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Standing up for Hertfordshire's countryside

Our manifesto for the May 2025 local election in Hertfordshire

We are CPRE Hertfordshire, the countryside charity. We campaign to protect and promote the countryside throughout the County, for everyone. We work within the planning system to stand up for the countryside, so that it can continue to sustain, inspire and improve life for future generations.

Hertfordshire residents care deeply about the countryside, nature and the environment

We know that huge numbers of local Hertfordshire people value the countryside, nature and the environment and want these to be protected. This is evidenced by the record-breaking number of responses to Local Plan consultations and the many new community groups campaigning to save their local countryside from inappropriate development.

But the Hertfordshire countryside is now at severe risk, due to provisions in the recently-revised National Planning Policy Framework regarding 'grey belt' and the dangers for nature in the new Planning and Infrastructure Bill.

We are calling on ALL candidates to help us Save the Green Belt.

Support our campaign for an urgent change in the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) published in December 2024. We are calling on the Government to amend the definition of so-called 'grey belt' land in the Green Belt which is hugely damaging to its continued existence.

'Grey belt' was initially described as poor-quality Green Belt land like disused car parks but the actual definition in the recently revised NPPF is so broad that it could include almost any Green Belt land. This allows developers to submit speculative planning applications on Green Belt sites anywhere and argue they are 'grey belt'. With over half of Hertfordshire in the Green Belt, this puts our countryside at severe risk of inappropriate over-development and we want to see a more balanced approach to grey belt and the protection of nature.

We want the right development in the right places to meet genuine local housing need, and a truly 'brownfield first' approach to development so that unnecessary destruction of the countryside can be avoided. See [our website to find out more on this campaign](#).

Important principles

Protection should mean protection for our Green Belt - the land remaining in the Green Belt should receive strengthened protection.

Support realistic, sensible housing targets that prioritise the provision of truly affordable housing that meets local needs and hold developers to their promises in this regard, ensuring that all developments are in sustainable locations – which means places that are not totally car-dependent.

Uphold a truly ‘brownfield first’ development approach – there is enough brownfield (previously developed) land available in Hertfordshire for at least 29,580 dwellings¹, plus 4,213 long term empty² dwellings – these should be the priority for redevelopment and occupancy, before permitting development on greenfield sites.

Promote ‘rooftop renewables’ – generating renewable energy on buildings, car park canopies and similar structures – and opposing the use of agricultural land and valued landscapes for ground-mounted solar energy installations.

Ensure the identification and designation of specific Local Green Spaces in all Local Plans and Neighbourhood Plans; Hertfordshire has fewer designated Local Green Spaces than two-thirds of other local authorities across England, so we know there is considerable scope for greater take-up³

Oppose the expansion of airports which cause increased carbon emissions and air and noise pollution over much of Hertfordshire, and destroy local residents’ enjoyment of the countryside.

Make keeping the countryside a major priority – protect the Green Belt, the Chilterns National Landscape (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) and its setting, and all other designated protected areas and wildlife habitats including Hertfordshire’s rare chalk streams. Recognise the vital role of the countryside in mitigating climate change through carbon sequestration, improving domestic food security through crop production, improving health and well-being, and reducing flood risk through surface water retention.

Here at CPRE Hertfordshire, we call on all local candidates and Councillors to take up these principles. If you have any questions or would like to find out more about how you and your Council can stand up for the countryside, please email us at office@cpreherts.org.uk or ring us at 01438 717587.

¹ See CPRE’s latest data on brownfield, including data for each district in Hertfordshire, at <https://www.cpreherts.org.uk/news/brownfield-update-space-for-29580-homes-on-recycled-land-in-hertfordshire/>

² See the data for each district in Hertfordshire, at <https://www.cpreherts.org.uk/news/4213-long-term-empty-homes-could-help-meet-local-housing-need/>

³ Read CPREs research on Local Green Spaces and how local communities can protect their valued green spaces, at <https://www.cpreherts.org.uk/news/how-local-communities-can-protect-their-valued-green-spaces/>