



**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF  
CPRE Wiltshire – The Countryside Charity  
(Limited Liability Company number 07127110 and Charity no 1134677).  
Held at 19:00 on Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> July 2024 at the Town Hall, Malmesbury.**

The Deputy Mayor of Malmesbury, Cllr Steve James, welcomed members to Malmesbury. Approximately 50 people were at the meeting, most of them members of CPRE.

1. Welcome

Apologies for absence: Michael Hodges, Geraldine and David White, Dr Olivia Chapple (High Sheriff of Wiltshire), Rosalind Ambler, Sebastian Lawrence-Mills, Robin and Marianne Eccles.

2. Minutes of the AGM held on 13<sup>th</sup> July 2023.

2.1 Accuracy - Minutes Approved. Proposed: Michelle Haley. Seconded: Anthony Cohen.

2.1 Matters arising. None

3. President's address.

The Lord-Lieutenant of Wiltshire, our President, welcomed our speakers: Roger Mortlock (CEO of CPRE) and Jackie Copley (CPRE's national lead for Planning Policy).

She noted that we were very close to the proposed site of the Lime Down Solar Farm, saying that when commenting on solar farm proposals we needed to recognise that there was both good and poor farmland. She also pointed out that housing development was not always bad: a site in Swindon on brownfield, with plenty of affordable housing and solar panels on roofs had recently been awarded a prize.

She thanked CPRE members who had been active in making comments on many proposals, notably on the proposed Stonehenge tunnel and on housing applications. She concluded by saying that despite many developments, Wiltshire was still a very beautiful county.

4. Chairman's Report.

The Chairman, Anne Henshaw, thanked the Lord-Lieutenant for her contribution to CPRE Wiltshire and in particular for her involvement with the Best Kept Village Competition.

She added that she had not written a report because she hoped that members had read her monthly contributions to our e-newsletter, which contained all the issues that have been exercising the branch over the past year.

However, she then gave a summary of some of them.

- She was sure that the new Government's policies would present enormous challenges for us, at least in the immediate future and that we would need to work closely with CPRE's national office on responding to these.



- She regretted that a recent report had indicated that small scale nuclear reactors were not likely to be cost-effective.
- Another problem was the impact of water pollution resulting from proposed housing developments, which was restricting sites on which they could take place.
- Affordability of housing is a key issue. It is important to recognise that simply building more houses does not make the housing stock more affordable. A strategy for land use is key to solving this issue. The main problem is that housing has become a commodity, an investment from which some people and companies can make a lot of money.
- Connected with this is the fact that in many places communities and people are losing their identities. Towns and villages are becoming simply places in which to live, rather than centres of community. The Chairman felt that design guides in Local Plans and neighbourhood Plans could help to alleviate this unfortunate problem.
- She also felt that NIMBY-ism was often a good thing for communities and democracy and should not always be seen as a negative issue.
- The Chairman concluded by saying that CPRE, both at branch and national level, was doing a lot of work that was not necessarily publicised widely. She asked members to keep up to date by reading our e-newsletters, our website and our Wiltshire Voice magazine.
- Finally, she thanked the branch staff, Geraldine White (Administrator) and Mike Manson (Project Officer) and also Anthony Cohen (Treasurer) and Rosalind Ambler (Voice editor).

#### 5. Treasurer's Report.

The Treasurer, Anthony Cohen, said that he hoped that members had read our accounts for FY23/24 which ended on 29 February. He pointed out that we had lost about £9k in value, primarily due to a drop in our investments. However, we had changed our investment policy and our financial assets had increased by about 6% so far in this FY. Those assets were current about £80k in value and had benefitted from a £8k legacy received early in this FY. In the last FY we had received an income of about £2.5k from events, however, in this FY sponsorship of the Best Kept Village Competition had reduced significantly.

#### 6. Confirmation of co-opted trustees during 2023 – 2024: Philippa Gray. Proposer: Mary Gillmore; Seconder: Nick Stokes.

#### 7. Election and Confirmation of Trustees. In accordance with the Company/Charity's Articles of Association, one third of the elected Trustees/ Directors must retire.

- John Eaton, Chairman of the West Wiltshire group had resigned due to pressure of his work outside CPRE. His role as Chairman was being covered by Ken McCall.
- Nick Stokes had offered himself for re-election as a Trustee and Director. Proposer: Mary Gillmore; Seconder: Charmian Spickernell.
- Michael Hodges had also offered himself for re-election as a Trustee and Director. Proposer: Mary Gillmore; Seconder: Michelle Haley.
- The Trustees who will continue in 2024-2025 will be: Anne Henshaw and Anthony Cohen,
- No other nominations had been received.



8. Appointment of independent examiner of accounts: P. Chow CPFA BSc (Hons). Proposer: Anne Henshaw, Seconder: Anthony Cohen.
9. There were no other motions for consideration at the AGM.
10. There was other business. The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and then closed the meeting.

#### **Guest speakers.**

Roger Mortlock (CEO of CPRE) and Jackie Copley (CPRE National Planning Policy Lead) gave a joint presentation, largely on the CPRE Rooftop Solar campaign. Their presentation, with notes, was sent to most attendees and was published on the CPRE Wiltshire website.

After the presentation the following points were made by the audience.

Steve Holt, of the Potterne Solar Action Group, was very grateful for the support provided by both CPRE Wiltshire and by the national office. He felt that a critical issue with solar power was the connection to the National Grid. We needed a national strategy for this and asked how CPRE could get its voice heard. Roger Mortlock said that we do not have many friendly organisations who would support us on this issue although national office is working on that. But he did feel that the strength of local feeling is very important and useful when campaigning.

Mike Pitts, speaking for the Stop Lime Down Solar Park, agreed that connection to the Grid was a major issue; the Lime Down proposal is a long way from the Grid. He said that land owners affected had been offered huge sums of money, from abroad, to allow their land to be covered with solar panels. He wondered where that action would lead elsewhere in the country. He felt that we needed both national strategic and county plans for solar farms. Roger Mortlock said that large institutional landowners in the UK were offering land for solar farms in order to make large profits. Jackie Copley said that a recent North West Harvesting the Sun study had shown that 100,000 jobs could be created by fitting solar panels onto warehouse and house rooftops. She added that there were some excellent community-led local projects using solar panels and heat pumps which provided local benefits.

Concerns were raised that most solar panels and systems were produced in China and there was a risk that these could deliver malware into IT systems. Jackie Copley said that research into graphene, initiated at Manchester University, showed that its use might be possible for solar panels which could be manufactured in the UK.

The question was raised about getting housebuilders on side to install solar panels on roofs during construction. Roger Mortlock said that realistically only a government mandate would achieve this.

The problem of the influence of the small number of large-volume housebuilders was also raised. Jackie Copley said that efforts with the Federation of Master Builders were being made to diversify the house building market so that many more small and medium builders would take up a larger proportion of construction. She added that CPRE was working with Create Streets, a company that delivered better designs and high-density housing while still providing good open spaces for communities.



Mary Gillmore commented about the increase in thefts from solar panel farms: in the main copper is being stolen, as the price on the open world market has soared. The thefts are by international organised crime gangs but neither planning authorities nor developers say much about it and the police do not have separate data on how and when it happens. Police figures revealed a 48 per cent rise in solar panel and cabling theft from 2021 to 2022. International criminals think nothing about ramming fencing and it could be that palisade fencing will become necessary as opposed to deer fencing to try and keep them out.

The problem was raised about the high cost of land on which planning permissions had been obtained. Jackie Copley said that this was one of CPRE's four key points in their election manifesto. She added that the Government would actively encourage a greater proportion of houses to be self-built (meaning not just DIY but self-design). Such houses were generally more likely to be attractive. In the UK this accounted for just 7% of new housing, while in Austria, for example it accounted for about 75%.

The Lord-Lieutenant, prompted by viewing a slide in the presentation showing solar tiles on rooftops, asked if these were much more expensive than panels. Jackie Copley said that although they were currently more expensive, they could be more affordable if they were installed during construction. She added that a related issue was the need to orientate as many houses, both individually and in estates, to have south-facing roofs for better efficiency of solar generation. She felt that proposed plans to devolve responsibility for some powers might help to achieve this.

Finally, concern was raised about decommissioning solar farms. Currently companies building them effectively walk away and avoid these costs. It was agreed that planning permission should be dependent on providing a financial bond that would cover the cost of decommissioning.