to thank my predecessor, Richard Bullen for his 12 years of outstanding support to our charity and his help to me since I have been a trustee. Most of our trustee team have only joined us recently and I am delighted that they bring an amazing range of skills and experience to our efforts.

I have enjoyed the countryside since I was a child, walking, spotting birds and animals and fishing and I am keen to see as much of it protected and enhanced as possible, especially in Hertfordshire where it faces unrelenting pressure for housing development. By background, I am a Chartered Management Accountant and have chaired other charities, a parish council and membership organisations.

We face very confused messages from the government, on one hand declaring undying support for the Green Belt and on the other imposing housing targets on Local Authorities which

cannot be met without invading the Green Belt. That is the major issue facing the Hertfordshire countryside and I am very pleased that CPRE Hertfordshire has the skills and initiative under our recently appointed Chief Executive, Martin Varco, to give advice to local authorities, parish councils, community groups and residents' associations.

We have recently published two very cogent papers "Our countryside is under threat like never before" on the massive erosion of Hertfordshire's Green Belt set out in the various District Plans that have been adopted and those which are still being developed. Also we have set out a very clear policy on the construction of Solar Energy Farms, which we hope will influence the positioning of these in the future.

In our efforts to promote an appreciation of the countryside our Awards Schemes are designed to reward and promote those who take active steps to improve rural life and conserve the countryside, particularly initiatives to combat climate change. Our Children's Art Competition hopefully inspires young people to take an active interest in the countryside.

We fully support CPRE national initiatives such as the Hedgerow Campaign.

I look forward to working with our trustees, chief executive and all our staff and volunteers.

Allan McNab
Chairman



AGM

Last year's AGM was virtual so it was lovely to be able to meet in person again this year. The setting was Woolmer Green Village Hall and the date Saturday 11 September; it was a beautiful sunny day, which was good because all the doors and windows needed to be open!

It was a pleasure to reappoint Sir Simon Bowes Lyon as President. We thanked Richard Bullen, outgoing Chairman, for everything he has contributed during his time in office and presented him with a small gift. The meeting unanimously voted for Allan McNab as the new Chairman and appointed three new trustees, Claire Russell, Steve Wiltshire and Glenn Tracey¹. The rest of our trustee board were happy to stand for re-election and were all voted in for a further year. Information about each of our trustees is on the website at www.cpreherts.org.uk/about-us/trustees/

We thanked all our amazing volunteers for the huge variety of things they do to help us protect, promote and enhance Hertfordshire's countryside for everyone to value and enjoy.

Tom Fyans, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Policy and Campaigns at National CPRE, held an interesting Q&A session where many of our members asked searching questions.

Following the meeting was an opportunity to socialise and catch up over a cup of tea and biscuits, we held a raffle and CPRE Hertfordshire Merchandise was on sale.

¹ Since the AGM, Glenn has decided to stand down as a Trustee but remain as a volunteer.

Children's Art Competition

To help young children and their families connect with the countryside and perhaps think about it in a different way, we run an annual Children's Art Competition. We set a different environmental or nature-related theme each year. The competition this year has the theme The Colour of Nature.

The benefits of young people engaging with the countryside have never been more important:

- Children's mental, physical and emotional health and wellbeing are improved by being in nature and looking at nature.
- Art and nature are likely to have a part to play somewhere on each School's Development Plans.
- The countryside and nature bring topics to life across many aspects of the primary school curriculum.
- Appreciation of and connecting with nature is key within the teaching of climate change awareness.
- Art is an inspiring media for engaging with many children and has numerous known emotional, physical, cognitive and learning benefits.

For all of these reasons we hope that as many primary schools as possible will take part in this year's Children's Art Competition. Details, including terms and conditions of entry, have been sent to primary schools in Hertfordshire and can be found on our website. We are also delighted to receive art direct from individual children if their school decides not to participate. Deadline is Friday 26 November.

We look forward to receiving wonderful artworks capturing the colours and beauty of our amazing Hertfordshire countryside.

Gill Bryant
Office Manager



Keep Hertfordshire Beautiful, Stop the Litter (2016)



Water, Water Everywhere (2014)



Wildlife in our Hertfordshire Countryside (2015)

Why I Volunteer

I started volunteering for CPRE Hertfordshire in September 2020.

Every week I check council websites for new planning applications for developments within the Green Belt and in areas that might be of concern to CPRE. If I find any of concern I forward the details to the CPRE Herts planning team for further investigation if necessary. Some applications might immediately stand out as needing further investigation, particularly if you are familiar with the area, while others may involve a bit of sleuthing such as inspecting the site plan, or checking out the area on google maps. I currently look after three districts in Hertfordshire.

During the lockdown of 2020 I spent a lot of time in the Hertfordshire countryside and realised I had been taking the beauty and accessibility of it for granted. I wanted to try and support the protection of it in some way while fitting around my work and personal life and the planning screening role was ideal for this as it is so flexible. Getting to understand the work CPRE do through my volunteer role has been inspiring, I had no idea there was so much hard work being done to protect our countryside!

The interview process was incredibly friendly and the team so welcoming, even though I haven't met them face to face as yet I feel I know them.

I have lived in Hertfordshire villages all my life and couldn't imagine a better place to be. There is just so much countryside out there to explore, and it has to be preserved for the generations to come. I owe that to my three year old son.

Natalie Boshier
Planning Volunteer



Natalie on her farm in the countryside near Welwyn

Editor's note. A big thank you to Natalie for having chosen to volunteer with us, and for contributing her story. Natalie and her fellow 'planning screening' volunteers review planning applications in all 10 Hertfordshire districts every week, and we are extremely grateful to each of them for their dedication and skill.

St Albans Council has approved 150 dwellings for this Green Belt site at Sewell Park, Harpenden Road. Photo by CLASH



Planning report

Now that I feel I have just about got my feet under the table – literally in fact as we have thankfully returned to working at our desks in the Welwyn office – it is clear what has needed most attention recently. After the successful campaign on the Dacorum Draft Local Plan consultation in the Spring, we moved swiftly on to the consultation on the Three Rivers Draft Local Plan in August and, at the time of writing this update, we have been informed that the Hertsmeire Draft Local Plan will be published on 11th October. Many of the issues are similar, most notably the inappropriate and unnecessary proposed release of vast swathes of Green Belt countryside for housing, and this is of course a common pattern throughout the County and of great concern to our local CPRE members.

Our increasingly well-oiled publicity and response machines have made excellent connections with local campaign groups in all cases and our submissions have coincided with the local CPRE Hertfordshire Green Belt Campaign launched in August. You can read more about our Green Belt Campaign in Martin's article on pages 8 & 9. In essence we are using this Campaign to highlight the discrepancy between what Government ministers are saying about protecting the Green Belt, and what is happening on the ground with Local Plans and planning appeals. An example is the

recent significant decision on 100 dwellings in the Green Belt at Bullens Green Lane, Colney Heath where the Inspector allowed the developer's appeal primarily due to lack of 5 year housing supply.

This decision has had far-reaching consequences and, together with a more recent decision by St Albans Council to approve 150 dwellings in the Green Belt at Sewell Park, Harpenden Road, is highly damaging. It gives added urgency to our continued efforts to persuade local Councillors that they have the capability to refuse applications on the basis of designated protected areas, and that both national planning policy and recent Government statements reinforce the status of these designated protected areas.

Responses to planning applications continue to be made and after a relatively quiet period over July/August we are noticing a definite increase in new applications in recent weeks. We are always most grateful to our planning volunteers for keeping their eagle eyes on the council planning lists.

A specific initiative this quarter has been the preparation of a policy statement on ground-mounted solar energy installations, partly encouraged by a rash of proposals for solar 'farms' all over the County. A particular hot-spot is the Essex/Herts boundary and we have been working with CPRE Essex on joint approaches to applications for battery

storage facilities as well as the fields of photovoltaic panels. Our policy statement has been published on our website and aims to provide guidance for objectors as well as the councils' Planning Committee Members who will be making the decisions.

I should finish this brief roundup with a word on the breaking news of the Planning Bill, and the changes at the new Department for Levelling Up etc which is hard to resist commenting on but I will. It is undeniably good news that the progress of the Planning Bill has been delayed, and CPRE can take considerable credit for being part of the opposition.

There is the opportunity to recast the non-democratic aspects of the proposed legislation which were proving toxic for many MPs of all parties, and especially ours in Hertfordshire. This all ties in well with our local campaigning and we are now working to identify specifically what we would like to see in legislation and guidance to ensure continued protection of the designated areas including the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Green Belt.

Rest assured that this will be done, in cooperation with other local CPREs and the national charity as much as possible. Interesting times indeed for planning, and we will continue to fight for our precious countryside as ever.

Chris Berry
Planning Manager

CPRE Hertfordshire Appeal for Donations

Our voices are being heard – we are making a difference, but we need your help so we can continue to protect our precious countryside.

The government has recently paused its deeply unpopular plans for shaking up the planning system. While it's still early days this acknowledgement from the government is a victory for people, nature and the countryside.

Here in Hertfordshire, we have been supporting this national campaign while also focusing on local planning issues.

The threats to the Hertfordshire countryside are more immediate

As you can see from the accompanying table seven of the ten boroughs in Hertfordshire have new Local Plans in varying stages of development and there is growing evidence of a disconnect between recent Government statements and the application of planning policy at a local level. Local plans in preparation in Hertfordshire are focused on meeting what Councillors appear to regard as non-negotiable housing targets. These targets are further inflated by being based on out-of-date figures.

To counter these misconceptions and mis-application of planning policy, we've been meeting with Hertfordshire MPs, asking them to back up repeated Government pledges to protect the Green Belt with written instruction in that regard for local authorities. We are also meeting with local Councillors right across the county, and demonstrating to them that planning policy allows them to prioritise the protection of the Green Belt and

open green spaces. At the same time, we are directly engaging with and advising more local campaign groups than ever before, over 120 so far in 2021, to ensure their voice and ours is amplified.

Our campaigning is making a positive difference

As an example, in response to the recent Local Plan consultation in Dacorum, our campaigning led to a 30% increase in responses over previous consultations and in their summary Dacorum Borough Council (DBC) acknowledged the part CPRE Hertfordshire played in highlighting the key issues. And our campaign has had an impact. DBC have paused the Local Plan and announced a rethink, focusing on identifying urban and brownfield sites, and reducing impact on the countryside.

We hope to replicate and extend this success across other districts

In response to the scale of the challenges across Hertfordshire, we have increased our paid resources and increased the hours that they work. For example:

- it takes about £250 in staff cost to research site history, prepare for, and attend a meeting to advise a local campaign group, and
- it takes about £2000 in staff cost to analyse a single local authority's draft Local Plan and prepare our technical analysis and submittal.



To help fund this we are launching our winter appeal for donations to help protect Hertfordshire's countryside.

Please help by donating

There are several ways you can do this;

- **Website:** we can process donations via credit card, debit card, or PayPal through a secure "Donate" button on our website. <https://www.cpreherts.org.uk>. If you click on this you are able to make a donation of any amount. You can also choose to let us claim the Gift Aid. This adds 25% to your donation.
- **Bank transfer:** any amount is always welcome (BACS CPRE Hertfordshire / 20-92-54 / 60469335, and please quote reference Appeal/surname).
- **Cheque:** please make cheque payable to CPRE Hertfordshire and post to: CPRE Hertfordshire, 31a Church Street, Welwyn, Herts, AL6 9LW

Thank you for your continued support of our charity. We are deeply grateful for the generosity of our members and supporters in funding our activities.

Martin Varco
Chief Executive

Local plan Overview - Hertfordshire Districts at October 2021

District Plan	Oct – Dec 2021	Jan – Jun 2022	Jul - Dec 2022	Potential Adoption
Broxbourne Local Plan 2018-2033				Adopted June 2020
Dacorum* Local Plan 2020 -2038	Following feedback from the Emerging Strategy for Growth consultation in Feb 2021 the next stage (Reg 18 or 19) has been deferred. Revised timetable awaited			TBC
East Herts District Plan 2011-2033				Adopted Oct 2018
Hertsmere* Local Plan 2020-2036	Reg 18 – Draft Local Plan consultation launched Oct			2023
North Herts Local Plan 2011-2031	Following Examination, Inspector's final report expected Nov 2021			2021/22
St Albans* Local Plan 2020-2038		Regulation 18 consultation expected Jan/ Feb 2022		2023/24
Stevenage Local Plan 2011-2031				Adopted May 2019
Three Rivers* Local Plan 2021-2036	Reg 18 Preferred Policy Options consultation ended Aug 2021		Reg 19 Pre-Sub Plan consultation due Nov/Dec 2022	2023
Watford* Local Plan 2018-2036	Examination in progress Sept 21 – Apr 22			2022
Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan 2013-2032	EIP still in progress Main Modifications consultation due Nov/Dec 2021			2022
South West * Herts Joint Strategic Plan		Reg 18 Issues and Options Consultation Jan/Feb		2024
Hertfordshire Minerals Local Plan Review	Submission for Examination due			2022
Hertfordshire Waste Local Plan Review			Reg 19 Pre-Sub Consultation	2024

* Five district councils working on **South West Herts Joint Strategic Plan**.

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 - views sought as to whether the plan is legally compliant and meets the test of soundness in the National Planning Policy Framework NPPF.

Examination in Public (EIP): Public hearing held by independent Planning Inspector to assess merits of Submitted Local Plan Policies and their soundness.

Campaigning to protect the Green Belt

The team have had a busy year campaigning to protect the Green Belt. Our campaign is focused on two fronts. Firstly, we are lobbying MPs and the Government to issue clarifications on how national Planning policy is interpreted by Local Authorities and secondly, we are engaging with local groups to amplify our voice in responding to Local Plan consultations.

More than half of the land in Hertfordshire is within the London Metropolitan Green Belt. But the future of Hertfordshire's Green Belt is at a critical juncture. Seven of the ten borough councils in Hertfordshire have new Local Plans in various stages of development. Influencing the outcome of these Local Plans is crucial to the future of our Green Belt as once adopted these Local Plans will define what development happens where for the next 15 – 20 years.

Pushing for Government clarifications.

To highlight the issue, we published a report ("The Green Belt is under greater threat than ever before") on the threat posed to the Green Belt by proposed development sites contained in these emerging Local Plans and the findings made sobering reading.

Our research found that 54,537 new homes are proposed on land in Hertfordshire's Green Belt, and this



is in addition to over 17,500 that have been approved or are already being built on land recently removed from the Green Belt as part of the Local Plan process.

The report also highlights the growing disconnect between recent Government statements pledging to protect the Green Belt, and the application of planning policy at local level by councils and planning inspectors.

We have shared our report widely on social media and in the press. We sent our report to all Hertfordshire MPs and local Council Leaders, with a request of them to seek clarification from the Government on how their recent statements pledging to protect the Green Belt are being translated into planning guidance for local authorities. We are pleased to see that so far one

local MP and two Council Leaders have taken up our request and written to the Minister for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

To drive home the key messages, we have requested face-to-face meetings with elected officials. We have so far met with 3 of the 11 local MPs in Hertfordshire, Gagan Mohindra (Southwest Hertfordshire), Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden), and Daisy Cooper (St Albans), with Julie Marson (Hertford) next in line, with the others still being scheduled. We are also meeting with the Heads of Planning for each borough to put our points of view across and to build a closer working relationship with them.

Amplifying our voice in response to local plans: In response to each of the Local Plan consultations we conduct an analysis of all the proposed policies

and sites in the draft Plan, and our planning team submits a detailed technical review.

In order to “amplify our voice” we have significantly expanded our stakeholder outreach and engagement. We have built a register of key stakeholders with whom we share our analysis. This register, organized by Borough includes local campaign groups, residents’ associations, parish councils, town and borough councillors, MPs and local press and media. We collect email addresses and Facebook links for these groups using Facebook and internet searches.

In addition to sharing our analyses and technical review of the relevant draft Local Plan with these stakeholders we also produce a higher-level summary aimed at helping local groups

and individuals make their own, informed responses to their Local Plan consultation.

While it is still early days in terms of measuring our impact on the outcome of the Local Plans, we do know that the “amplifying our voice” approach is working. Earlier in the year we engaged with over 50 local groups and stakeholders in Dacorum Borough in response to the latest draft Local Plan consultation. This resulted in the council receiving over 3,300 responses, a 30% increase over previous consultations, and a significant and publicly-declared change in direction away from developing greenfield sites to a renewed emphasis on redeveloping so-called ‘brownfield’ (previously developed) land. In Three Rivers District as well, we have partnered with local groups to ensure

a coordinated response to the Local Plan consultation, and at the time of writing, we understand the Three Rivers Council is having a rethink. As a result of our increased stakeholder outreach and engagement we are also seeing new members joining CPRE from throughout the county.

We encourage all members to write to their local MPs expressing their concern at the Government’s failure to provide guidance to local authorities that protecting the Green Belt is of paramount importance, both for our own health and well-being and in helping to address the climate emergency.

Martin Varco
Chief Executive



71 dwellings are proposed for this Green Belt site at Bedmond, Three Rivers District, photo by Eliza Hermann

A Guest Speaker for your Group's Next Gathering?

For a number of years I have given talks on behalf of CPRE Hertfordshire to groups around the county. In August I gave a talk to a Probus group, my first live talk since March 2020. It was lovely to be in front of a real audience again and be able to chat informally before and afterwards with audience members. My topic on this occasion was 'A recent history of Hertfordshire, with particular reference to the founding and subsequent work of CPRE'.

In this short talk, I explain how London's growth into rural Hertfordshire took off with the coming of the railways and the arrival of private motor cars. Similar uncontrolled loss of countryside was happening all over England, and by the 1920s had become a national scandal. When CPRE was founded nationally in 1926 (and in Hertfordshire two years later), it campaigned to stop this 'ribbon development', bring in universal development control, recognise nationally important landscapes and create Green Belts to protect open countryside around urban areas. I illustrate how this quartet of achievements has meant that 80% of Hertfordshire is still rural. The talk lasts around 25 minutes, ideal to precede or follow a lunch or dinner.

In September I was delighted to be the guest speaker at three local WI meetings. On each occasion the group hadn't met in its usual venue since the start of the pandemic and the excitement was palpable. Twice I

gave my long-standing talk on walking the Hertfordshire Way, a route which passes through some of the county's loveliest landscapes. The talk features the views, villages, buildings, chalk streams, churches and wildlife which I have encountered along the Way.

At the third of these meetings I presented my talk on rural churches in Hertfordshire. My interest was kindled during my Hertfordshire Way walk, and I have since photographed many churches around the county. The talk begins with a brief history of local church building since Saxon times, then looks at a miscellany of the many amazing objects contained within and outside their walls.

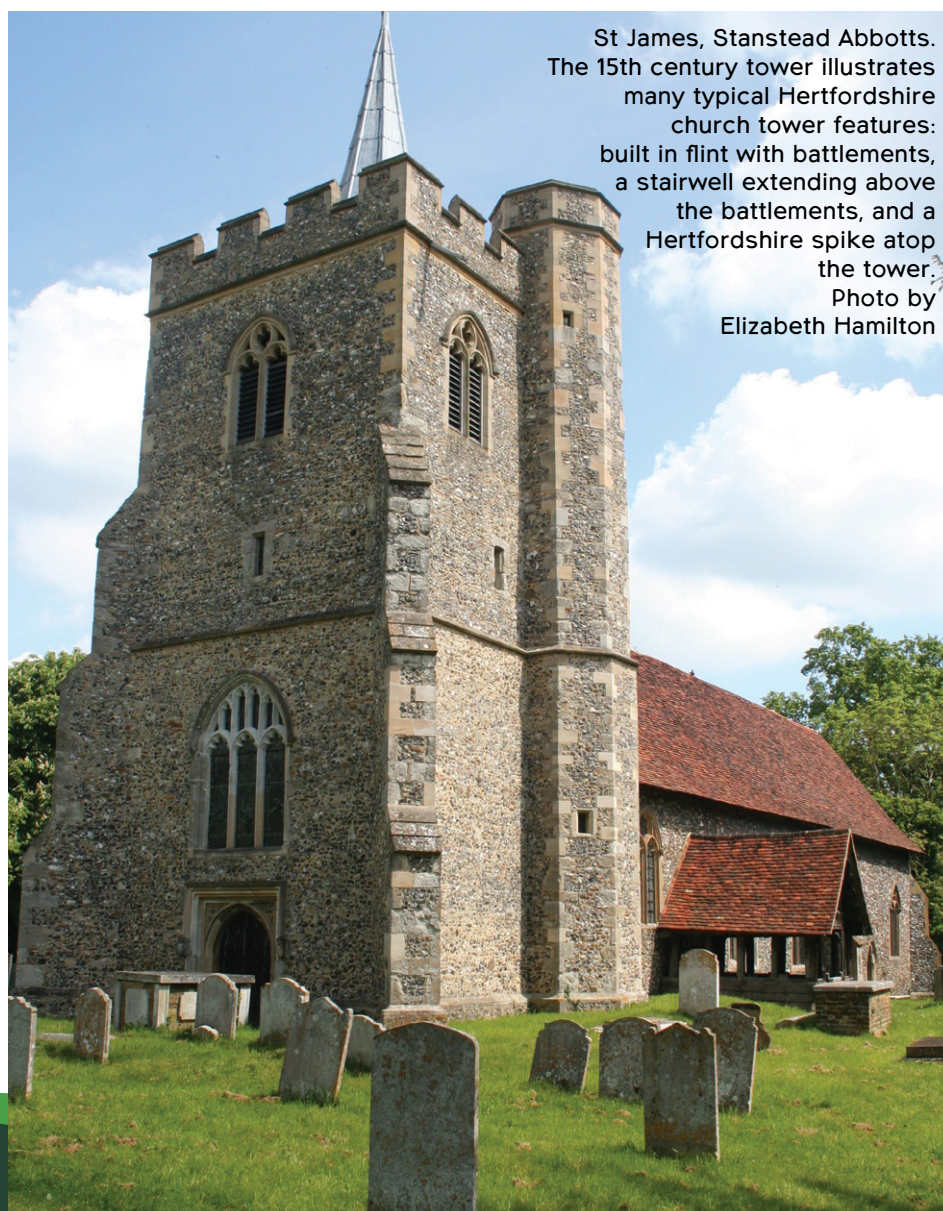
I have another talk based on my walk down the Lea Valley. Its title,

'Following the Swan', is a reference to the swan logo used on the waymarks when the Lea Valley Walk was set up in 1993. So far I have walked from the source at Leagrave to just beyond the Hertfordshire boundary at Enfield Island, and there's plenty of history and features of interest along the route.

My talks usually last 45-60 minutes (apart from the short history talk), and are well illustrated by slides. Please contact the office to enquire about a possible booking. I donate my fees to CPRE Hertfordshire, so that every talk contributes to helping us protect the county's countryside.

Elizabeth Hamilton

Trustee & Former CPRE
Hertfordshire Chairman



St James, Stanstead Abbots.
The 15th century tower illustrates many typical Hertfordshire church tower features: built in flint with battlements, a stairwell extending above the battlements, and a Hertfordshire spike atop the tower.
Photo by Elizabeth Hamilton

Biodiversity and pesticides

17 times. I was astonished when I read it, especially as I was eating my breakfast cereal. 17 is the average number of times that a UK arable field is sprayed with pesticides each year.

All pesticides must be toxic, or poisonous, to be effective against the pests they are intended to control therefore they cannot be good for the environment, animals and or even humans so I researched further. I found out much about invertebrate and microbial life destruction. I learned how the “yield is king” farming culture drives pesticide use. I discovered that we even export our “banned” pesticides to other developing countries.

Our insect populations have plummeted for several reasons but one is the industrial use of pesticides. In view of the growing understanding of biodiversity loss and human effect on climate change surely it must be time to curb our use of pesticides everywhere.

I stopped using pesticides in my garden and started gardening organically many years ago so I know the initial reduction in yield. But I also know the dramatically increased abundance in pollinators and magical sightings of insect life I had never



Photo by Terry Over

seen before. In addition the soil health has improved, as have my yields over time, and my “wellbeing” space has never looked so good. I am convinced that us gardeners could make a big difference if we cleared out all those synthetic chemicals sitting in our sheds and stopped using pesticides all together.

And maybe it is time for me to campaign more to encourage a ban on pesticides on a wider scale for the benefit of our food, our health and our environment?

Nationally I have signed the “Ban urban and garden pesticides to protect bees, other wildlife and human health” on the UK Government and Parliament website <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/590309>

Locally I could petition or write to encourage our Councils to go pesticide free in our parks, on our roadside verges and around our schools. I should encourage and support those farmers who are transitioning to more environmentally sound practices.

Individually I could simply educate myself more by reading the occasional article such as on the Pesticide Action Network UK website or just have a discussion with the family over that Sunday lunch and its accompanying array of perfectly roasted pesticide residues.

Terry Over
Trustee

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CPRE Hertfordshire Merchandise

Please support us by placing an order today. Profit from every item funds our work to protect, promote and enhance Hertfordshire's countryside. The easiest way to order is online at <https://www.cpreherts.org.uk/get-involved/merchandise/> where you can place your order and pay with your debit or credit card. If you are unable to order online, a paper order form is enclosed with this Newsletter for your convenience. £3 p&p per order.

Christmas Cards

Ten different unique designs, all by our local members and supporters. Square cards are 13 x 13 cm. Rectangular cards are A6 (10.5 cm x 14.8 cm). For large quantities please order as soon as possible as we have limited stock and may need to request a reprint. 70p each - you choose how many of each image.



'Four Seasons' Blank Greetings Cards

Packs of eight, with four each of two exclusive Hertfordshire scenes per pack, either Spring Bluebells and Winter Sunset or Summer Meadows and Autumn Mists. Cards are 15 cm square. All images by local award-winning photographer and long-time CPRE Hertfordshire supporter Chris Howe. £8 per pack of 8 cards.



Heavy Cotton Tote Bags

Our logo on a plain background on one side, and with a colourful 'swoosh' on the other side. Bags are approximately 36 x 41 cm with long handles to fit comfortably over the shoulder. £4 each.

