

Chairman's Report

Welcome to the 2023 AGM

I am delighted to invite you all to the AGM.

During late 2022 and into 2023 National CPRE have run a number of campaigns which the Wiltshire Branch supported and publicised, with local interpretations, on our social media, web site, Voice magazine or the e newsletter. Dark Skies and Hedgerow Heroes were the two most successful in attracting public attention.

There have been three areas of concern to Wiltshire CPRE during the year.

One is the steady increase in planning permissions on greenfield sites granted at Appeal despite being contrary to the Wiltshire Local Plan, and the Neighbourhood Plans of many communities. All due to a section in the National Planning Policy Framework document which is relentlessly used by developers and unfortunately upheld by Planning Inspectors through a series of perversely worded decisions. I sympathise and commiserate with the many parishes and residents who feel completely let down by government and its empty promises on local democracy.

These decisions have created depressing sprawl spread around the edges of many of our market towns and villages without any parallel measures to meet the challenges of medical and dental waiting lists, school places, job opportunities and a major reduction in carbon emissions.

Meetings were held with all five MPs to discuss this and other necessary planning reforms with varying results.

The second is the looming possibility that the A350 will be selected as a road deemed by Transport Planners for National Highways to be of economic Strategic Significance. It is seen as the western link from M4 to the A303 and on south to the Dorset coast. Therefore it is considered that the road requires dualling with accompanying bypasses where deemed necessary. The long-term environmental consequences and effect on local road infrastructure are underestimated. I would like to thank all those in the local groups campaigning against these proposals for their vigilance and constant hard work.

The third area is concerning the rapid increase and spread of large solar farms on green fields. This is a controversial area requiring an understanding of up to date technical expertise as well as a recognition of the local landscape and agricultural values.

The view of CPRE is that the way forward for solar is on rooftops, car parks and industrial sites not on agricultural land. The Rooftop Renewables campaign is spearheading this approach.

Wiltshire Council will be publishing, or have published, their review of the Wiltshire Local Plan by the time of this AGM.

That document, and the equally important review of the Local Transport Plan (LTP4), is something which CPRE Wiltshire will be deeply involved in over the forthcoming months.

We know we are facing a climate emergency. The urgency for action is clear. It will affect housing, energy, farming, transport, the economy and most of all the natural environment. Lobbying locally and nationally on important rural agendas and working with a variety of local partners is a crucial

part of protecting and promoting our beautiful landscapes and the communities who value and share them.

Politically it has not been easy dealing with the number of changes within the Planning, Environmental and Transport departments. Secretary of States and Ministers come and go.

Will a new political party be any better is a frequently asked question.

We will shortly have to work with different area MPs as a result of the Boundary Changes and perhaps the election.

The Best Kept Village competition continues to attract strong interest county wide.

A seminar run by the branch on Neighbourhood Planning in November 2022 was most successful, and is something we might find useful to repeat once the Wiltshire Local Plan content is known.

CPRE Wiltshire district groups continue their important work fighting inappropriate planning applications both large and small.

Finances and Membership are an ongoing concern.

However, working to protect a realistic future for our countryside for the sake of future generations is surely something we cannot afford to undervalue or ignore.