



ANNUAL REPORT

October 2024



The countryside charity
Cambridgeshire
and Peterborough

Chairman's Report

Alan James

This has been a very demanding year for CPRE Cambridgeshire & Peterborough. I sometimes doubt we have ever had to face so many ill-conceived, money-driven, environmentally damaging and downright foolish development and planning issues for the region at the same time as we have had this past year. Almost every day there seems to be either a new issue or a serious development of an ongoing one. Often several.

It does seem that more people are returning to commuting and other work-related journeys and that rush-hour traffic has risen across the region, despite many people continuing to work some or all of their time from home. One of the most public examples has been South Cambs. District Council's four-day week, continued despite government objections. Published analysis claims this to be working well although some members of the public disagree! Experience has led to myself and my colleagues continued working from home and, of course, the CPRE office remains closed. Neither has led to any major issues and the greenhouse gas reduction all helps the climate.

Transport

We have continued to call for a proper integrated transport plan for the region. It does appear that some progress is being made but it is often a case of one step forward, two steps back.

For those continuing to commute, improved public transport could help reduce the numbers of cars on the roads and could significantly reduce carbon dioxide emissions. There has been a small ray of light in this respect caused by the support of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CAPCA) for continuation and improvement of bus services across the county and some of the local schemes to encourage active travel by making cycling and walking easier, safer and more enjoyable. CAPCA is funding 30 new or improved bus routes with the first eight being launched in September benefitting Whittlesey, Huntingdon, Alconbury Weald, Cambourne, St Neots, Eye, Thorney and Cambridge. Tragically, in March this year government ministers cut two-thirds of England's dedicated funding for walking, wheeling and cycling, in order to protect the largest ever roads programme. Only days later, ministers published an updated climate plan, showing the UK is set to miss its 2030 target due to carbon emissions from road transport.

East-West Rail, EWR, have continued to press ahead with Route 'E' across South Cambs. If this project proceeds, villages and countryside will be severely damaged with over-bearing, massive, embankments, fields and farms left uneconomic, few passengers and no direct connection with the closed Colne Valley line, which urgently needs re-opening to Haverhill and Sudbury as a climate friendly alternative to the CSETS busway. EWR will only have a single station in the

county, in the countryside north of Cambourne, and its financial case is to enable further development at Cambourne and Tempsford. Diesel trains will thunder through central Cambridge and Newmarket 24/7 and the cost of upgrading the at-capacity single-track Newmarket line with its single-track tunnel seems to have been forgotten. Where is the joined-up transport planning?

We believe the EWR money, £8bn plus inflation, would be far better spent on other rail projects. These include, completing the upgrade of the freight route between Felixstowe and the national freight interchange at Nuneaton. The main requirements are the extra chord at Ely station and the doubling of the line from Ely to Soham's re-opened station and hence onward to the junction with the Cambridge-Ipswich main line east of Newmarket. This would take thousands of heavy goods vehicle journeys off the A14 every day. These funds would also be enough to simultaneously complete the reconnection of Wisbech to the Peterborough-Cambridge line at March, to build the promised new station at Waterbeach and to return the Cambridge-St Ives busway back to rail and continue it to Alconbury Weald by re-opening the old line between St Ives and Huntingdon. After all, some developers were falsely advertising the long-promised Alconbury station as having a 'direct rail connection to Cambridge'. Hmmm!

Climate change

Climate change is the biggest issue affecting our county. Huge areas, including Cambridge, are at steadily increasing risk from lack of potable water due to hotter, drier summers and over-population. Farms

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could be left reduced or no water for irrigation. More flooding is inevitable due to prolonged and heavier winter rainfall added to sea level rise. In our Fenland and East Cambs. reports, we looked at the now 30-year global average rate of sea level rise of 3.61 mm per year and the global 5-year average, 4.60 mm per year. Some would say, that a more realistic appraisal of the rate of sea level rise affecting the UK is the 5-year average for the North Atlantic. This is now reported as being 4.78 mm per year. To all of these figures must be added the 1 mm per year land shrinkage. Yet, as we said last year, the risks to community health and well-being arising from climate change continue to be largely ignored by national and local government alike and any action that is taken is slow and even complacent, compared to the apparent urgency with which building and growth are being pursued.

We think that Internal Drainage Boards, (IDBs) should be much better funded. Many are struggling with the monstrous increase in their electricity costs and related standing charges which is compounded by the increased pumping they are required to do. We think that all IDBs should be statutory consultees for all planning applications affecting their areas. It was only recently that the planning team leader for one of the largest developments in the county, admitted to me that he hadn't known what an IDB was until he had received objections from one. We have even had examples of planning authorities informing the wrong IDB of a planning application in an area. We believe that Environment Agency funding should be restored and that the Agency's right of veto of developments on flood plains should be restored. This could save huge costs arising from property damage and probably lives as well in the longer term. It was Vermuyden in the 1650's who designed and implemented much of the drainage of the Fens, the Humber Estuary and the Somerset Levels. With climate change trends the way that they are, perhaps we should be looking again at today's Dutch engineers to advise on the flood protection that these areas need now to mitigate climate change effects and protect much of the UK fresh food supply. Perhaps some more of the EWR funds would be better spent on improving flood protection measures.

The Ox-Cam Arc

Once again, central government has become obsessed with 'growth' and 'clustering' in the corridor between Cambridge and Oxford, the Ox-Cam Arc. It is very timely that national CPRE has been revising its policy on the Arc and this revised policy will be published by the time you are reading this. Why government does not want to refurbish the *circa* 1 m empty homes or build on the *circa* 1.3 m registered brownfield sites

across our towns and cities, many of which are crying out for regeneration, I do not understand. Why government wants to impoverish the social cohesion of those communities by encouraging their brightest and best to move south for jobs beats me. As someone involved in global life-science research and IT, I cannot comprehend why government does not understand that the global industry 'clusters' the UK has to compete with, like Research Triangle in North Carolina, cover large geographical areas and that to compete, it is the UK with its many world-class universities that needs to act as a single cluster, not Cambridge on its own with an occasional contact with Oxford.

Construction

We are increasingly worried that the unelected Greater Cambridge Partnership, some councils, and Cambridge University, continue to press for more building around Cambridge including on its Green Belt and on some of the best farm land in the country. The current government's attempts to centralise planning seem to be worse and less democratic than the last one's. The latest announcement of the allocation of £650,000 to Greater Cambridge Shared Planning by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to "*help make the whole planning process even more efficient*", an '*accelerator*' project colloquially known as the 'Planning Supersquad', is even more alarming. This is in neither the best national interest or the best local interest.

This seems in direct conflict with the objectives and provisions of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023, which seems to have been forgotten already. We continue to hope that Mission 2 of the original White Paper, moving R&D investment out of the south east, is implemented. I repeat it here once again:

“Mission 2: By 2030, domestic public investment in R&D outside the Greater South East will increase by at least 40%, and over the Spending Review period by at least one third. This additional government funding will seek to leverage at least twice as much private sector investment over the long term to stimulate innovation and productivity growth. *and...*

Achieving the mission will require sustained and targeted increases in public R&D investment, as well as increased investment by business. It will be driven by a change in the way the UK Government invests. For example, for the first time, BEIS will commit to invest at least 55% of its funding outside the GSE by 2024–25. In addition, the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) will increase National Institute for Health Research investment outside London, Oxford and Cambridge, while the Ministry of Defence will enhance and accelerate

R&D spend across the UK through the Defence and Security Industrial Strategy. 99

Last year we were able to report that we had successfully assisted Newnham residents in halting a Queens College application for new student accommodation which would have severely damaged



📷 "Winter at Woodwalton Fen" by 'naturalengland' is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

wildlife, including bats, in the adjacent Paradise Nature Reserve. Unfortunately, Queens College not being a community-minded or nature-minded organisation decided to appeal the planning authority's decision. With some unfathomable reasoning, the Planning Inspectorate decided against the will of the local community and upheld the appeal. There is now an ongoing legal battle apparently because the college wants to widen the narrow lane to the site to allow access for construction machinery. Residents who have protected the grass verges with large boulders and allow safe standing points for pedestrians are now being threatened with prosecution.

The timetable for the development of the Greater Cambridge Local Plan seems as uncertain as ever due to the various pressures being placed upon the local planning authorities. The last timetable update that we are aware of was published in March 2024.

<https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/news/2024/03/05/greater-cambridge-local-plan---timetable-update>

Meanwhile we understand that the South Barton Road Landowners Group of colleges continues to push the councils to include the Green Belt south of the Barton Road in the new Plan. The North Barton Landowners Group of colleges continues to do the same for land north of the Barton Road. This will destroy a very significant part of the Cambridge Green Belt. We again point to the Cambridge Inner Green Belt Study by LDA Design in November 2015 - the most recent review of the Green Belt which was very clear that any release of Green Belt land in this sector would be very damaging

to the setting of the city and that *"no Green Belt release should be contemplated"*.

We continue to await the Planning Inspectorate's recommendation and the Secretary of State's decision about the Anglian Water application to move the perfectly serviceable Cambridge Waste Water Treatment (WWT) plant into the Green Belt at Honey Hill, north of the A14 between Fen Ditton and Horningsea.

We continue to prepare to formally oppose the unelected Greater Cambridge Partnership, GCP, proposals to build 3 busways, north, east and west across the Cambridgeshire countryside. In each case the only claimed financial benefit is *"land value uplift"*. We think these applications will be made soon.

Research & Development

As mentioned above and in my report last year, we remain totally gob-smacked by the way in which both central and local government keep clinging to the 1960's approach to R&D development as requiring 'clustering'. It is mind numbing that these organisations remain so far behind the curve of reality and do not understand that we now have this mechanism called the internet, which means that thoughts can be exchanged and meetings held with anyone, anywhere in the world at any time. In the USA people and organisations are moving out of Silicon Valley to more equable climes. In Australia, clinical trials are run in hospitals all over the country for industry customers all over the world who can access their trials results in real time. Meanwhile, here in the UK, the country which invented ADSL, the technology on which broadband is based and which was first in being able to joint fibre-optic cables, we are still awaiting the completion of fibre optic cable installation to all premises in the country, an ambition first expressed to me by the then research director of British Telecom, in 1971, yes 1971, a pre-retirement ambition.

Solar energy

We are more than concerned by the decision of the new Secretary of State to allow the Sunnica solar installation, against the recommendations of the Planning Inspectorate and the findings of all elected local authorities, within days of coming to office. This is a major loss of good crop-growing land forever. The battery storage installations are a major fire and explosion hazard and a major security risk to communities. There is a significant USAF war grave on the site containing the remains of a crashed B50 bomber and its crew from 43rd Bomb Group of the Davis Monthan Field, Arizona on a training exercise at RAF Skulthorpe and visiting Lakenheath. The crew were heroes who died while avoiding the village of Isleham when their plane developed mechanical faults.

This same decision was paralleled by the approval of the Mallards Pass solar installation just across the border in Lincolnshire and Rutland. In Cambridgeshire we continue to battle more and more smaller solar installations whose cumulative effect on crop-growing and fresh-food availability continues to be ignored. We fully support the national CPRE efforts to campaign for more solar on rooftops, especially on large building such as warehouses and offices. We also applaud the work by Cambridgeshire County Council to install solar roofing at its park-and-ride sites in St Ives and Babraham.

Planning

The 'greenwash' by planning applicants continues and the claims made for bio-diversity net gain by some developers is quite staggering, especially when it involves sites many miles away from the actual development with claimed off-setting.

There continues to be no universal application of carbon life-cycle analysis to developments despite construction classified by the Climate Change Committee as a major source of greenhouse gas emissions. The horses are doing well cutting the lawn at Kings College though!

The Great Ouse Valley Trust (GOVT) continues to work to improve and make safe the Ouse Valley Way. They are also taking an increasing interest in planning applications and building along the Great Ouse Valley. Their application for Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) status remains in abeyance and of course this designation is now replaced by the new designation National Landscape. We believe the Great Ouse Valley is a National Landscape worthy of protection for future generations.
<https://greatousevalleytrust.org.uk/>

The Friends of the Cam are steadily gaining increased recognition for their independent approach, unsullied by water companies or pro-development organisations like the University. They provided an excellent response to the proposal to move the main Cambridge sewage works into the Green Belt and continue to harry the local authorities concerning the effects this will have on the Cam, its banks and the boating and rowing fraternities. They opposed the establishment of a designated bathing area on the Cam, pointing out that until Anglian Water carried out proper maintenance of the Haslingfield sewage works, bathing in the river will always be a risk to health. They continue to support us in the battle to prevent over abstraction from the chalk aquifer south of Cambridge being aggravated by further major development. This situation is now so serious that the Environment Agency has formally objected to four significant developments around Cambridge. The councillors and council officers unfortunately seem to think they know

better than the experts at the Agency.

<https://www.friendsofthecam.org/>

We are all working hard to protect our precious countryside. We are very concerned about climate change and I think that must be our first priority with every issue we face. We must encourage government at all levels to adopt properly climate-friendly policies and actions. Greenwash and failure to look at carbon life cycles in all that government does is irresponsible at best, dangerous to us all at worst. We need healthy, vibrant rural communities with sufficient housing and sufficient to eat but these objectives must be applied right across the country, not just in our county. Here, where much of the UK's fresh food and grain is grown, we must balance development against its effect on food supply. We must also press for proper remuneration for farmers of all sizes for their products and services. The intense pressure on farm prices exerted by large supermarkets may be something we should be looking at more closely. That is most likely one of the reasons that many farmers are turning to activities like growing solar panels instead of crops, just to stay solvent.

If you think you can assist, either as volunteer or as a trustee please do contact us.

Wishing you all a very enjoyable year out and about in our beautiful countryside. Long may it stay that way!

Jo McGowan continues to provide an excellent service as Branch Administrator. We now have more of her time following the closing down of Regions by national CPRE. Tracey Hipson continues to maintain the website, adding to its content each week. Tracey also maintains our Facebook presence. A volunteer adds the occasional riposte to Twitter, or should I say 'X' and our following is growing.

We welcome Sue Duma as our new Treasurer. Sue is a Chartered Management Accountant with experience of business and of the charity sector having been Treasurer for the Rotary Club of St Ives. Welcome Sue!

Sue will take over from Nick de Chenu who has been our Treasurer for many years now. I must say a personal thank you to Nick for all the help that he has given me with both routine and not so routine matters. Nick, we wish you and Linda well in all that you do.

We are also joined by Claire Butcher, who has a legal background in business, local authorities and the courts. Claire is currently studying for a law degree. Claire has agreed to work alongside Jane Williams until the AGM when she will take over from Jane as Vice Chair. Claire lives in Wisbech, so I have also asked her to represent Fenland for us.

East Cambridgeshire

Alan James

We continue to monitor and respond to planning applications in the District and provide advice to residents and members.

Climate change

Climate change remains the most serious issue facing East Cambridgeshire (Cambs.). The annual rate of sea level rise continues to increase due to the ice melt caused by climate change. During the past year the 30-year average has risen from to 3.57mm/annum to 3.61 mm/annum (Aviso Satellite). Including crustal shrinkage of the southern England land mass, this means an effective rate of sea level rise of 4.61mm/annum. The 5-year average is now 4.60 mm/year (Aviso Satellite) creating an effective rate including land shrinkage of 5.60mm/year, steadily adding to local flood risk.

The past winter has seen some of the heaviest and most prolonged rainfall on record. This and the continued cool Spring weather made farmers' tasks very difficult with soft and sometimes flooded ground being incapable at times of bearing tilling or planting machinery. We wonder what effect this will have on crop yields.

Construction

We remain very concerned by the continued high rates of building in East Cambs., which will contribute to climate change and make it harder to manage its effects in the future. As we stated last year, it remains our view that the Environment Agency and the Internal Drainage Boards should be given more powers to prevent unwise development which affects flood plains and artificially drained areas like fens.

We maintained our objection to the 'CLT' branded application in Wilburton. Because of a technical failure by the applicant to deliver responses to the planning authority's questions on time, the planning authority has issued a very welcome refusal.

In March 2023, we objected to a third application to build a retirement care village on an area of the Cambridge Green Belt in Bottisham. Applications for this development had been refused on appeal twice previously. This was again refused by the planning authority and again went to appeal. Due to an inaccurate calculation of numbers of residents requiring such care within the proximity of the site, this planning inspector decided in favour.

The gravel extraction close to the river on Haddenham Fen, disguised as an agricultural

reservoir and given planning permission by the County Council, is gradually increasing the massive damage to the previously unspoiled fen landscape from the Hillrow Causeway (A1123) towards Sutton. Heavy vehicle traffic from the site continues to damage this unstable and dangerous fen road. Even parts of the major repair completed last year are starting to buckle. The noise and vibration to villages houses along the route are exacerbated by the HGV drivers who clearly think they hold a speed limit exemption certificate.

Transport

Network Rail submitted the Outline Business Case for the Ely Area Capacity Enhancement (EACE) to the Department for Transport in March 2022. A response is still awaited. Like Network Rail, we consider this to be a very significant component in completing the freight route upgrade between the Haven Ports and the Nuneaton rail freight interchange. The doubling of the line to Soham and other improvements around Ely could also improve local passenger services in addition to removing many HGV journeys from the A14, a welcome contribution to climate mitigation.

The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, CAPCA, is continuing its study into the planning of an upgrade to the A10 between Cambridge and Ely. We continue to maintain our reservations and possible future objections to this proposal. At a time of climate change, increasing road-space and driving does not seem to be a good idea.

Solar energy

We received significant support from the previous MP, Lucy Fraser, in respect of the application for the massive Sunnica solar development. The Planning Inspectorate recommended refusal but within days of being elected the new Secretary of State decided to overrule the Inspectorate and allow the application. The new MP, Charlotte Cane, has reacted furiously to this decision. We are extremely concerned not just by the area of farm land used but also by the compulsory purchase of farms that have been in family ownership for decades and by the principle of untrammelled dictatorship that this decision reveals. We are also extremely concerned by the risks of explosion and chemical contamination of the huge battery storage installations. CPRE's policy with respect to solar

energy generation is that it should be on rooftops, not on good growing land. In this respect, we support the UK Warehousing Association who are asking government to make it easier to install solar on warehouses.

Volunteering

We would welcome additional volunteers in East Cambs. to help us monitor and respond fully to the many inappropriate planning applications that

continue to arise in the District. With around 60 planning applications per week arising, it is difficult just to identify those which will have a significant negative effect upon their neighbourhood, the countryside or the landscape. Often it is the smaller ones which do the most profound damage. If you see something near you that you think we should investigate, please let us know.

Membership and Events

Wendy Oldfield

Who is the CPRE – this is a question I ask lots of people but like me in the past, very few people know who we are, so this year we have purchased equipment so we can attend outside events, to promote our name, hopefully get some badly needed donations and new members.

Events for this year are The Green Weekend in Godmanchester at the great Community Plant Nursery, the Ely Green Fair, Wild About Huntingdon, Ramsey Heritage Day, look out for them listed on our web site or on Facebook, so please come along and support us. We are also looking at the possibility of indoor events for the winter months. If you have a local event, we could attend please let us know, or you could hold a fund-raising event in your area!

If we are unable to afford to campaign effectively, we could end up losing the countryside we love.



The Ely Green Fair event 2024

Gifts and Donations

We are always grateful for your donations – they are vital in enabling us to carry out our work. To ensure your gift reaches us, please consider donating in the following ways:

Website: By donating via CAF Donate on our website <https://www.cprecambs.org.uk/donate-to-cpre.html>

Online: By bank transfer to our CAF account, Campaign to Protect Rural England

Cambridgeshire (account details on request) Please let us know so that we can thank you.

Cheque: Made payable to “CPRE Cambridgeshire” and sent to: CPRE, The Town Hall, St Ives, Cambridgeshire, PE27 5AL.

For further information about how to help us, including by leaving a legacy, please visit <https://www.cprecambs.org.uk/how-to-help/> or contact us at office@cprecambs.org.uk.

Fenland

Alan James

We continued to monitor and respond to planning applications in Fenland and provide advice to residents and members.

Flood defences

As with East Cambridgeshire and parts of South Cambridgeshire, the effects of climate change are our greatest concern. Mean sea level has risen 11 cm since 1993. The annual rate of rise continues to increase. Current planning guidance assumes 3 mm per annum or, unofficially since 2019, 3.3 mm per annum. These are 30-year averages. The actual 30-year average is now 3.61 mm per annum.

Following completion of the raising of the Middle Level Barrier Bank (Old Bedford) and the installation of the new demountable barrier on the A1101, Welney Wash Road, by the Environment Agency, we are now hoping that funding can be found for further flood defence work and that additional financial assistance can be provided to the Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs) to meet the major increase in the cost of electricity and standing charges that they are incurring in order to run their pumps.

This winter has seen prolonged and heavy rainfall which has caused periodic closure of roads at Welney, Sutton Gault and Earith as well as flooding of some Fen farm land. The long period of pump operation will have increased the IDB costs and the rates they charge to local councils.

Construction

We are extremely worried by the new government's pronouncements that they will bring back housing targets in a revision of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). This could again force councils to build in areas of future high risk of flooding. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill seems to have been forgotten.

We are also very concerned by the latest announcements that building should take precedence over the water quality and cleaning up of our rivers.

We are shocked that the previous government saw fit to permit the building of the proposed waste incinerator near a school in Wisbech. It was even more shocking that Fenland District Council were refused consent to apply for a judicial review. However, given the rapid improvements in plastic recycling technologies, such as the Trifol process, and the growth of plastic recycling activities by the major waste companies, we wonder where exactly the operator will be able to find enough material to burn. No material, no profit! It is our hope that the new government will call a halt to all building of these

environmental disasters.

The 2021 planning application to develop the site north of and affecting Wenny Meadow in Chatteris, F/YR21/0981/F, remains under consideration by Fenland District Council.

In 2022, residents of Tydd St Giles village and holiday



📷 "Cambridgeshire Fens" by Lapse of the Shutter. Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

park requested our assistance with a proposal to build an additional 51 leisure holiday homes. The applicant has submitted additional documents which have resulted in further objections and the application remains under consideration.

New reservoirs

We were and remain concerned by the proposal by Anglian Water (AW) for two reservoirs in the Fens and that their offshoot, Water Resources East (WRE), was recognised as a regional water authority. It is our view that such authorities should be completely independent of water companies and the regular exchange of senior staff between AW and WRE is evidence that WRE is not independent in any way.

We summarised our responses to the AW 'consultation' concerning its proposals for a new reservoir at Chatteris last year. We will not reiterate them. However, AW has now realised that the Ouse Washes are tidal and that the water from their initially proposed abstraction point is saline.

So, AW are now proposing to abstract water from a point near Bluntisham, pump it back to the reservoir north-east of Chatteris and then pump it again from there back to an enlarged holding tank at Coton from where Cambridge can be supplied. This hardly looks energy efficient. It also seems to have escaped AW's notice that the river is tidal upstream as far as Brownhill Stauch, which is upstream of Bluntisham.

So, the water there will be less saline than in the Washes but still saline and contain nematodes. Furthermore, little consideration seems to have been given to the effects of either surrounding flooding or increasing groundwater pressure on the reservoir due to the rising sea level.

We continue to recommend the more climate-friendly alternatives to this proposal, including:

- Implementation of the last government's Levelling Up Agenda.
- Re-use and refurbishment of *circa* 1 million empty homes in other regions of the country, where water supply exists.
- Building on the 1.3 million registered brownfield sites in other regions of the country, where water supply exists.
- Fixing and replacing leaking pipes and infrastructure, which both AW and Cambridge Water have failed to do.

We are hoping that Network Rail and the Combined Authority will be successful in their application for funds to re-open the March-Wisbech railway line. The Full Business Case has been submitted.

Fenland District Council has stated on its website that "Owners of the Horsefair Shopping Centre in Wisbech are planning to demolish its multi-storey car park under 'Permitted Development Rights' - meaning it does not require planning permission to go ahead." It is now apparent that the owners wish to demolish the car park to make way for an improved retail centre which will need planning permission.

In many of the statements and responses to consultations that we make, we continue to highlight that Fenland hosts one of the UK's most productive crop-growing areas. Just as we stated last year, the warnings contained in the reports by the Environmental Audit Committee in 2019 and by DEFRA in the UK Food Security Report 2021, mean we must continue to do all that we can to protect the Fens from both over-development and flooding in the interests of national food security.

We badly need additional volunteers in Fenland to help us monitor and respond fully to inappropriate planning applications. Even small developments can cause profound damage. If you see something local to you that you think we should investigate, please let us know.

Peterborough

Sally Jackson

This has been a busy year for CPRE in the Peterborough Area. The Local Plan is due to be renewed and a 'Call for Sites' produced the usual submission of completely unsuitable sites in open countryside.

Ginton and Peakirk

One of the areas of particular concern to us, is the open countryside between the villages of Ginton and Peakirk, in the North of Peterborough. There have been two sites suggested for the new Local Plan which would add 400+ houses to the East of Ginton. The two villages are separated by 1 mile of open countryside, both villages have Adopted Neighbourhood Plans, with policies preventing any coalescence.

We still have to wait for the City Councils decision, but in the meantime, one of the developers, Gladman, have submitted an outline application for one of the sites for 250 houses. Development on this site is also contrary to the existing Local Plan Policies. LP43 Small Village Allocations. *"Development in the countryside contributes to the overall housing delivery and must be acknowledged in the Spatial Strategy..... Any dwellings developed in the countryside are very much exceptional."* We wait to hear their decision!

Helpston

Another area of concern is on the outskirts of Helpston village, in the West of our area. This is described as a medium sized village, with an allocated site under the existing Local Plan, for 82 new houses. The land is in joint ownership and the owners individually have been trying unsuccessfully to get Planning Permission for their part of the site.

The Policy in the Local Plan states that – *"Any application for the site at Broad Wheel Road, Helpston Site (LP41.5) shall comprise amongst other matters, a comprehensive Masterplan for the whole site."*

However, after several unsuccessful attempts, one landowner was granted permission for up to 20 houses on his part of the site. The City Council was challenged and after a great deal of argument and discussion, the plans were passed in the Planning Committee by 2 votes!

A local resident, who is also a retired barrister together with a volunteer planner from CPRE Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, have challenged this and the outcome is still undecided.

Huntingdonshire

Gareth Ridewood

We monitored and responded to planning applications in the District and provided advice to residents and members.

We are also continuing to monitor and object to several large solar farm proposals currently being planned across Huntingdonshire and have concerns at the impact due to their scale and location. We have called for more solar retrofitting of homes and business and for better renewable energy incorporation into new housing development in the area from day one.

The Local Plan

We continued to engage with the Huntingdonshire Local Plan review with suggested changes to the document in relation to countryside, energy efficiency to Future Homes standard, opposed large scale

logistics and distribution, called for the rural character and landscape of the countryside to be protected. The Local Plan should bring together solutions for the rural economy, housing, farming, transport and the natural environment to achieve positive progress for the countryside and those who live in it. Locally valued landscapes and green spaces should be protected and consideration given to tranquility and light pollution. We are concerned at the potential impact of a large new town on the border of Huntingdonshire and the impact it would have on St Neots and the local villages.

We continued to support and promote our local producers at Farmers markets and our local shops across the District and welcomed Market Town improvements.

Press and Publicity

Much of our focus this year has been on climate change. We've excited some media curiosity about the apparently conflicting concerns of Cambridgeshire not having enough water while continued development will only increase flood risk. It was the focus of one of a series of press releases in the run-up to the General Election.

Chairman Alan James warns that with rising sea levels and a sinking region, it won't be many decades before the Fens flood regularly, Ely will be an island once more and 'Cambridge-on-Sea' could become a reality. It's a campaign we'll doubtless return to repeatedly over the next year. With three newly-elected Liberal Democrats in our patch, we've already appealed to their collective consciences to honour their election commitment to *"Take bold, urgent action ... to tackle climate change"*.

Press releases

The twin issues of flood risk and water shortage also featured in our first post-election press release when we welcomed Chancellor Rachel Reeve's commitment to 'brownfield first' but cautioned against incursions into Cambridge's tiny green belt. We made the point that modern communications mean we no longer have to "cluster" development around major centres of excellence, of which Cambridge University is clearly

one. The internet means people can now work together effectively – and more efficiently – without all crowding into one, already over-crowded and at risk, area of the country.

This was a point we made in two other pre-election press releases. The first appealed to candidates to



Social Media

Tracey Hipson

E-newsletter

An e-newsletter is sent to members twice per year, usually in late spring/early summer and winter. It aims to keep members up-to-date with our work, and signposts you to further information should you want to find out more about a particular topic. If you have not received a copy but would like to, please contact Jo McGowan at office@cprecambs.org.uk. If you do receive the e-newsletter, please pass it on to anyone you think might be interested in reading it.

Parish and village magazines

This year we began a campaign to encourage parish and village newsletters to publish articles from CPRE Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. We have had a good take-up so far, and we will continue with this project throughout the rest of this year.

Perhaps you have seen something about CPRE in your village magazine? If you'd like to know more, or if you can suggest a publication we could contact, get in touch with Tracey Hipson at administrator2@cprecambs.org.uk.

Website and Facebook

The website (<https://www.cprecambs.org.uk>) is updated weekly with a wide range of content including in-depth reports and opinion pieces, events, news updates and a blog. You are very welcome to have a listing in our Resources/ Organisations section, to be listed for free in our Rural Economy/Rural Businesses and Rural Economy/Local Foods sections, and to give us your feedback. Our contact for this is also Jo McGowan at office@cprecambs.org.uk.

Our Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/CPRECambridgeshireAndPeterborough>) is now being updated several times a week and we are pleased to see 'engagement' is growing with 166 current followers.

X / Twitter

We continue to have an active presence on X, formerly Twitter ([@CPRECambs](https://twitter.com/CPRECambs/Peterboro) / X). We now have 1,354 followers, and are very happy to attract many more. We had a strange event earlier this year when our X site was taken down as we had not proved that the person who uploads our tweets was over the age of 13. We know of one other local campaigning group that had the same problem at the same time. Our site was eventually restored, and we continue to tweet original content and re-post tweets of interest. Unsurprisingly, we are still finding that the majority of our tweeting is, as it has been for the last few years, on the seemingly-intractable problems of climate change, threats to the Green Belt, vital farmland and countryside, East-West Rail, incinerators, solar parks, the numbers of new developments in Cambridge for life-sciences (which really do not need to be in 'clusters'), sewage in our rivers, preservation of chalk streams, and development-related water shortages. We try very hard not to be 'political', but inevitably we will sometimes find ourselves in disagreement with the policies of government (of any party).

Ali Sargent, Press Officer

put a stop to East West Rail proposals. We argued the threat to farmland in particular (food security is another issue we continue to highlight in a number of contexts) and the environment in general, far outweighs any benefits. The second raised the nonsense of building tens of thousands of homes in and around Cambridge when "levelling up" investment was badly needed elsewhere. We pointed out that Cambridge was not the only university delivering life sciences – and reiterated the concept that small-scale clustering was hugely out-dated in these days of the internet!

Our final press release of the election campaign was an appeal to the incoming government to abolish the Greater Cambridge Partnership, another out-dated concept which has 'had its day' and needs to be stopped before it does any further damage to the environment.



Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire

Alan James

It has been another challenging year for the branch driven by the previous and current government’s pursuit of economic growth. In a recent report by the BBC it was stated that Cambridge University is a research powerhouse which adds nearly £30bn to the UK economy each year. It appears that the Greater Cambridge area has become a “cash cow” for the Treasury.

Cambridge is the most unequal City in the UK. A report by The Equality Trust states: *“Whilst we have the sixth highest average weekly earnings of any city in the UK, the benefits of prosperity have not been shared by all residents in the city. Evidence shows that a significant proportion of people are experiencing poverty, while others may be at risk of poverty due to factors such as low wages and rapidly increasing housing and costs. One in 10 households earns less than £16,518 per year and poverty is concentrated in certain wards and neighbourhoods that are primarily in the North and East of the city.”*

Cambridge is rated as the second most expensive place to buy a home in the UK according to Go Compare a financial product comparison site:

Top 10 most expensive areas:

	Location	Salary Required £	Average House Price £
1	London	134,241	674,698
2	Cambridge	114,629	576,127
3	Brighton and Hove	108,408	544,862
4	Oxford	108,256	544,097
5	City of Edinburgh	89,344	449,047
6	City of Bristol	86,056	432,520
7	Worthing	81,810	411,178
8	Reading	79,934	401,748
9	Crawley	78,164	392,854
10	Southend-on-Sea	77,882	391,438

According to the Office of national Statistics: *“Home-movers in Cambridge paid an average of £560,000 in May 2024. This was in line with £554,000 a year earlier In May 2024, the average price was £384,000 in the East of England”.*

It is therefore understandable that many of those on lower incomes cannot afford to live close to their place of work in Cambridge, instead choosing to live in such places as the villages and market towns to the North of Ely where housing is more affordable. This incurs

time and money to travel from home to their place of work and, of course adds to greenhouse gas emissions. This is the very real conundrum of growth versus quality of life and affordability for the workers who keep the wheels turning.

The Local Plan

In the new Local Plan, forecasts suggest an increase of around 66,600 jobs across Greater Cambridge by 2041 (8,200 more than previously anticipated), meaning that an additional 14,500 homes would need to be planned for Greater Cambridge on top of the existing Local Plan sites. How exactly did the previous and present government intend to factor in the proposed additional 150,000 dwellings first proposed by Mr Gove into this equation? It all feels like the Emperor’s New Clothes. No-one within the corridors of power, whether local or nationally, appears to grasp the possible unintentional consequences that we may be inflicting on future generations and the planet.

According to Cambs. Times, March 2024, the Office for National Statistics determined that there are twelve thousand empty homes in Cambridgeshire, many purchased by overseas investors and left empty. Additionally, it is unclear how many thousands of dwellings have been granted planning permission within the Greater Cambridge Area not yet built. Greenfield sites can seem cheaper to develop, but often these are on best most versatile farmland. Much of Cambridge and South Cambs. is Grade 2 highly productive farmland. The real story here is that by purchasing such land from farmers at relatively low prices per sq. metre, developers make a much greater return when they sell that land beneath an often cheaply built house. In fact, a study by Glenigan independent consultants for national CPRE has demonstrated that on average it is quicker and easier to redevelop many brownfield sites where levelling has taken place and reusable infrastructure such as roads, paths, drains and service conduits are already in place. Below, the table shows average number of weeks taken for projects to be completed following planning approval by size of scheme:

	Brownfield	Greenfield
Below 50 units	80	91
50-99	103	110
100-249	132	164
250+	148	244
Total	92	121

Source: Glenigan “Brownfield comes first” March 2016

Looking at the overall average timescales for both types of site from the granting of permission to completion, brownfield sites were developed more than half a year quicker (92 weeks against 121 weeks for greenfield). The finding that brownfield sites were faster from permission to completion was consistent for all site sizes.

Many new dwellings are sold off plan keeping house prices high, out of reach for many. Property is sold to investors, many from overseas. The rise of second homes and Airbnb has also had a major impact on the property market and the availability of 'affordable' homes. The term 'affordable', 80% of market price, is actually truly unaffordable for many.

Green Belt

The Cambridge Green Belt, like others across the country, is now under increasing threat from the government's proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework. A 'Grey Belt Land' classification of land within the Green Belt has emerged. The government's definition of the Grey Belt includes land on the edge of existing settlements or roads as well as old petrol stations and car parks. But it will be up to individual councils to decide what will be designated as Grey Belt. Would it not be more appropriate to clean up all such sites and return them to farming or nature?

Local Authorities can already earmark development within the Green Belt when formulating their Local Plans. The Cambridge Green Belt is being stealthily eaten away in the current 2018 Local Plans and the emerging Greater Cambridge Local Plan, a joint plan between Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire Council.

Water and sewage

We await the decision of the Secretary of State regarding the proposals to move the existing Anglian Water's Cambridge sewage works to the Cambridge Green Belt between the villages of Horningsea and Fen Ditton. The sewage works (bigger than Wembley Stadium) at a preliminary cost of £227m is being funded by public money granted by Homes England. This is to enable the existing site to be developed. The benefactors include Anglian Water, Cambridge University, Cambridge City and Homes England if approval is granted.

The infrastructure required to support such growth in Greater Cambridge is huge. We already live in a water depleted/stressed area and the Environment Agency, whose right of veto of development on flood plains was removed by the Cameron government, has taken the unusual step of formally objecting to four major developments in Greater Cambridge. The Agency has also written to Cambridge Water telling them that at

the next consideration of their abstraction licence from the chalk aquifer south of Cambridge, that licence will be reduced. Unless realistic and workable measures are taken, the area is in danger of running out of potable water in five to ten years. Meanwhile, the local planning authority have ignored the Environment Agency's objection and passed the 3,500-house development at Bourn airfield. Who needs experts?

Climate change

In this low-lying area, there is the additional and increasing threat of flooding due to climate change. We are experiencing wetter winters and drier summers. Rainfall tends to be heavier and more prolonged when it occurs and the run-off from upstream development is increasing. We are reliant upon the Environment Agency and the Internal Drainage Boards to prevent fluvial flooding in parts of Cambridge as well as in the fenland to the north. It is unclear if future funding will be sufficient to cope with the increased risk of flooding that development brings.

The surrounding farmland is becoming of greater importance to ensure national food security. The Cambridgeshire Fens form nearly a quarter of all lowland peatlands in England and Wales. The region's drained peat yields some of the nation's most fertile soil. Half of England's Grade 1 farmland calls the Fens home, contributing to 22% of the country's crop output and an impressive 35% of its vegetable production. The rural economy is worth £3bn in the Cambridgeshire Fens alone. So, increasing the flood risk to the Fens by undertaking massive development around Cambridge, itself consuming some of the nation's best farmland, does not seem like the most intelligent strategy.

I have tried to give a brief overview expressing my opinion of the threats to the countryside and quality of life which our area faces. I haven't mentioned the multitude of planning applications in Greater Cambridge. There are too many to list and all have a cumulative effect on our precious resources. One very good example though is the East-West Rail project. This will carve a swathe of destruction across many of the productive farms of South Cambridgeshire. Huge embankments will dominate village skylines. Fields will be cut up and made too small to cultivate economically. Houses and farmhouses will be bulldozed and for what? Eight billion pounds of expenditure on a transport route, Cambridge to Oxford, with very few potential users. Only a single local station, at Cambourne North but major developments on productive farmland there and just across the border in Bedfordshire at Tempsford. It will not serve Northstowe. It will not connect to the former Colne

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Finance

Quarterly Financial Report for the 12-Month Period Ending 31st March 2024

The accounts for the 12 months show that our total income was exceptionally high at £20,261 and that expenditure was £16,399, resulting in a net inflow of funds of £3,862, and a total balance of funds as at 31st March 2024 of £31,095.

Detailed as follows:

Income

The membership subscriptions for the last quarter were £2,926 and the total for the year was £11,333, £1,833 above budget and £2,317 above the previous year ending on 31st March 2023. This increase in income may be due to the formula for distributing subscription income used by the National Office.

In addition we received £6,770 from the distribution of the Eastern Region's funds. This was placed on deposit until its ultimate use is agreed. It is not clear yet whether these funds are General Funds or are hypothecated (dedicated to a specific use).

In the last quarter we received donations of £132 bringing the total donations received in the year to £186 compared to the budget of £600 and last year's receipts of £423. However, we received a very generous legacy of £1,000 from the estate of Mr. Mike Bratby. The interest which we received for the year was £865, reflecting the current increase in rates. Receipts from the Lottery were £107.

The total income for the 12 months was £20,261, compared to the annual 12 month budget of £11,550 and last year's total of £10,426.

Expenditure

Office Rent was £480 which was paid in the year but related to the prior year.

Total payroll expenditure for the 12 months was £12,197, which represents Jo and Tracey working at capacity.

Telephone costs were £87 despite virtually no use, and the line has now been terminated.

A financial review for the year ended 31st March 2023 was carried out by Stafford and Company, their invoice was paid in April 2024 and so will be shown in next year's accounts, which are calculated on a receipts and payments basis.

All other expenditure was relatively normal, and the total expenditure for the 12 months was £16,399 resulting in a net surplus of £3,862 for the year.

Cash position

The total balance of all the bank accounts at the end of the period was £31,095 an increase of £3,862 over last year's closing balance. The current total as of 26th May 2024 was £28,978.

Financial Report for the Year from 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024

The unaudited accounts opposite, are for the financial year to 31st March 2024. The charity does not have any funds which are of a restricted nature.

During the year to 31st March 2024 the charity received a steady flow of income from Members' subscriptions of £11,333 (2023 £9,014) and donations of £186 (2023, £423). In addition a very generous legacy of £1,000 was received from the estate of Mr Mike Bratby, and a one off donation of £6,770 from the distribution of the funds of the Eastern Region of CPRE.

All expenditure was for normal costs and the total was £16,399 (2023 £11,824). The notable increase was for additional payroll costs, which are a result of the huge increase in workload caused by the surge in developments being proposed.

The net result for the year was a surplus of £3,862 (2023 deficit £1,398) which increased the cash reserves as at 31st March 2024 to £31,095 from £27,233 as at 31st March 2023.

Receipts and Payments Accounts for the Year Ending 31st March 2024

	Unaudited Accounts for the year ending 31st March 2024 £	For the year ending 31st March 2023 £
Receipts		
CPRE subscriptions received	11,333	9,014
Donations received	186	423
Share of Eastern Region Funds Redistribution	6,770	-
Interest received	865	296
Lottery receipts	107	193
Grants received	-	500
Legacy received	1,000	-
Total receipts for year	20,261	10,426
Payments		
Charitable activities	16,056	11,464
Governance	344	360
Total payments for the year	16,400	11,824
Excess of expenditure over receipts	3,862	1,398
Balance of Cash Reserves at the beginning of the year	27,233	28,631
Balance of Cash Reserves at the end of the year	31,095	27,233

Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire continued from page 13

Valley line and thus enable the re-opening of a much-needed rail service to Haverhill and Sudbury. It will cause heavy diesel passenger and freight trains to rattle through central Newmarket and Cambridge at all times of day and night.

Change must and will happen but at what cost? Is the pursuit of growth sustainable? Should we be sharing that growth with other parts of the country which are

in serious decline? Do we need to consider de-growth? Sadly nature, precious habitat and sense of place cannot be measured in monetary terms. CPRE Cambridgeshire and Peterborough strives to stand, to be a voice of reason in the times we find ourselves.

About CPRE

We campaign for a beautiful and living countryside. We work to influence how we plan our towns and cities to make them better places to live and work, to ensure the countryside is protected for all to enjoy for now and future generations.

Our President is Mary Ann Ochota.

Nationally, we have around 60,000 members and a branch in every county. CPRE is a powerful combination of effective local action and strong national campaigning. CPRE is a Registered Charity (No. 1089685).

Please note the opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of individual contributors, or the editor, and do not necessarily represent the views of the branch or the national charity.

CPRE Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Branch

President

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Branch Officers

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Vice-Chairwoman: Jane Williams

Treasurer: Nick de Chenu

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Lizzie Bannister

Website and Social Media

Tracey Hipson

Keeping in Touch

CPRE Cambridgeshire and Peterborough are happy to help you. As well as this report and our printed newsletter, there are lots of ways to keep in touch with us.

If you have an email address, sign up for our quarterly newsletter: office@cprecambs.org.uk

Our website is frequently updated with both local and national news and issues. Have a look and tell us what you think: <https://www.cprecambs.org.uk>.

Write:

CPRE, The Town Hall, Market Hill, St Ives, Cambs PE27 5AL. Follow us on:



X (formerly Twitter): [@CPRECambs](https://twitter.com/CPRECambs).



Facebook: CPRE Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.