

SUSSEX REVIEW

**The battle for Sussex heats up
Celebrate the best –
enter the Countryside Awards**

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We exist to protect and promote the beauty, tranquility and diversity of our countryside by encouraging the sustainable use of land and natural resources in town and country.

CPRE Sussex is an independent charity relying entirely on membership subscriptions, donations and legacies to fund our work. What makes our work so effective is our network of active volunteers and the support of our members.

The opinions expressed in the Review reflect the views and interests of individual contributors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Branch.

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Update



Thank you once again for your very generous response to our Autumn appeal.

We are hugely grateful for your support in building up our fighting funds as the scale of challenges across the county continues to escalate.

Your generosity makes a huge difference to the support we can offer to local groups and our volunteers who are fighting off threats from inappropriate development.

Sussex is a fantastic place to live, work and visit. The balance between accommodating growth and protecting the heritage and environment which make Sussex so special can be difficult to achieve. Thank you to our fantastic volunteers who are preparing evidence for local plan hearings by the planning expectorate in Mid Sussex, Adur and Arun, Wealden and Chichester. Although the Government maintains its commitment to giving local people 'a voice' in planning through Neighbourhood Plans and emphasises the great importance it places on protecting 'our special places' such as National Parks and Areas of outstanding Beauty, the fight goes on at a local level against opportunistic and speculative development.

For example, recently we have been experiencing an exceptionally high number of calls asking for help and advice from local communities, especially from locations where we do not have an active volunteer group, areas like Arun and Chichester where so much is happening. This year a major focus will be on developing new groups there so if you live in either of these Districts and feel that you may be able to help, please do let us know. (email: info@cpresussex.org.uk / call: 01825 890 975)

In the Autumn of last year we launched our well received 'Making Places' manual at the HQ of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in London with a debate entitled 'How can localism create beauty?'. The Making Places manual is the output of a one-year project with seven Sussex parishes who need to accommodate significant amounts of new housing. It shows how parish/town councils or Neighbourhood Forums can establish what 'good design' means for their community by analysing each settlement's character, buildings and rural setting and discussing the importance and effectiveness of the existing layout. An initial series of Making Places Workshops showed that many local people feel positive about development but they want a role in shaping the places where they live. Most negative views could be traced to experiences of inappropriate or dysfunctional development in the past and a feeling of frustration over the planners' refusal to listen.

Residents who took part in the workshops felt passionately about the character and integrity of their communities and wanted to ensure that expansion would meet local needs for open space, affordable homes, services and jobs. We are now putting together an external funding bid for 'phase 2' of the project – more detailed support for parishes to embed this work into emerging policies and deliver improvements on the ground.

In 2017 we are expanding our programme of tours and talks, developing our Biodiversity Group – 'Planning for Nature.' And finally we are very excited to launch the Countryside Awards!

Kia Trainor,
Director, CPRE Sussex

The fight for our Sussex countryside



Nick Herbert MP outlines the pressures on the National Park and his real concern for the surrounding areas.

I am privileged to represent the Arundel & South Downs constituency, one of the most beautiful in England, much of its 250 square miles falling within the South Downs National Park. Attending the National Trust's exhibition of 'Turner and the Age of British Watercolour' at Petworth in January, I was once again reminded of the historic value of a landscape that has been portrayed by many of our greatest artists.

There are undoubtedly challenges and pressures in Britain's most populated National Park. For instance, I've led opposition to ill-judged proposals by Forest Enterprise to build lodges in 77 acres of woodland at Madehurst, warning that it would transform a large area of natural woodland to become a suburban-style theme park. At least normal planning processes in the Park, which rightly enjoys the highest level of landscape protection, should see bad ideas like these off.

I am rather more concerned about what's happening outside the Park, where the countryside is less protected and where development pressures are rising. It has not been all bad news. At its best, Neighbourhood Planning, introduced under the Localism Act 2011, has given communities more control over where development goes, with decisions validated democratically through a local referendum. It has been interesting to see that local people have responded positively to the opportunity to think about what they want in their villages rather than what they don't want.

But there's been growing concern that Neighbourhood Plans have been undermined by speculative developers who have been able to 'game' the system, breaking through the Plans by claiming that local authorities have an inadequate five-year land supply while cynically contributing to that situation by failing to build themselves. I worked with the

CPRE's national team to raise this issue in Parliament, and I'm delighted to say that the Planning Minister responded by agreeing to some of our proposals and announcing a change to give greater protection to Neighbourhood Plans.

Problems remain where councils have failed to adopt a Local Plan, while the housing numbers they must provide for have increased as every year goes by, reflecting a rising population and demand. We can expect even more pressure from rumoured changes in the imminent Housing White Paper. The root of the problem is a shortage of housing, exacerbated by regional imbalances which sees demand concentrated in southern counties like our own. The solutions are complex, but a crude relaxation of planning controls is not one of them.

In the small towns and villages of my constituency, local infrastructure is already

inadequate, reflected for instance by oversubscribed local schools and extended GP waiting lists. Random development has exacerbated these problems, and construction is eroding the green space between villages, leading to the slow suburbanisation of once-rural areas. Yet young people face the unfairness of high rents and property prices that are completely out of their reach.

One idea is to build new towns rather than extend villages, but these must have local support. The proposed Mayfield new town near Henfield is the worst example of a poorly located scheme that is rightly opposed by every local council. The plan has blighted local properties while its promoters have persistently sought to overturn local plans in an attempt to insinuate their own proposal. It is the wrong way to get the housing we need.

No development is free from dispute, just as there is no uncontroversial means to generate energy. Fracking obviously carries risks to the countryside, and I have worked to ensure that it does not damage the South Downs, but in the eyes of many people wind turbines and solar panels can despoil the landscape, too. Even the offshore wind generation off the Sussex coast has had its opponents.

And then there are roads schemes. This summer, Highways England will consult over routes for the Arundel Bypass. I would urge people not to assume that the bypass is bad simply because a small section will go through the National Park. This part is not chalk downland, but an area of replanted woodland at

the southernmost extremity of the Park. The A27 already runs through the Park for much of its route, including at Arundel. Crucially, a bypass is needed to stop rat-running not just through the historic town but through the National Park's downland and villages, which is why there is such strong local support for the scheme. Storrington's high traffic levels give it some of the worst air pollution in the country.

The alternatives are all less palatable: a bypass that misses the Park but damages the villages of Walberton and Binsted, or one that cuts right through Arundel, which would be deeply unpopular, or no bypass at all, which would mean continuing delays and traffic diverting through the Park. Not all road schemes need be bad. I have proposed that a beautiful bridge is built over the Arun, just as a British architect, Norman Foster, designed the sensational Millau Bridge over the River Tarn in France.

If we could learn to build beautifully, much concern about development of all kinds would be mitigated. After all, it wasn't Bath

on which John Betjeman wanted friendly bombs to fall. No-one says that Brunel's Clifton Suspension Bridge despoils the Avon Gorge. The Balcombe Viaduct is a stunning Sussex landmark. I am a member of Respublica's 'Backing Beauty Commission', a campaign to put beauty, placemaking and community participation at the heart of local planning and wider public policy. It would only take a little imagination to achieve these goals.

As we struggle to meet the economic demands of a rising population, we must remember that is in the national interest to protect the countryside, too. In my office at Westminster I have a print of Frank Newbould's famous wartime poster of the South Downs. "Your Britain - Fight For It Now" urges the slogan. It is significant that a love for our countryside was deployed to incite a patriotic fervour. The landscape is indeed a part of our national identity. Today we face a different kind of battle for the countryside, one which I will continue, alongside the CPRE, to join.





The battle Sussex can't afford to lose

How loopholes and legalities are robbing us of our countryside.

Jane Watson reports from the front line at the Mid Sussex Local Plan Examination on how escape clauses in the National Planning Policy Framework are sending housing targets through the roof, potentially ruining our landscape.

In 2011 the Secretary of State for Communities, Eric Pickles, announced 'a new era of people power'. This was the launch of the Localism Act – billed at the time as 'a ground-breaking shift in power to councils and communities overturning decades of central government control'. The new legislation was followed a year later by a concise guidebook to planning policy, called the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The guide was, said the minister for planning, Greg Clarke, 'written simply and clearly' to 'allow people and communities back into planning'.

This should have been cause for celebration across rural Sussex – at last communities could draw up their own local plans and protect themselves from unsuitable development. However, there were storm clouds gathering

even before the ink had dried on the legislation. The NPPF was peppered with loopholes and provided a perfect feeding ground for speculative developers keen to cash in on the ever growing housing crisis.

“The Public Examination of Mid Sussex’s Local Plan has courted controversy from its outset.”

It wasn't long before an army of opportunistic developers had set their sights on the lucrative green fields of Sussex, armed themselves with savvy lawyers, and started to exploit these new planning laws. This 'invasion' quickly gathered pace and for the past four years the Sussex countryside has been, quite literally, fighting for its life.

In November, this battle moved to the pretty, rural district of Mid Sussex where a drama is now

unfolding which is a very far cry from Eric Pickles' new 'era of people power'.

The Public Examination of Mid Sussex's Local Plan has courted controversy from its outset. On the very first day the government planning inspector, Jonathan Bore, was forced to open the proceedings by declaring his 'impartiality' following the revelation that he knows the founding Director of Mayfield Market Towns (MMT). MMT is a speculative property company which has spent the past four years hounding local planners throughout Sussex in a bid to build a widely opposed new settlement.

Mr Bore became an inspector after retiring from his job as head of planning for Kensington and Chelsea Borough Council in London where he had worked with Lady Victoria Borwick MP, who is married to MMT Director,



Lord Jamie Borwick. Declaring his ‘impartiality’ Mr Bore insisted that he had only met Lord Borwick ‘occasionally’ and they had ‘never discussed planning issues’. However, the revelation was snapped up by the *Mid Sussex Times* which published a story under the title ‘Planning Inspector states “Impartiality” as he knows the new market town director’.

The Examination itself quickly assumed an atmosphere not dissimilar to that of a court of law – with the Council ‘in the dock’, defending its actions against a sea of hostile witnesses. Seated opposite Mid Sussex’s planning team, and CPRE’s volunteer Michael Brown, lining two sides of the wood-panelled Council Chamber, were the teams of lawyers and planning consultants representing nearly 20 property developers.

The Council was now facing the prospect of defending its Local Plan against what Sir Nicholas Soames described as: “The most

unscrupulous building lobby it has ever been my pleasure to have to deal with.” To make matters worse, ten of these companies had joined forces to create The Mid Sussex Developers Forum (MSDF) – a temporary arrangement which Sir Nicholas called “a bogus development forum that had been rushed together to try to present itself as reputable”.

Next to MSDF, but not part of it, was a formidable line up of experts representing MMT – headed by a government planning advisor, John Rhodes.

Mr Rhodes was one of the men who created the existing planning laws and must have an intimate knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses in current legislation. He joined the Mid Sussex hearing fresh from his position as chairman of the government’s Local Plan Expert Panel which had been advising the planning minister on new changes to the planning laws in preparation for this year’s new Housing White Paper. He was also

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one of the four men who drafted the original NPPF.

If, on reading this account, you are already feeling uncomfortable about the way the examination was shaping up, be warned – things were about to get very much worse.

By the afternoon of the first day the barrister representing MSDF had already persuaded the inspector that the Council’s plan to build 800 new homes every year until 2031, was not enough.

Mr Bore, who has very little experience of the local area, pondered for a few minutes over how much to increase the figure, before coming to the conclusion



Government planning inspector, Jonathon Bore



Robert Worsley
CAMBS



A 25% ‘uplift’ recommended to Mr Bore by MSDF equates to 3,400 extra homes in addition to the 11,200 already proposed by the Council – a total of nearly 15,000 over the next 14 years.

that it should be somewhere between the Council’s original calculations, and the 25% ‘uplift’ recommended to him by MSDF. This would equate to 3,400 extra homes in addition to the 11,200 already proposed by the Council – a total of nearly 15,000 over the next 14 years. He gave the Council a week to discuss its options with the developers and report back with a new increased figure.

Mr Bore’s stance put the Council in an impossible position – it desperately needs the inspector to approve its Local Plan in order to retain control and protect the District from unsuitable and unsustainable development. However, if it agrees to allocate land for too many houses, and then finds itself unable to prove that they can be built at the prescribed rate, then the Council’s policies relating to where houses should go would be considered ‘out of date’ and therefore void. Unfortunately for the Council, the build rate is something it can’t control, because developers frequently slow down delivery or ‘land bank’ sites, to maximise profits. And there is little incentive for these builders to speed up the

process, because an ‘out of date’ plan provides even richer pickings by creating a ‘free for all’. The developers are holding the cards.

No one is more aware of this injustice than South Downs and Arundel MP, Nick Herbert, who, together with Sir Nicholas, made an appearance at the Mid Sussex hearing to express his support for the Council’s Plan. In December, Mr Herbert successfully tabled an Amendment to the Housing Bill to provide greater protection for local plans. In Parliament he said:

“There is a real danger of undermining localism and communities if we do not act to ensure that the principles of neighbourhood plans are upheld and that made neighbourhood plans that have been approved by the local population in a democratic vote cannot be overturned by speculative developers.”

“The loophole has to be closed, and I very much hope that the Government will do so”.

As a result, on 12 December, the housing minister, Gavin Barwell, issued a written statement which changed the law immediately – shortening the housing supply requirement from five to three years. This small change in the detail of the NPPF is great news for the countryside because it gives some control to the local

communities, but it solves only part of Mid Sussex’s problem.

Back at the hearing, and less than an hour after the two MPs had spoken passionately in support of the Mid Sussex Plan, praising the Council for its “hard work”, and “credibility and integrity”, MMT’s influential planning advisor, John Rhodes, stood up to speak. As a high-profile and indisputable expert on the legislation he commands great respect in planning circles, and the inspector made no attempt to interrupt what followed.

Mr Rhodes’ speech was lengthy and deeply insulting, not only to Mid Sussex, but also to the county as a whole. Speaking directly to the inspector, he declared that Sussex is “a part of the country which has failed – it has failed in relation to the NPPF and it has failed in relation to its residents. It has failed spectacularly”.

He then stated that Mid Sussex had “an unsound plan” and outlined, in detail, the steps he thought the inspector should take to remedy the problem. These included forcing the Council to agree to a strict review to address not only its own housing needs, but also a shortfall of houses in neighbouring and coastal districts – a figure which he calculated as being a total of 38,500 new homes. That equates to nearly one and a half new Haywards Heaths.



Finally, to add insult to injury, he offered to help draft alterations to the plan saying that “with respect, the local authorities in this area need some help in identifying their responsibilities in terms of proactive action to look at the extent of the need”. There can be no doubt that the solution Mr Rhodes is alluding to is none other than his wealthy employer’s new settlement.

“We need realistic deliverable housing targets that meet local need across the country. And then we need to get on with building the homes the country needs.”

This attack on the democratic planning process from a man trusted by the government to draft national legislation raises some serious questions. MMT is a speculative company which has, in Mr Herbert’s words, been behaving “appallingly in trying to undermine Mid Sussex’s District Plan, which they effectively hope to get overturned”.

“They’re not getting their way through the democratic process,” added Mr Herbert, “so they’re trying to subvert it. I think that is absolutely contemptible.” MMT has already been rejected by all the local councils, MPs, residents, landowners and even, critically, by the government

inspector examining the Horsham Plan. So how, given his high profile position, is Mr Rhodes allowed to promote a proposal like this? Even if, as seems likely, MMT’s efforts are thwarted yet again, Mr Rhodes’ input could inflict irreversible damage on the Sussex countryside by driving the housing figures way beyond what is sustainable.

However, Sussex has a history of standing up for itself (the County’s unofficial motto is “we wunt be druv”). Sussex is also a county which values its countryside – and nothing illustrates this more clearly than the principled land owner, Robert Worsley, who famously turned down £275m to save his land from the bulldozers. Robert Worsley’s passion for the countryside doesn’t stop there. He, like Nick Herbert and Sir Nicholas, sees deep injustice in the planning system and feels compelled to do something about it.

In January, Robert made the headlines again by appearing at the Mid Sussex hearing to publicly challenge the developers over their refusal to accept they can’t build on his land.

He says he decided to speak out because he is so frustrated by the injustices of the planning system and wanted to appeal directly to the inspector. For a full account of Robert Worsley’s challenge, see page 23.

Mid Sussex is not the only district struggling to produce a Local Plan under near impossible circumstances. A quick Google search will uncover all kinds of similar stories across the country – particularly in the south where house building is most lucrative.

Shaun Spiers, CPRE chief executive, says the government “must address the main failing of the current system – undeliverable housing targets which lead to acrimonious planning conflicts without increasing the overall number of homes built”.

“Villages and small towns across England are being besieged by multiple planning applications that pay no heed to sustainability or real need,” he says. “All the evidence is that if you work with communities, they will get behind necessary development, but if you seek to impose it on them, they will fight it.”

“We need realistic deliverable housing targets that meet local need across the country. And then we need to get on with building the homes the country needs.”



Erosion of our wild and wonderful countryside

Michael Brown, CPRE Sussex volunteer, wonders what will be left of this beautiful county if the law's highest level of protection continues to be flagrantly disregarded.

The High Weald and Chichester Harbour are two of 34 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) in England which, together with 13 national parks, have been designated by Parliament as areas whose very special natural landscape, beauty and relative wildness require active conservation for the sake of future generations, and hence the highest level of protection in the planning system. Local Planning Authorities are required to maintain detailed plans for the evolving conservation, enhancement and long-term sustainable management of AONBs, as well as facilitating public access and education as to their environmental and historic value.

These environmental treasures are amongst the most precious, but sensitive, parts of England's countryside and heritage. That is why they have been singled out for special protection from development, and why the planning rules purport to rule out

all 'major development' within an AONB or national park other than in exceptional circumstances and where there is a public interest imperative to do so. Build over an AONB, and that special part of our countryside is forever lost to us. The system is meant to stop that from happening.

That system is not working, and we need to shout our concerns about that from the rooftops. Look no further than Pease Pottage, a village on the edge of the High Weald AONB adjacent to Handcross and not far from Crawley. Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC) has just unanimously approved the development of an estate of 600 houses there within the AONB boundary, primarily to meet the unmet needs of residents of Crawley Borough Council. The development will take place on

That system is not working, and we need to shout our concerns about that from the rooftops.

a 100-acre unallocated site that MSDC itself described as 'very unsuitable' for development just six months earlier.

In so doing MSDC ignored unequivocal advice from Natural England and the High Weald AONB Unit that the development would cause significant harm to the High Weald and that the exceptional circumstances test was not met. CPRE's detailed objections were cast aside. Even Crawley Borough Council opposed development of this site.

An attempt by CPRE to persuade the Secretary of State to use his reserve power to call in the decision and determine it himself was turned down on the ground that decisions of this kind were best taken locally.

This is not an isolated incident. Another 90 homes were approved in 2015 at nearby Handcross, also within the High Weald. CPRE Kent had to go to the Court of Appeal to



“ We need to be arguing for a clearer Governmental statement of obligation on planning authorities to conserve and enhance all AONBs and national parks irrespective of housing shortfall pressures.”

get a similar-sized development overturned in the Kent Downs AONB.

MSDC has even just announced that, if it is forced to increase its annual housing target in its draft new District Plan beyond the currently proposed 800 homes, it may consider permitting 200–350 more houses on multiple other sites within the High Weald.

As a recent CPRE-briefed leading article in *The Times* about the Pease Pottage decision pointed out, the rules governing rural planning and their interface with the drive for more housing are “as clear as mud”. The Government came out for the principle of conservation in their manifesto, only to outsource to overstretched and under-funded local councils

the problem of when that principle applies in practice.

In the absence of clear Governmental guidance on what the ‘highest status of protection’ from development of AONBs means in practice, and under huge pressure to build, build, build, planning authorities are buckling under the pressure to approve development in wholly unsuitable and unsustainable locations, and are applying the planning rules inconsistently.

So let us be clear: whatever the pressure, national parks and AONBs are not designated for the purpose of forming convenient longstop locations to get this country out of its housing shortfall mess. If it were otherwise, special statutory designations would have no purpose; and we, one day, will have no more wild and wonderful countryside and landscapes for future generations to cherish. I don’t want to be left to explain to my grandchildren how we let that happen.

We need to be arguing for a clearer Governmental statement of obligation on planning authorities to conserve and enhance all AONBs and national parks irrespective of housing shortfall pressures. We need to be arguing for the planning rules to be applied consistently across all local planning bodies, and for the Secretary of State to play a larger role in decision making, especially in cases where the statutory consultees such as Natural England and/or AONB Units advise (as in the Pease Pottage case) that a major development will cause significant harm.

Protected beautiful places must not be sacrificed – no more Pease Pottages!

If you are worried about protecting our most beautiful places write to your local MP. To find your MP go to www.theyworkforyou.com/MP



Safeguarding our wildlife

Tony Whitbread, Sussex Wildlife Trust's chief executive, says politicians should be held accountable for improving wildlife protection and developing a viable, environmentally friendly farming industry.

For decades Britain has been part of the EU and, overall, this has been a positive influence on our environment.

Before we joined the EU, Britain was known, with some justification, as the 'dirty man of Europe'. Our pollution record was poor and our agricultural policy was already damaging wildlife.

Since joining the EU our environmental safeguards have become far better. By joining we became part of a group of nations applying the same, high standards; this has been successful

in preventing a 'race to the bottom' and has driven significant wildlife protection. Funding for biodiversity has been supplied through the EU while rivers, water catchments and coastal zones have been hugely improved and our most valuable places and species have been protected because of EU Directives.

Furthermore, rather than being 'gold-plated standards' holding back business, these have generally been positive to our economy as well as to our environment.

However, membership of the EU has not been entirely positive

for wildlife, with agricultural and marine fisheries policies driving much of the environmental damage of the last decades.

The threats posed by leaving the EU are all too real. Re-branding sensible environmental safeguards as 'red tape' might be used by some as an excuse to strip away the EU 'Nature Directives'. Places like Ashdown Forest, Rye Harbour and Chichester Harbour could now be at risk from an aggressive deregulation agenda. Even if there is no direct intention to weaken wildlife protection, environmental regulation is so tied up in its EU background that it could leave us

good as, or better than, what was achieved in the EU. If democracy means anything then politicians should realise that they have a mandate – indeed a requirement – to improve wildlife protection not weaken it. Those wishing to reduce wildlife protection are in the small minority. Nevertheless, it wouldn't hurt to remind our politicians of this!

A recent report by the government's Environmental Audit Committee proposes a new Environmental Protection Act. We in the CPRE and the Sussex Wildlife Trust should now lobby for this to replace and improve the safeguards lost when we leave the EU.

Whilst reduction of safeguards is a threat, a change to agricultural policy is an opportunity.

Since the 1980s the Common Agricultural Policy has gradually improved, and current agri-environment schemes have been helpful in supporting environmentally friendly countryside management. Think of the flower-rich grassland on the South Downs, the purple heaths at Midhurst and the wetlands in the Arun valley – some of our most valued landscapes all maintained with the help of EU funding.

Nevertheless, far more EU funding has driven agricultural practices causing wildlife loss. This year a State of Nature report showed that nearly 60% of species examined are in decline. This is being driven not by farmers but by EU farming policy.

We must now take the opportunity to develop more locally-relevant ways of supporting agriculture. Paying farmers simply to be

farmers is increasingly difficult to justify against other priorities for public funding. But paying farmers for all the public benefits they provide – maintaining our landscape, protecting wildlife, managing flood water, conserving soils and delivering a healthy environment for all to enjoy, as well as producing food – is a far stronger argument for public investment.

It is not possible to have a rigid system of agricultural support that works as well for southern Italy as it does for northern Scotland. But by working more locally we should be able to develop approaches that are more relevant to real Sussex places. If we are able to focus on specific areas – the South Downs, for example – then it should be easier to see the benefits provided and to agree ways of paying for them.

Some benefits, food for instance, might be paid for through the market. Many public benefits, however, cannot just be bought or sold. Water, pollination, landscape, health, recreation, wildlife or just the chance to see a rare Adonis blue butterfly or a diminutive fly orchid – these are all essential to our wellbeing and all great justifications to support a viable and environmentally friendly farming industry.

We must, however, maintain our commitment to the high international standards that we expect of other nations. If we are no longer able to refer our government to the European Court then there must be other ways of calling our government to account. Leaving the EU must not be a return to being the 'dirty man of Europe'!

with a confused and weakened situation while we try to sort out the mess! A temporary weakening could leave plenty of opportunity for the less well intentioned to sweep-away perceived 'constraints'.

However, there is no mandate to weaken wildlife protection. Whichever way they voted in the referendum, over 80% of those asked in a recent poll wish to see wildlife protection that is as

“If democracy means anything then politicians should realise that they have a mandate – indeed a requirement – to improve wildlife protection not weaken it.”



Ancient and defenceless

The Woodland Trust has been working to protect ancient woodlands since 1999 as Jenny Scholfield, the Trust’s regional manager for the South East, explains.



Glance at the map of ancient woodland at a UK-wide scale, and a dense extensive shape of unique and irreplaceable habitat looks back from the South East of England. This beautiful strong pattern is almost reminiscent of the murmurations of flocking birds at dusk, but is in fact the patterns of a more static member of the natural world – the tree – shaped by centuries of environmental and human interactions.’

The UK Ancient Woodland Inventory identifies over 22,000 ancient woodland sites in England which can be viewed on the Government’s MAGIC map website. The protected landscapes of the South Downs and New Forest National Parks, and the many Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are the holding bays of this impressive extensive swathe of ancient woodland. Add the wooded landscapes of the Low and West Weald and you can take a virtual walk in this MAGIC

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“Ancient woodland covers only two per cent of the land area of the UK; the county of West Sussex has an impressive 10.5 per cent cover.”

map beginning at the New Forest and emerging through a dark continuous canopy somewhere on the North Kent Downs.

Of course this is just a daydream but nevertheless, whilst ancient woodland covers only two per cent of the land area of the UK, the county of West Sussex has an impressive 10.5 per cent cover. The South Downs National Park is the most wooded national park in England with around 10 per cent ancient woodland cover. Zoom in from UK scale to county scale of the Ancient Woodland Inventory, and what materialises are in fact hundreds of parcels of small woods, typical of the existing resource in East and West Sussex.

What is ancient woodland and why is it important?

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, ancient woodland is defined as woodland that has existed continuously since 1600 (or 1750 in Scotland). Around this time reliable maps began to be available, and 1600 pre-dates the time when tree planting became common. Some ancient woods may even link back to original woodland that covered the UK around 10,000 years ago, after the last Ice Age. Because they have developed over such long timescales, ancient woods have unique features such as relatively undisturbed soils and communities of plants and animals that depend on the stable conditions ancient woodland provides, some of which are rare and vulnerable.

Unlike existing ancient woodlands, woods planted or maturing will not become ancient woods in 400 years' time because the soils on which they have developed have been modified by modern

agriculture or industry. Many species characteristic of ancient woodland are slow to disperse and do not colonise new areas easily. Fragmentation of natural habitats in today's landscape hampers species' natural movements and interactions. Our remaining ancient woodland is irreplaceable.

Jewels in the crown of Sussex woodlands include Ebernoe Common and Kingley Vale National Nature Reserves.

Ebernoe Common – a beech forest and former wood-pasture with a very rich epiphytic lichen flora. It's designated as a Special Area of Conservation (under the European Habitats Directive) and is an important location for bat species. Managed by Sussex Wildlife Trust.

Kingley Vale – an ancient yew forest and National Nature Reserve, on the South Downs a few miles northwest of Chichester, managed by Natural



England. The landscape is a mosaic of chalk grasslands, oak/ash woodland and a yew tree grove perhaps over 2,000 years old, creating an outdoor museum of the oldest living life forms in the country. The place oozes wildlife, history (a Bronze Age burial mound and thirteen other scheduled monuments) and legend. Why did these yew trees survive when so many were felled centuries ago?

High Brede Forest – Woodland Trust – managed, publicly accessible woodland near Battle, East Sussex. A mosaic of ancient and secondary woodland, open heathland and acid grassland is located on the north-east shore of Powdermill Reservoir in East Sussex, in the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It has a rich history and a diverse range of wildlife.

Protecting our woodlands

In spite of ancient woodlands being such national treasures, this habitat is not protected in

legislation and therefore has very little (sometimes no) real protection from development or inappropriate management that might cause direct loss or damage to the woodland and the wildlife within it. The A21 Tonbridge to Pembury widening is a case in point that many CPRE supporters may be familiar with, from early proposals of Highways England to the ongoing construction stage. Drivers using the A21 near Tunbridge Wells can currently see newly exposed woodland edges alongside the widened transport corridor under construction. Nine irreplaceable hectares of ancient woodland were lost to the new scheme.

The Woodland Trust does not oppose sustainable transport but will speak out and object to development where the balance sheet just isn't adding up for these special places where once the woods have gone they've gone forever. The chipping / chopping away of ancient woodland to

“In spite of ancient woodlands being such national treasures, this habitat is not protected in legislation”.

development and infrastructure, alongside other tree felling and the latest annual figure of a meagre 700 hectares of tree planting means that England could be entering a trend of deforestation, losing trees faster than we are planting them.

Real protection extends over and above legislation (although that would help!). We need a shift in attitude towards these precious habitats, especially a greater understanding of their cultural value, and a stronger impetus to protect them.



Clearance of ancient woodland for the A21 road corridor.

There are practical measures that will help too. If you would like to get more involved in protecting ancient woodland then here's what you can do:

Go online

Take a look at the Woodland Trust's Enough is Enough pages on the Woodland Trust's website
www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/get-involved

Become a Woods Under Threat Detector

The Woodland Trust has a team who respond to over 100 cases of threats to ancient woodland every year. They aren't able to check and respond to every application from all the local planning authorities so a network of volunteer Threat Detectors help spot such applications and put together a case to save the woodland.

www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer-with-us/opportunities/woods-under-threat-detector/

Campaign locally

As well as national campaigns against threats to ancient woodland, such as High Speed2, the Woodland Trust also directly campaigns at a local level. We can't support every community campaign but we do provide broad advice and assistance for local campaigning. For example, we can help you make an objection to a planning application that is threatening trees or woods in your neighbourhood.

www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/get-involved/campaign-with-us/

Add your voice to the Tree Charter

The Charter of the Forest was first issued in 1217 as a complementary charter to the Magna Carta. Now, more than 50 organisations, including CPRE, from across multiple sectors are standing together to call for a Charter for Trees, Woods and People. We are collecting stories about what trees and woods mean to people, which will be used to create a set of guiding principles for the charter.

The Charter for Trees, Woods and People will be launched on November 6th 2017, the 800th anniversary of the Charter of the Forest Charter. Add your voice at treecharter.uk/

Reference

1. <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>

Halt the plan to sell off our Downs

Phil Belden, who has been helping to protect the South Downs for over 30 years, makes an impassioned call for your support to prevent the sale of Eastbourne Downs.

The Eastbourne Downs are a well-loved treasure. A million visitors come to Beachy Head every year and many of the 100,000 local residents regularly wander up from the town to enjoy the view, take in the air, exercise the dog or to get away from the everyday stress of urban living.

This wonderful resource is owned by the people, held in trust by the council, thanks to an Act of Parliament that “secures the free and open use of the Downs in perpetuity”.

Similar pictures emerge across the Downs, with local councils owning significant areas of land.

In the 1970s East Sussex County Council boldly stepped in to take over what is now Seven Sisters Country Park, transforming a degraded, run-down commercial caravan park into an iconic landscape, enabling hundreds of

thousands of people to enjoy this wonderful place.

Virtually all of the Brighton Downs, some 12,500 acres (5,000 hectares) is in public ownership. A jewel-encrusted necklace draping itself around the city from Shoreham to Saltdean, it was acquired between the 1880s and the 1940s to protect the drinking water supply, control development, and provide a recreational resource.

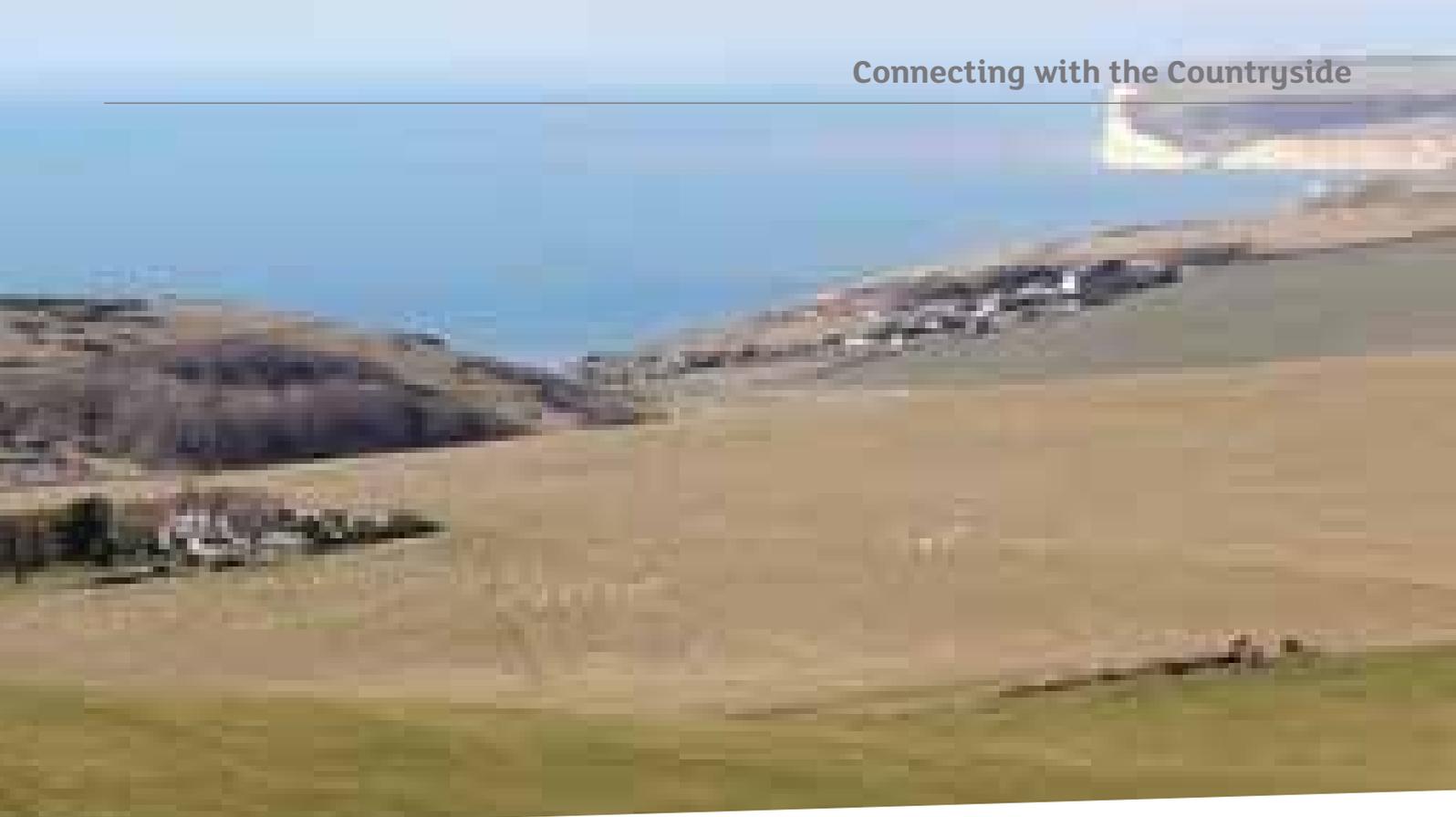
Prophetic words of the future King George VI are etched into the commemorative seat at Devil’s Dyke “to the use of the public for ever”.

Further west, people can enjoy open access from Worthing right up to the historic Cissbury Ring iron-age hill-fort, all managed on their behalf by Worthing council.

The 1920s/30s were a time of active campaigning for countryside protection and access.

At this time there were no planning restrictions in the countryside and speculative development was rife. In the south, this was epitomised by Peacehaven, a bungalow intrusion that quickly sprawled four miles along and one mile deep into the open Downs. It caused a huge reaction and was the catalyst for the formation of the Society of Sussex Downsmen (now the South Downs Society) and for our country planning laws. CPRE and other groups, with public subscription, bought out property developers at Crowlink, which is now safely protected by the National Trust.

East Dean jumped across the main road and began its Downs invasion northwards and the town of Eastbourne crept ever-westwards, until the 1926 Eastbourne Corporation Act secured all the borough downland into public ownership. All this protection and access activism culminated, in 1949, in the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act.



Plans to override protection, buried in the minutes of committee meetings, have come to light in recent weeks.

Local people have been finding out about clandestine council plans to sell off their downland. It never pays to be complacent with democracy; after years of trusting our councils to look after our land, they're betraying us. Two councils are in the news, Brighton & Hove and Eastbourne (the former trying to raise match-funding for a lottery bid and to put some cash back into depleted city hall coffers). This is a sad indictment on our current councils that we expect to look after our precious land. Public outcry and local campaigning has halted plans by Brighton and Hove council to sell off its downland, for the time being.

For Eastbourne, it is a short-term and rather desperate 'family silver' sale, seeking to steal downland to pay for urban regeneration. It's an abuse of public funds, and

in the 1980s the same political administration invested much time and energy in our Downs, revitalising them and setting a visionary future.

This was in response to growing concerns over our internationally rare chalk grassland being fragmented by poorly managed arable fields, gang-mowing and coastal erosion. The council's positive response was reverting arable to grassland and employing downland rangers and shepherds with flocks to sympathetically manage the pastures.

If sold, this will be a colossal loss as the council is planning to dispose of 75% of the downland.

This represents the entire land-holding between Beachy Head and Butts Brow open spaces (these, for now, being retained – maybe until the next cash crisis).

Public ownership provides protection and the opportunity

to influence the way our land is managed. As constituents we can engage with our councillors and officers to achieve commendable conservation and public access gains. Unless there is a benign private owner, there can be no assurances.

Designations, covenants and restrictions offer hope, but it is ownership that is key. There are some depressing examples of the weakness of protective labels:

- Laws 'protect' archaeology and wildlife through, for example, Scheduled Ancient Monument and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) status. These labels should have safeguarded Twyford Down east of Winchester, but both ancient monument and SSSIs there were destroyed with the M3 road-cutting. Contrast that with Southwick Hill, Shoreham which is National Trust owned and which has no legal archaeology or wildlife designations. The hill remains, thanks to twin-tunnels bored under it for the A27 Brighton bypass.



- Covenants / restrictions placed on land are fragile, often overturned and lost over time. In the early 1980s, Brighton council sold Mary Farm, initially to the tenant, but he couldn't afford the mortgage repayments so the land ended up in the hands of investment banks and pension funds, which rented it to an intensive agri-businessman. He ploughed up all the 'permanent' chalk grassland and introduced a commercial shoot that bulldozed the woodlands for game-rearing.

- The new National Park should prevent intense built development, but much land management is outside the planning system, so it is the action of the owner that determines what happens to the landscape and associated cultural heritage, wildlife, public access and more.

If Eastbourne council goes through with the sale it has an obligation to offer the land first to the original owners, the Davis-Gilbert and Devonshire estates, responsible for much of the development in the town. After that it is the free-market and highest bidder, so it is highly unlikely a benign charity will be able to afford it and the tenant farmers would be hard-pressed to find the big purchase sums needed. Selling the land to the highest bidder means it will end up with purchasers looking for a good return on their investment, with likely re-development of the various properties, land-intensification and 'diversification'.

Currently, most of the public land is mixed-farming arable and grass, with small copses and public open space. Intensification away from traditional downland management practices could include:

- Arable prairies

- Horsey-culture with its fencing, jumps and shelters plus risks of over-grazing and sward-deterioration which is detrimental to wildlife

- 'Champagne country' – grape-growing means high fences (to exclude deer), reliance on chemical sprays and the plant and equipment needed to process the product

- Urban-fringe development – this is a common problem; some development has planning permission, some falls outside its remit, some may be illegal or resulting from neglect and abuse.

Retaining public ownership provides people with the ability to influence the public landowner, the council holding the land in trust for its people. Our democratic system enables us to talk to or, if needed, put pressure on our elected representatives and their officers. Look what we did in the 1980s. Today, we need to rise up and protest, to get the council to respect the wishes of its people. If they listen and act, and STOP the sales, the downs will truly be 'to the use of the public forever'.

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD!

Contact

Councillor David Tutt,
Leader, Eastbourne
Borough Council,
1 Grove Road,
Eastbourne
BN21 4UG,
email
councillor.tutt@
eastbourne.gov.uk

Write to your local newspaper

Sign the petition at

<https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/stop-the-sell-off-of-eastbournes-public-downland>

Help house sparrows!

Graham Ault asks for your help with the CPRE Sussex Biodiversity Group's new project to bring back house sparrows.

Members of the Brighton and Hove Wildlife Forum have been concerned for some time by the decline in the numbers of the iconic house sparrow in their city. They want to explore the reasons for this decline and how they can help the birds to stabilise and, hopefully, increase in number in the future. CPRE Sussex is delighted to have become a partner in this excellent project.

Many of us think of house sparrows as common chatty little birds. It comes as a shock that they are now categorised as 'at risk'. Indeed, research suggests that house sparrows have declined by more than 70% over a 30-year period. It is most likely that this is due to loss of habitat and nesting sites, especially in urban areas. Many urban gardens now have few or no visiting sparrows.

The aims of the project are to carry out surveys around Brighton and Hove to identify where house sparrows are living successfully and where they are absent to identify the problems and possible solutions. These may include working with communities and developers to improve all green

spaces. House sparrow habitat can be improved quite easily through more wildlife-friendly gardens, suitable nesting sites (sparrows need multiple sites as they are social nesters), and better food sources.

The involvement of CPRE Sussex will enable our own members to take part in similar work in towns and villages across Sussex. This could include surveying areas to find the status of house sparrows in your community and/or just filling in a questionnaire about your experiences of this special bird in your garden, local parks and other places. We can give you advice and support in doing this and, with help from enough volunteers, we can improve

our environment to give house sparrows a home. This project will run from Spring 2017 for the next two years.

Please fill in the questionnaire enclosed and send it back to the office by the end of April. We would love to get as many questionnaire responses as possible, even if you have only very limited information.

If you would like to get more involved please let us know by phoning 01825 890975 or by email: info@cpresussex.org.uk

Please help us to protect these great little birds, and to demonstrate the commitment of CPRE Sussex to planning for nature.



Countryside hero stands up to developers

Jane Watson reports on Twineham farmer, Robert Worsley who made national news when he turned down £275m to protect the Sussex countryside. He has now taken things a step further by publicly challenging the developers for continuing to promote their proposal on his land.

I Increasing concern about the erosion of the Sussex countryside and the many injustices of the present planning system was what led Robert Worsley to take action to stop development of his land two years ago.

For the past four years, the property company, Mayfield Market Towns (MMT) has been promoting Robert's farm as a 'new settlement'. Although MMT has never submitted a formal planning application, it has published maps of Robert's land on its website showing hundreds of acres of his countryside which would be obliterated by the proposal.

Robert has now responded by dealing the company a crushing blow – speaking at the Examination of Mid Sussex's Local Plan last month (January), he left the government inspector, Jonathan Bore in no doubt of MMT's shortcomings.

Robert began by referring to paragraph 173 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which states the need to establish that there is a willing landowner before a site can be considered. He then criticised MMT's Planning Advisor, John Rhodes for trying to manipulate the examination process to promote his client's site.



Sir Nicholas Soames and Robert Worsley at the Mid Sussex Plan Examination

"With respect to Mr Rhodes and his submission," he said, "I know he says they're not talking about specific sites here, but I think every submission they have made has made it very clear where their site is and where the epicentre of it is."

"As the landowner of the land in that area, I can confirm that the land is not available – it doesn't have willing landowners there, both in terms of my land and the land belonging to all the farmers and landowners around me."

"I can confirm that it (Mayfields) is not supported, it is not deliverable and frankly it's a non starter from any constraint point of view. It is the definition of 'constrained'." Robert's actions have delighted local communities – many of which are feeling the effects of

other unwanted developments. Henfield resident, Emma Osborne summed up local feeling:

"Brilliant," she said. "Calmly and perfectly delivered without exaggeration or deviation from the clear point. Thank you for all you're doing for this beautiful part of Sussex. We look after the land for future generations as custodians rather than owners. Robert has got it 100% right and is prepared to stand up for what he believes in. It restores your faith, it really does."

Robert's intervention was also watched by Sir Nicholas Soames who had joined the Public Examination for the morning. Sir Nicholas quickly sent out a flurry of supportive Tweets hashtagged:

#realherocountrysideowes himhugedebt

If you know a project or enterprise that enriches our countryside enter it in the Countryside Awards!

The awards are open to any project or enterprise, large or small, completed between December 2010 and January 2017 in the following categories –

Rural Enterprise

Environmental Education

New Sussex Landscapes

Making Places Design Award

To enter and for more information

see the enclosed leaflet or go to the CPRE Sussex website bit.ly/SussexCountryside and complete an online application or phone **01825 890975** for an application pack

The closing date for entries is **31st March 2017**

The Awards Ceremony will be held at Petworth House on **11th October 2017**

Show your support for the projects that make Sussex great – sponsor an award!

For more details go to <http://bit.ly/SussexCountryside> or email lesley.wilson@cpresussex.org.uk

Dates for your diary

If you're interested in any of the following CPRE events please contact the office to book a place.

Countryside Walks

We welcome family groups (with pets on leads please) to our walks, led by experienced guides willing to share their knowledge of the countryside.

Directions to the meeting point will be sent with your tickets. Please come suitably dressed with refreshments.

Walk 1

June 3rd (Saturday)

2pm - 5pm at Chailey

The walk is approximately 4.5 miles and will take about 2.5 hours. Led by John Harmer of Sussex Ramblers Association. A lovely walk mainly over level fields and through woodland with short distances on minor roads passing several ancient buildings. Finishing at the Horns Lodge Inn, South Street, Chailey. Suggested donation: £5

Walk 2

September 9th (Saturday)

Details to follow

Other Events

Planning for Nature:

wildlife & farming

May 2nd (Tuesday)

The Barn, Daylands Farm, Honeybridge Lane, Ashurst, Steyning, BN44 3AW
A day spent focussing on wildlife habitat issues on a working farm to enable us to better challenge inappropriate development.

Farmhouse Breakfast

February 13th (Monday)

9:00am - 1:30pm at Hellingly Village Hall, North Street, Hellingly, BN27 4DS
Suggested donation: £10, under 14s: £5

For more information contact:

Gill & Bryan Hesselgrave: 01323 844613
stonehouse@hessel.force9.co.uk

*Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution
Supporting Farming Families
Charity no 208858*