

A person with curly hair, wearing a red long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans, stands on a grassy hillside. They are wearing a large black backpack and looking out over a vast, green landscape under a clear sky. The landscape features rolling hills, fields, and some trees in the distance. The person is positioned on the left side of the frame, facing right.

# Planning for climate, nature and affordability

## CPRE Sussex's Election Manifesto 2024

What countryside charity CPRE Sussex  
wants to see from our next MPs



The countryside charity  
Sussex

# Planning for climate, nature and affordability

## What we want to see from our next MPs

Sussex is on the frontline of our cost of living, housing, nature and climate crises. We need our next MPs to champion policies that address these huge challenges – and we have put them at the heart of our manifesto.

At this general election, we want to see candidates and parties prioritise policies that:

### Tackle climate breakdown

by committing to renewable energy sources, ending reliance on fossil fuels and opposing airport and road expansion, and supporting Sussex to adapt to the unavoidable impacts.

### Make genuinely affordable housing a reality

by requiring more affordable housing in developments, abolishing ‘hope value’ to help local authorities build social housing, backing communities to use neighbourhood planning or rural exception sites to deliver small-scale affordable housing developments, and taking the house price pressure off the South East with a regional economic development strategy for England.

### Protect nature and natural landscapes

by supporting nature-friendly farming, and properly funding protected National Landscapes and Nature Recovery Networks.

### Plan intelligently to get the right development in the right places

while protecting the things that make Sussex special, with planning reform and a land use strategy that promotes brownfield development first, abolishes the ‘Standard Method’ for setting housing targets, puts local voices at its heart, and supports nature recovery, such as hedgerow planting.

## CPRE Sussex

CPRE Sussex is the historic county’s countryside charity. We protect, celebrate and regenerate the beautiful, thriving Sussex countryside, to shape a greener future for everyone.

Working across East and West Sussex and Brighton & Hove for over 50 years, with more than 2000 members and supporters, we form part of an England-wide CPRE network.



Prof Dan Osborn,  
Chair, CPRE Sussex



Paul Steedman,  
Director, CPRE Sussex

# Tackling climate breakdown

This is the greatest challenge facing Sussex – and the world – in the 21st century. It will disrupt every aspect of life. We are already in uncharted territory: very recently parts of East Sussex had three times the expected rainfall over a period of months. The heatwaves, extreme rainfall, coastal erosion, disruptive landslides, water shortages and sewage pollution we have seen in Sussex in the last few years can all be linked to climate change. We're currently on track for nearly 3°C of average warming this century. For Sussex that means more summer temperatures of 40°C – and we are not prepared. A “3°C world” would mean deadly heatwaves and flooding in Sussex, as well as crop failures and the displacement of hundreds of millions of people worldwide. Every fraction of a degree of global temperature rise will make things worse.

Acting now is the best way of dealing with climate change. That means immediate government action to cut greenhouse gas pollution and adapt to the changes that are already happening and those that are to come. No more delays, no more pushing back deadlines. Many of these serious problems can be avoided if we act now. Delay will be costly and dangerous.

## We need Sussex's next MPs to commit to:

- A rapid end to fossil fuel extraction and consumption, with no further exploration, test drilling or gas or oil development.
- Making the best use of Sussex's natural resources, backing CPRE Sussex's campaign for a step change in rooftop solar energy, including making solar PV or thermal panels a standard requirement for all suitable new build housing, commercial buildings and car parks and setting a new government target for at least 60% of solar energy to be delivered through rooftop solar installations, with the aim of increasing this percentage rapidly. No planning permissions without rooftop solar should be the norm.
- No second runway at Gatwick, including refusing the current expansion plans; the technology to eliminate the resultant greenhouse gas emissions from flying does not yet exist – and it is unclear if it ever will do – on top of noise and air quality impacts.
- A focus on active travel not road-building.
- Policies that will help Sussex adapt to the impacts of climate change already 'locked in', including a management plan drawing on nature-based solutions for the fast-eroding areas of our Sussex coast at Cuckmere Haven, Climping Foreshore and Birling Gap and flood-prone river valleys. Too much of Sussex's coast is currently without a management plan for the future.
- Changing the approach to water so that there are not shortages in hot weather and floods at other times. Both shortages and floods will get much worse if no action is taken and drought will become more frequent.



Rooftop solar is a great way to produce low carbon electricity.



# Protecting nature and natural landscapes

Sussex has many internationally important places for wildlife in landscapes such as chalk streams, ancient woodlands and chalk grassland. But isolated areas of valued habitat need to be joined up in ways and expanded, creating corridors for wildlife to move and increase across the landscape.

But wildlife is in sharp decline on land and in the seas. The UK has suffered more than most nations in this. We need action now to halt and then reverse the decline. This is possible. Sussex's rewilding initiatives (most famously at Knepp), and, for example, new grazing regimes near Cuckmere Haven are doing just that.

## We need Sussex's next MPs to commit to:

- Meeting the 30x30 target to conserve at least 30% of land and sea for biodiversity by 2030.
- Providing more certainty for farmers wanting to produce food in low-carbon, low-pollution, nature-friendly ways. Most critically, there is a need to improve agri-environment schemes, doubling the amount of farmland covered by Environmental Land Management schemes, through local mechanisms that work both in National Landscapes (eg Farming in Protected Landscapes) and in the wider countryside. Targeting this funding to create new woodland and wetland near urban areas would increase access to nature too.
- Guaranteeing full funding for National Park Authorities (including the South Downs, which CPRE Sussex campaigned for the creation of) and implement the Glover Review recommendations to give other National Landscapes (including the High Weald and Chichester Harbour AONBs) increased funding and a greater voice on development proposals.
- Increasing funding for Local Nature Recovery Strategies, to drive habitat protection and creation from the bottom up.
- Champion planting more rural hedgerows, and more urban trees, as part of nature recovery networks penetrating towns and villages and improving access to green space for everyone.



# Make genuinely affordable housing a reality

The cost of living in Sussex is unbearable for many. Soaring energy bills have combined with sky-high rent and house purchase prices. Housing costs have raced ahead of local wages, highlighting disparities in wealth. In 2022, across Sussex house prices were between 9 and 14 times annual pre-tax earnings, compared to a ratio of 8 for England and Wales as a whole. Affordable home build completions have largely stagnated. In 2021/22, 1,758 affordable homes were completed across the whole of Sussex, compared to a peak of 2,115 in 2014/15. Local residents see their children unable to afford to stay in the area, while at the same time green fields are lost to expensive – and sometimes low-quality – properties that mainly benefit the shareholders of major construction companies.

We need reforms to planning and construction that will deliver truly affordable homes meeting local needs and sustainable because they have low energy costs with rooftop solar and good insulation and suitable ventilation. Such developments need to work with nature, not against it, by managing water better and preserving and planting trees instead of cutting them down.

## We need Sussex's next MPs to commit to:

- Backing CPRE's campaign for affordable rural housing to meet local community needs.
- Taking the house price pressure off the South East with a regional economic development strategy for England to create more jobs in the Midlands and the North.
- Abolishing 'hope value' and amending national policy to expect much more affordable and social housing in new developments, thereby reducing the market value of land and increasing the viability of social housing provision by local authorities.
- Redefining 'affordable housing' so that new homes for sale or rent are directly linked to average local incomes.
- Supporting rural communities wishing to use neighbourhood planning or rural exception sites to deliver small-scale affordable housing developments on the edge of villages in line with locally-assessed need.
- Introducing a second home and short-term lets register, with planning controls to regulate the provision of short-term lets and powers to levy extra council tax on second homes, to help tackle affordability pressures in tourist hotspots.
- Securing higher quality housing by more forcefully advising local authorities and the Planning Inspectorate to reject schemes that do not live up to design aspirations set out in the National Design Code and those adopted locally.
- Addressing other drivers of countryside poverty and isolation, including reversing the decline of the rural bus network, massively expanding home insulation programmes and adopting net zero standards for new-build homes to cut energy bills.



Sussex needs homes which are affordable to buy, rent and run – and which are climate and nature-friendly.

# A plan for the land

Land (and the rivers and streams that crisscross it) is a limited resource. In Sussex it is being consumed by developers at such a rate that some communities, like Billingshurst, could double in size between 2000 and 2040 whilst others, such as Hassocks, Burgess Hill and Haywards Heath could merge because the gaps between them are fast shrinking. The value of land to society needs recognition in new policies and practical approaches because land provides food, conserves water, stores carbon to keep the climate stable, protects from flooding, is a home for wildlife and provides green, open and coastal spaces for us to enjoy. The planning system is a crucial tool to help balanced decision-making - but it is largely reactive, driven more by developers than the community. Many decisions – such as how farmers might best use the land – sit largely outside the planning process.

In this context, and given the relentless pressure from developers, too many poor decisions get made. As a result, we build the wrong houses in the wrong places, we farm unsustainably, we leave too little space for nature, and we put solar panels on high quality agricultural land. Consequently, residents frequently feel that the character of Sussex is under threat whilst other parts of the country are being left to decline.

Given the urgency of tackling the climate, nature and affordability crises, we need a more strategic approach to land use, and to planning – and we need it now.

## We need Sussex's next MPs to commit to:

- Develop a land use strategy which sets a positive long-term vision for land use across Sussex and England based on how the land works to store carbon, conserve water, provide for wildlife in a range of habitats and sustainably produce nutritious food. The strategy should integrate national and local policymaking and decision-taking to inform and incentivise greener land use decisions and deliver national environmental targets including net-zero.
- Ensure genuinely sustainable development by aligning national policy with the land use strategy, ensuring that key environmental targets, such as the expansion of our hedgerow network by 40% by 2050, are translated into planning policy.
- Protect our countryside from overdevelopment through planning reform, including an end to the 'Standard Method' of setting inflated housing targets that sucks overdevelopment into the South East, while bearing no relation to real local need.
- Require developers to use suitable urban brownfield sites before greenfield sites and encourage local authorities to set policies prioritising urban regeneration.
- Reform of the water sector to end pollution of our rivers and seas, and to ensure that our infrastructure can cope with the new housing we do need. This should be underpinned by changes to the National Planning Policy Framework to support the principle that water infrastructure, including sewers and water treatment works, should be upgraded before the commencement of significant new developments.
- Investing to ensure everyone is within 15 minutes of high quality 'green and blue' spaces, such as urban parks, beaches or rivers.
- Strengthen approaches to Nature Recovery and improve support for urban greenspaces so that town and country are better linked for the benefit of people and wildlife.







Get involved  
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