



The countryside charity
Sussex

Shaping a greener future for Sussex

CPRE Sussex's manifesto for the 2024 local elections

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CPRE Sussex, the countryside charity, promotes, protects and enhances our local countryside. We promote beautiful landscapes which are rich in nature and greener towns and cities. We campaign for a countryside and green spaces which are accessible to all. We champion climate action and sustainable development for thriving communities.

Sussex is, in many ways, a glorious place to live: with natural wonder, exceptional heritage, and buzzing towns and cities surrounded by rolling downland and weald.

There are, however, some major concerns. CPRE Sussex is calling for candidates in May 2024's council elections to commit to action to tackle five big threats to our countryside and our communities:

- Local people priced out of the countryside
- Climate breakdown
- Ugly, monolithic, anti-wildlife development and agriculture
- A lack of access to nature
- Pollution of our water, air and land

We want to see our elected politicians tackle the climate, housing and ecological crises, and shape a greener future for Sussex.

We hope candidates of all parties and none, pledge to back our manifesto and voters hold them to account.



Paul Steedman
Director



Prof. Dan Osborn
Chair

Local people priced out of the countryside: the need for local, affordable, brownfield homes, and strong rural bus links

We're widely acknowledged to be in a housing crisis. Homes – both to buy and to rent – are simply unaffordable for many people. To meet the needs of residents, Sussex is in real need of more genuinely affordable housing. This should be affordable to rent, part-own, or buy. It must be affordable to run, because it is energy efficient. It should be affordable to get to and from because it is located close to employment, shops and services which can be accessed by walking, cycling or public transport. Finally, it must be affordable because it does not cost us our environment, which we cannot afford to lose.

Yet too much of the housing being built is the opposite of this. It is not designed to meet the needs of local people with stretched budgets but to fill the pockets of major developers at the expense of our countryside.

CPRE's State of Brownfield Report 2022 showed nearly 400 hectares of previously-used brownfield land in Sussex on more than 700 sites – enough to build more than 23,500 new homes.

We would ask council candidates to focus on the delivery of affordable housing to meet local needs by:

- Advocating for the redefinition of 'affordable' housing to ensure it directly reflects average local incomes
- Calling for new targets for new social and genuinely affordable homes in rural areas to meet locally assessed needs
- Calling for hope value to be abolished to reduce the market value of land and increase the viability of social housing delivery
- Supporting initiatives that tackle the issues of short term lets and second homes in rural hotspots including the introduction of a short-term lets and second home register.

And by:

- Ensuring all brownfield land that is suitable for housing and could potentially come forward as a source of land supply is identified by:
 - Properly resourcing the search for brownfield land;
 - Working with local communities to identify suitable sites;
 - Ensuring local planning authorities are updating their brownfield registers at least once a year as required by Regulation 17 of the Town and Country Planning (Brownfield Land Register) Regulations 2017.
- Using all means available to bring suitable brownfield sites forward for housing by:
 - Maximising any funding opportunities which become available;
 - Working with delivery partners to get brownfield sites approved;
 - Using Compulsory Purchase Powers where necessary.
- Ensuring any Infrastructure levy, including Community Infrastructure Levy and Section 106 requirements, are set at a level which positively discourages greenfield land development over brownfield land development to reflect the higher costs of greenfield development to local communities.
- Only allowing greenfield developments if the above steps have been undertaken, with exceptions for affordable and social homes to address local need.

The affordability of rural life is also directly related to transport costs, especially for those without access to a car. We want everyone to have genuine, sustainable travel choices,

providing an alternative to car-dependency and keeping pollution out of the atmosphere. CPRE advocates for local transport improvements, improving connectivity and access and reducing loneliness and isolation for everyone. That is why we are asking candidates to commit to:

- Advocating for enhanced and restored bus services;
- Keeping vital public transport routes in place such as those connecting communities to hospitals, social care routes, places of employment, and educational facilities.

Climate breakdown: flooding, drought and much worse, in Sussex and beyond

The situation is stark. The impact of climate change is already clear in our daily lives. Severe weather events, erosion along the Sussex coast and flooding are all increasing. At current levels of heating, many parts of our planet will be unliveable within decades. We must do everything we can to tackle this threat to humanity – as acknowledged by the ‘climate emergency’ declarations from councils across Sussex.

We are calling on local election candidates to commit to:

- Setting an emissions target for the whole council area (not just ‘direct’ council activities) of at least a 68% reduction on 1990 levels by 2030 and delivering a strategy to achieve this target;
- Embedding climate change considerations in all policy-making, demonstrating leadership by assessing and reducing the greenhouse gas emissions from all local authority policies, actions and decisions. This includes infrastructure and minerals decisions and divestment from fossil fuels;
- Leading a Rooftop Renewables Revolution. There is huge untapped potential for rooftop solar across the country, with 250,000 hectares of south-facing commercial roof space alone and a further 20,000 hectares of car parks. Making the best use of this rooftop space would dramatically reduce pressure on land elsewhere. CPRE is calling on local government to adopt a renewables strategy that prioritises rooftops, surface car parks and brownfield sites. Candidates can do this by:
 - Taking all means possible to ensure solar PV or thermal panels are the standard expectation for all suitably-orientated roofs on new buildings, including homes. This should be at the forefront of any new or updated Climate Strategy or Action Plan, any Corporate Strategy, or any emerging local plan;
 - Prioritising the installation of solar PV or thermal panels upon all suitably-orientated roofs on publicly-owned buildings or suitable publicly-owned brownfield land. Where previous commitments have been made by councils to this effect, ensure they are being resourced, monitored and met;
 - Bringing forward local plan policies to require new homes, commercial developments and public car parking spaces to provide solar energy generation as a condition of planning permission;
 - Actively seeking out opportunities to install solar panels on suitable brownfield land, avoiding best and most versatile agricultural land, requiring provisions for multi-functional benefits and achieving best practice standards for landscape and natural capital.
- Prioritising investment in sustainable travel including footpaths, cycleways and bus lanes which help people lead healthier lives while cutting carbon emissions;
- Opposing extensive road-building programmes which simply fill up with more traffic;
- Opposing the expansion of Gatwick Airport, which would make climate change worse and compromise the tranquillity of the countryside.

Poor development and agriculture: ugly, monolithic, anti-wildlife and water-hungry

Our beautiful countryside – and the very functioning of the natural systems on which we rely – are also under tremendous pressure in Sussex from two key sources. The first is development, primarily for profitable but locally-unaffordable homes, as described above. The second is unsympathetic approaches to agriculture, which leave little space for nature and contribute significantly to the pollution of our water and atmosphere.

The development that we don't want or need (expensive, 'executive' housing on greenfield sites, rather than affordable brownfield homes) is encouraged by a planning system stacked in favour of the big development companies, and – contrary to claims of countryside 'levelling up' – Government housing targets that place ever more development pressure on the overheated South East. Our rivers and aquifers are under particular pressure; there is huge water stress simply to meet existing needs. Where development takes place, the design is often poor, with identikit houses built in car-dependent locations, with poor walking, wheeling, and public transport connections and zero thought given to nature corridors or wildlife habitats.

We are calling on local election candidates to commit to:

- Supporting our call to national government for sustainable and deliverable housing targets, scrapping the government approach that, against its own policies, sucks ever more development into the South East;
- Protecting the South Downs National Park and the High Weald and Chichester Harbour Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty from inappropriate development.
- Respecting water by limiting development so there is enough water for nature, farming and people, and ensuring the cumulative impact of sewage discharges on the environment and public health is determined and factored into the making of development plans, including the calculation of housing targets and allocation of sites.
- Recognising the character of rural roads and opposing new development that overloads them.

Around 70% of Sussex land is used for farming. Agriculture has shaped the landscapes we see all around us. Farmers do a critical job of producing food, and, where it is done well, managing the land to support nature, carbon storage, public access for recreation and wellbeing, and much more. Farmers do so amidst extremely challenging market conditions and an uncertain and changing policy and subsidy landscape. Yet in too many cases – often as a consequence of these economic and policy pressures – agriculture in Sussex does not deliver these public benefits, and has been responsible for nature-loss, river-pollution and the creation of monocultural, sterile, landscapes.

We are calling on local election candidates to commit to:

- Working in partnership with farmers on council-owned land to enhance, or introduce, more nature-friendly forms of farming that reduce chemical inputs and pesticides, restore wildlife habitats, including woodlands and hedgerows, limit water pollution, end overgrazing and bring down carbon emissions.
- Using council procurement to help develop local food networks that support nature-friendly farming on a sustainable basis.

A lack of access to nature: a countryside that says 'keep out'

The coronavirus pandemic highlighted the value of the countryside and green spaces for people's physical and mental health and the urgent need to reverse the trend of declining biodiversity. It also showed how hard it is for many people to access nature on a regular basis.

The barriers can be physical: stiles and certain types of gate can be impassable for some people with disabilities, for example. They can be financial: people may not be able to afford to get to the countryside from an urban area, or the costs of 'outdoor gear'. They can be cultural: for some people, 'going for a countryside walk' is just not something 'people like me' do, and can be intimidating. They can be the product of discrimination: a government review in 2019 found many Black, Asian and ethnically diverse people view the countryside as an 'an exclusive, mainly white, mainly middle-class club'. The inaccessibility of nature can also reflect how much of the countryside is 'off-limits', walled-off behind 'keep out' signs and, in urban areas, the simple absence of nature, with few street trees or poorly-maintained parks.

We are calling on local election candidates to commit to making nature accessible to everyone, by:

- Planting new trees, woodlands and hedgerows, including street trees in towns and cities, to significantly increase tree cover;
- Ensuring *everyone* is within a 15-minute walk or wheel of a nature-rich green space;
- Conducting an audit of foot-, bridle- and cycle paths to identify where physical barriers prevent users of mobility equipment from enjoying nature, and putting in place a programme to change or remove these barriers to make our paths more inclusive;
- Supporting walking, cycling, birdwatching and other countryside leisure groups run by and for people of colour;
- Expanding the availability of mobility equipment such as off-road mobility scooters and inclusive bikes and trikes at council-managed countryside leisure destinations;
- Supporting and developing bus, cycle and walking routes to countryside leisure destinations;
- Opening up more council-owned countryside to public access, expanding the 'right to roam' within Sussex.

Pollution of our water, air and land: by chemicals, sewage, plastics, light and noise

Our rivers are polluted by sewage and agricultural run-off. Our roadsides blighted by litter. Our beaches covered in plastic. Our air, especially in urban areas, is heavy with NO₂ and particulates. By day, noise from roads and planes threatens our countryside's tranquillity, while at night the wonder of our starry skies is blotted out by light pollution.

It need not be like this. We are calling on local election candidates to commit to:

- Putting pressure on water companies and the Government to end the discharge of raw sewage into our rivers and seas;
- Supporting action to reduce the run-off of agricultural pollutants – fertilisers, pesticides and animal wastes – into our rivers;
- Addressing plastic pollution through waste and procurement strategies that minimise single-use plastics and supporting local initiatives to reduce and reuse;
- Tackling air pollution through:
 - Transport policies which emphasise walking, cycling and electric public transport;
 - Planning policies which reduce the need for travel through the co-location of homes, employment and services;
 - Effectively managing the council fleet's own transport emissions.
- Addressing light pollution on the council's own estate and through planning policy and partnership working to protect dark skies;
- Developing a Quiet Lanes policy and supporting local communities to create safer routes for travelling.