



The countryside charity  
Hertfordshire

# Spring Newsletter 2024



## Farewell to Martin and welcome to Abby

We were very fortunate to be able to appoint Martin Varco in March 2021, as CPRE Hertfordshire's first paid Chief Executive. He has given us three years of exceptional service, often voluntarily going beyond his contracted hours. We believe he's made an enormous positive contribution in modernising the charity and improving our digital communications, enhancing and prioritising our external focus on community groups and local campaigns right across the county and of course, getting our offices in Welwyn renovated. He steered the charity through the pandemic and has introduced new ways of working, making us more professional in all that we do. Martin has decided it's time to move on to new challenges and he leaves with all our good wishes.

We're delighted to welcome our new CPRE Hertfordshire Chief Executive, Abby Coften. Abby was born in Hitchin and grew up in Watton-at-Stone where her family have

resided for four generations. After gaining her degree at University of Hertfordshire, specializing in Marketing and Communications, Abby worked in a number of senior roles in the book publishing industry before moving to senior leadership roles in the national and local Hertfordshire "not for profit" sector across education, youth, health and volunteering. Abby lives in Ware with her husband and two young daughters and is a keen nature enthusiast, enjoying local rural walks with her family and passing down her knowledge of flora and fauna to her children.

Abby says: "I'm excited to be joining CPRE Hertfordshire at a pivotal time, bringing my knowledge and expertise in marketing and fundraising to the charity. With so many challenges to our countryside and protecting our Green Belt from inappropriate housing development, I am looking forward to connecting more people with our local countryside and making a real difference".

Allan McNab  
Chairman

## Thank you for your support with our Winter Appeal

In our last newsletter, we wrote to you with our Winter Fundraising Appeal, and we have been truly humbled by the level of support we have received from you.

Your generous donations have enabled us to continue our fight to protect Hertfordshire's countryside as we move into another busy year, where we are already seeing a number of significant new development proposals that threaten our beloved green spaces.

Since our last newsletter, we're pleased to report some key successes:

- The Planning Inspectorate dismissal of Fairfax Acquisitions appeal to build 195 dwellings on Green Belt land to the south of Shenley Road at Radlett in Hertsmere Borough
- The Planning Inspectorate dismissal of an appeal from Vistry Homes who wanted to build 150 dwellings in the Green Belt at Colney Heath in St Albans District
- The refused permission for a new minerals quarry at Ellenbrook Fields country park in Hatfield situated within the Green Belt

We're also pleased to report that our continued support for Save St Albans: Fight the Freight group in the campaign to stop the proposed massive rail freight terminal on Green Belt land at Park Street near St Albans has now proceeded to Judicial Review.

Despite our successes, now more than ever we need our members' support.

We continue to see proposals for wholly inappropriate and speculative large-scale planning applications on non-allocated sites all over the county as well as more proposals for extensive, commercial solar farms in protected areas like the National Landscape (AONB) and Green Belt.

We are doing everything we can to stop unnecessary development on Green Belt land and we hope that the Government's latest consultation on changes to the National Planning Policy Framework will truly help support the regeneration of brownfield land. In Hertfordshire alone, there is enough brownfield land to accommodate more than 20,000 new homes.

But with new Local and District Plans at different stages of development across the county, to which we are responding with our concerns including most recently our response to Dacorum Borough Council's consultation survey on their 'Revised Strategy for Growth', we know that this year we are going to have to fight harder than ever to protect the Hertfordshire countryside.

We hope that you will continue to join us in our fight.

Best wishes and thank you again.



Abby Coften  
Chief Executive

If you wish to donate, 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/)

# Planning update



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There was a spate of important activity over Christmas with the eventual publication of amendments to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), shortly after Royal Assent was gained for the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (LURA).

There are many commentaries online for both the NPPF and LURA, from all sides of the development fence, and the general feeling is that Green Belt protections are increased but not enough. It is certainly good news that the NPPF, backed up by Ministerial statements, now makes it clear that local authorities do not need to review or change their Green Belt boundaries nor to allocate Green Belt sites for development. Less fortuitously, they may still do so if they choose.

Locally we continue to monitor Local Plans following last year's consultations and we made substantial responses to partial re-consultations by Dacorum and Three Rivers on their Local Plans in December. Their positions are quite different and we were able to be supportive of Three Rivers decision to remove virtually all their Green Belt allocations which is a brave move in the circumstances, as the Council Leader said herself, and it will be interesting to see how they fare in later stages.

Dacorum have gone part of the way in removing smaller sites from towns and villages in their Local Plan but have loaded more into Hemel Hempstead. This has significant implications for Green Belt and the Chilterns National Landscape (AONB) in the vast project known as Hemel Garden Communities which we continue to oppose. The contrast with St Albans is salutary and we continue to explore how we may be able to influence Local Plans in the future, especially Hertsmeire who are re-consulting shortly.

We are increasingly turning our attention to Local Plan reviews in East Herts and North Herts where new councillors following last year's elections are grappling with the implications of the large allocations of former Green Belt they were bequeathed. We are offering support to newly elected Members on planning issues affecting the countryside and have already made some useful contacts. Our position is always to work within the planning system and although this can lead to frustration, councillors by and large recognise our contribution and talking to them when we can is an increasing part of our work.

The essential work of responding to planning applications continues, and we have been involved in some recent planning appeal successes, generally in cooperation with local community and interest groups. We were delighted that permission was refused for the developer to legally challenge the Inspector's dismissal of Bradmore Way, Brookmans Park, and very recently the same result occurred for a major residential appeal dismissal at Little Bushey Lane, Bushey. And in March, we hugely welcomed the Secretary of State's decision to dismiss the planning appeal for 1400 houses on Green Belt land east of Tring (Marshcroft).

We are also very pleased that Fight the Freight, the group opposing Herts County Council's sale of the former Radlett Aerodrome to warehouse developers, SEGRO, will soon have their day in court. In short, this Green Belt site was sold to the County Council for £1 in the 1980s. Last year the County sold it on, and Fight the Freight is challenging the sale legally. We have supported their efforts and the High Court has agreed to hear their case in an accelerated procedure in May or June – we wish them well!

Amazingly, we are still awaiting the Secretary of State's decisions on the major solar installation at Butterfly Lane, Aldenham (sixteen months and counting). In March, we appeared at a hearing for an appeal at Ragged Hall Lane, Chiswell Green. And we will soon be participating as part of a Joint Objectors' Group with the local residents' association at the inquiry for 135 houses in the Green Belt at Rectory Farm, Kings Langley.

The story of the Gilston "Garden Villages" continues and East Herts Council held the first of its new Community Forums at the end of February. Negotiations continue with the developers and we are keen to help the local communities get the best possible result from what was the largest ever release of Green Belt in the country.

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A small portion of the proposed solar farm site in the Green Belt at Aldenham Photo: E Hermann

# Local Plan Overview

District Plan	Comments & Key Milestones	Potential Adoption
Broxbourne Local Plan 2018-2033	Due for review 2025	Adopted June 2020
Dacorum* Local Plan 2024 -2040	Reg 18 consultation on Revised Strategy for Growth including proposed changes to housing allocations completed Dec 2023. See <a href="#">CPRE Hertfordshire response on our website</a> .	2025
East Herts District Plan 2011-2033	Due for review 2023	Adopted Oct 2018
Hertsmere* Local Plan 2024 to 2040	Following feedback from the Reg 18 Draft Local Plan consultation in Dec 2021 the Council 'set-aside' the Draft Plan. Further Reg 18 consultation on revised Draft Plan expected April/May 2024.	2026
North Herts Local Plan 2011-2031	Due for review 2023	Adopted Nov 2022
St Albans* Local Plan 2024-2041	Reg 18 consultation completed Sept 2023. See <a href="#">CPRE Hertfordshire response on our website</a> .	2025
Stevenage Local Plan 2011-2031	Due for review 2024	Adopted May 2019
Three Rivers* Local Plan to 2041	Reg 18 consultation for Part 4 'Preferred Local Plan Lower Housing Growth Option Protecting More Green Belt Land' completed Dec 2023. See <a href="#">CPRE Hertfordshire response on our website</a>	2026
Watford* Local Plan 2021-2038	Due for review 2027	Adopted Oct 2022
Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan 2016-2036	Due for review 2026	Adopted Oct 2023
South West Herts* Joint Strategic Plan to 2050	Reg 18 consultation completed Nov 2022. See <a href="#">CPRE Hertfordshire response on our website</a> . Vision and Objectives endorsed by the councils Nov 2023. Consultation on scale and pattern of growth expected mid 2024.	TBC
Hertfordshire Minerals & Waste Local Plan to 2040	Reg 18 consultation completed Oct 2022. See <a href="#">CPRE Hertfordshire response on our website</a> .	TBC

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

**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.

## 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)

# NPPF

On 19 December 2023 the government published long-awaited revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which sets out planning policies for England. The changes should – in theory – help protect the Hertfordshire countryside which is increasingly under threat from speculative development.

The newly revised NPPF brings some good news, but not as much as we had hoped. Here are the highlights.

## Good news for the Green Belt

The revised NPPF reinforces the importance of Local Plans, and incentivises local authority Councils to get on with making their Local Plan and keeping it up to date. Importantly, the government has added a new paragraph that makes it clear that Councils do not need to review their Green Belt nor allocate Green Belt land for development when preparing or updating their Local Plans. 6 out of our 10 local authorities in Hertfordshire are in the process of preparing or updating their Local Plans: Dacorum, Hertsmere, St Albans and Three Rivers have all published early-stage Regulation 18 Local Plans, and East Hertfordshire and North Hertfordshire Districts are both due to review and update their adopted Local Plans. So the revised policy on Green Belt is very relevant for the majority of people in our county.

## Partial good news about housing targets

One of the main reasons the Hertfordshire countryside is under so much development pressure is the top-down imposition of housing “targets” calculated using the Standard Method. Unfortunately, national planning practice guidance still requires the use of out-dated 2014-based household projections that we know over-inflate future household numbers. But the good news is that housing need calculated in this manner is now only an “advisory starting point,” not a mandatory target meaning local authorities may now, when preparing or updating their Local Plan, consider constraints such as Green Belt and other protected designations, and set their own realistic housing “target” accordingly.

## Possible good news about agricultural land

The revised NPPF says the availability of land for food production should be considered when local authorities allocate agricultural land for development. A new footnote states that when agricultural land must be used, poorer quality land should be preferred over higher quality i.e. Best and Most Versatile land.



Early spring in the Green Belt at Piccotts End Photo: M Nidd

For Hertfordshire, this means that areas with Grade 1, 2 and 3a agricultural land should have a stronger planning argument for opposing development. Much of the land around Colney Heath and Buntingford and land at Leverstock Green and east of Hemel Hempstead that is currently being proposed for development is Best and Most Versatile land.

## Missed opportunities on ‘brownfield first’ and affordable housing

Although the revised NPPF has dozens of changes, we don’t think it goes far enough to incentivise and enforce a ‘brownfield first’ approach to housing. CPRE research shows that 1.2 million new homes could be built on brownfield land across England, including more than 20,000 in Hertfordshire. We believe at least 60% of all new housing should be targeted on brownfield land and the government has missed the opportunity to set a meaningful approach to deliver this.

There is also a missed opportunity to tackle the housing crisis and incentivise the provision of truly affordable homes, including those for social-rent, close to where people live, work and go to school. We’ve seen far too many greenfield developments that mostly deliver unaffordable ‘executive homes’ and do little to meet actual local housing need.

## So, what next?

The revised NPPF means that all Hertfordshire District and Borough Councils that are preparing new Local Plans, or reviewing their currently adopted Local Plans, do not need to review, allocate, or release Green Belt land for development. We are calling on Councils such as St Albans and Dacorum to take full heed of this, and recognise that they simply do not need to proceed with their proposals to develop over a thousand hectares of the Green Belt. The Green Belt serves an important and enduring purpose for people and for wildlife, and is intended to be permanent, and we call on Councils to uphold this.

## Planning Update continued from page 3

An increasing number of ground-mounted solar installations are being proposed, often in sensitive areas including Green Belt and affecting the Chilterns National Landscape (AONB) and again we join and support local groups marshalling opposition where appropriate, for example, in the upper Beane valley near Cottered and west of Welwyn. We are enthusiastic supporters of the national CPRE campaign to promote roof-mounted solar generation which seems such a sensible approach, given the huge warehouses being constructed all over the place, let alone the opportunity for residential panels and roofing and the need to protect our precious countryside.

We have recently launched our new on-line planning training sessions covering Local Plans and the planning application process for people wanting to know more about the planning system and how to get involved. The sessions are led by myself and CPRE Hertfordshire trustee Alison Young, and you can sign up to attend [on our website](#). We hope that these will be the start of a series of webinars covering different aspects of planning and countryside issues.

We were pleased to welcome a new volunteer to the planning team in February – more are always welcome!

Chris Berry  
Planning Manager

## Volunteering with CPRE Hertfordshire



Some of our volunteers enjoying our "thank you" party in June 2023  
Photo: C Howe

We are fortunate to have several dozen passionate and dedicated volunteers, who give their time and skill to fight for the Hertfordshire countryside. And we would love to grow our volunteer team even further. If you have a few hours to spare, why not volunteer with us? We'll provide training and you'll be thanked and recognised for your contributions. See [our website](#) for more information or contact us at [office@cpreherts.org.uk](mailto:office@cpreherts.org.uk) to discuss how you might be able to help

Eliza Hermann  
Volunteer Coordinator

To my daughter, I leave  
this beautiful  
countryside to you



Looking across the upper Bulbourne Valley from near Tring

Leaving a gift in your will helps CPRE Hertfordshire protect the places you love

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

Registered Charity Number 1162419

# Why I became a Trustee of CPRE Hertfordshire

From the gentle ripples of the Chiltern Hills to the verdant meadows of the Lea Valley, Hertfordshire is blessed with an abundance of natural beauty. It's the perfect place to get out and enjoy nature, and like all things of value, it needs safeguarding. Becoming a Trustee of CPRE Hertfordshire has allowed me to play a more active role in both protecting and promoting our countryside.



Adam walking near Whitwell Photo: J Hopwood

I moved to Hertfordshire 6 years ago, settling in the village of Digswell just north of Welwyn Garden City. It has proved the perfect place to raise a family, and I now spend most weekends out with my wife and two young children enjoying all that our countryside has to offer - walking, cycling and even the occasional canoe trip along the River Lea!

When I first discovered CPRE Hertfordshire, I was impressed by their commitment to a number of areas, including campaigning against inappropriate development, advocating for sustainable land-use practices, promoting biodiversity and habitat conservation, and raising awareness through initiatives such as children's artwork competitions and community awards.

Several factors fuelled my decision to become a Trustee. Firstly, the Hertfordshire countryside isn't simply a pretty picture; it's the canvas for wildlife to thrive, the source of clean air and water that sustains us, and a wonderful place to relax and recharge. It's important to protect it, not just for ourselves, but also for the generations who will follow us. Secondly, I want to make a tangible difference, working with like-minded people to find solutions to the challenges facing the countryside. Finally, I want to spend more time driving positive action and promoting the countryside across my local community. Becoming a Trustee has proved the perfect way of achieving all three of those goals, by offering me a platform to actively contribute to a cause I deeply believe in.

As a Trustee, I wear many hats. I participate in board meetings, helping chart the strategic course of CPRE Hertfordshire. I collaborate with fellow Trustees, ensuring everything runs smoothly and effectively. I also have the opportunity to get involved with specific projects - for example, I will be working with colleagues over the coming months to review the effectiveness of the current IT set up and consider how this may need to evolve in the future. I have even been out and about walking some of our excellent self-guided walks, ensuring these are updated and ready for our wider community to enjoy. Our walks can be found [on our website](#).

Volunteering my time as a Trustee allows me to put the skills and experience I have developed through my professional career to bear supporting a cause which I am passionate about, knowing that I am making a lasting contribution that will be felt for generations to come. I'm proud to be part of a dedicated team working tirelessly to protect and promote the Hertfordshire countryside. If, like me, you think that this sounds like a rewarding pursuit, why not consider joining us as a Trustee? There are currently spaces available on the Board, and you can find out more by contacting our Volunteer Coordinator Eliza at [office@cpreherts.org.uk](mailto:office@cpreherts.org.uk)

Adam Hopwood  
Trustee

## 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, Stephen Pollock-Hill, David Irving, Elizabeth Hamilton, Kevin FitzGerald TD, DL, Peter Waine

Honorary Vice President: Ralph Abel Smith

Officers: Hon. Chairman: Allan McNab, Vice Chair: Alison Young, Hon. Treasurer: Steve Wiltshire

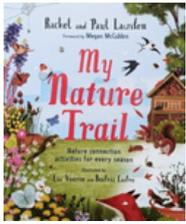
Board of Trustees: Allan McNab, Alison Young, Elizabeth Hamilton, Claire Russell, Steve Wiltshire, Claire Trbovic, Adam Hopwood

Staff: Chief Executive: Abby Coften, Planning Manager: Chris Berry, Planning Assistant: Linda Brookes, Office Manager: Gill Bryant

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

Bankers: Barclays Bank plc, Welwyn Garden City

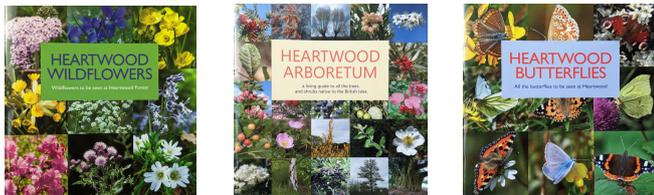
## Books



My Nature Trail, £10.99, a beautifully illustrated book which will captivate budding young nature lovers (and their adults). It's packed with a variety of fun outdoor nature activities, and will help children develop skills and knowledge about wildlife and conservation.

A high-quality paperback, 80 pages, original edition, published in October 2023. It's the perfect gift for young children or grandchildren. Suitable for children aged from three.

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 and are suitable for children aged from four.

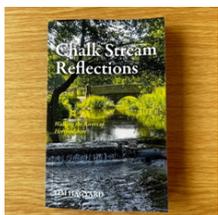


A trilogy of beautiful full-colour guidebooks produced by the Heartwood Monitoring Group of volunteers at Heartwood Forest. Each book is a high quality paperback packed with photographs and descriptive information to make species identification easy. £9.99 each

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

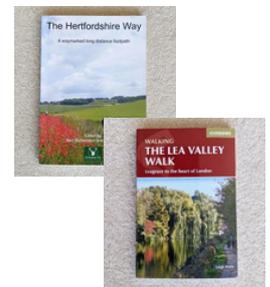
## CPRE Hertfordshire Merchandise

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 - four each of 2 exclusive Hertfordshire scenes per pack. Spring Bluebells and Winter Sunset or Summer Meadows and Autumn Mists. 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

