

Our manifesto for the May 2026 local elections in Hertfordshire

We are CPRE Hertfordshire – the local charity for the Campaign to Protect Rural England. 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.

Local people 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 community groups campaigning to save their local countryside from inappropriate development.

But the Hertfordshire countryside is at severe risk due to 'grey belt' provisions first introduced in 2024 in the National Planning Policy Framework. Already, more than 1,138 hectares of pristine, greenfield sites in the designated Green Belt in Hertfordshire are threatened with construction because the developer is arguing that that these valued landscapes are 'grey belt'.¹

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

Support our campaign for an urgent change in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). ***We are calling on the Government to reverse its 'grey belt' policy and restore pre-existing protections for the Green Belt.***

'Grey belt' was initially described as previously developed or poor-quality land like disused car parks, but the actual definition in the NPPF is so broad that it could include almost any Green Belt land. This encourages 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. 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.

We therefore call on all candidates to commit to 10 pledges for the environment:

¹ See the details at <https://www.cpreherts.org.uk/news/grey-belt-land-grab-unnecessary-1-5-million-new-homes-ready-to-build/>

10 pledges for the environment

1. **Reverse ‘grey belt’ policy** – support our campaign calling on the Government to reverse its damaging ‘grey belt’ policy and restore pre-existing protections for the Green Belt. Protection should mean protection for our Green Belt, in keeping with the wishes of 86% of the UK population.²
2. **Uphold a truly ‘brownfield first’ development approach** – there is enough brownfield (previously developed) land available in Hertfordshire for at least 26,779 dwellings³, plus 5,057 long term empty⁴ dwellings – these should be the priority for redevelopment and occupancy, before permitting development on greenfield sites.
3. **Promote more redevelopment of town centres thus ensuring development is in sustainable locations**, which means places that are not car-dependent. Ensure development does not negatively impact National Landscapes, high quality agricultural land, wildlife sites, recreational green spaces and Hertfordshire’s precious chalk streams.
4. **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.
5. **Call for new measures to force developers to build where they have secured planning permission, or face sanctions.** Across England, developers have secured planning permission for more than 1.4 million homes since 2007 (and more than 1.1 million homes between 2010 and 2020) that have not been built.⁵ Delivering these permissions would reduce the need for building on greenfield sites.

² A recent poll by More in Common found that 91% of Britons think the countryside makes Britain special, 86% consider Green Belt protections important, and 75% want measures to protect specific areas of land to be strengthened. See all the headlines and the full survey results at <https://www.cpreherts.org.uk/news/86-of-britons-support-the-green-belt-new-poll-reveals/>

³ 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-26779-homes-on-recycled-land-in-hertfordshire/>

⁴ See the empty homes data for each district in Hertfordshire, at <https://www.cpreherts.org.uk/news/5057-long-term-empty-homes-in-hertfordshire-would-help-meet-housing-need/>

⁵ The Institute for Public Policy Research <https://www.ippr.org/media-office/revealed-1-4-million-homes-left-unbuilt-by-developers-since-2007>

6. **Ensure the designation of more 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 England⁶ – and ensure that the "biodiversity mitigation hierarchy" (the need to avoid environmental harm) is also a priority in all Local Plans.
7. **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.
8. **Proactively support increasing the UK's hedgerows** by 40% by 2050, including CPRE Hertfordshire's Hedgerow Heroes project, to improve biodiversity, restore habitat connectivity, increase resilience against flooding and help mitigate climate change.
9. **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.
10. **Recognise that protecting the countryside – in its own right - makes an important contribution to the nation's objectives of growing the economy and achieving net zero, and that it is not just a place to build on.** Protect the Green Belt, the Chilterns National Landscape 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 want to see all local candidates and Councillors take up these pledges. 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.

⁶ Read CPRE's 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/>