



The countryside charity Buckinghamshire

The Buckinghamshire Branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (“CPRE Bucks”)

Annual Report of Trustees 2024-2025

Foreword

This year has been one of many changes with the core Trustees leaving us and gaining some new ones. We welcomed Tanya Arora, Michael Blackwell and Andrew Turton-Ward to help us continue to prompt the CPRE ethos and message. We were very pleased to have Paula Buck, our ex chair, to support us this year as an interim secretary so that the branch could build on the work at transition.

Our website this year has been the main source of information along with newsletters and our presence on social media to reach more Bucks residents. We will be looking next year to expand the use of these

Planning as always has been our primary focus with a constantly changing national picture and the frustrations of delays in new guidelines and legislation coming forward. The good news was from the rejection of the planning application for another film studio in Lower Marlow on land designated as a Country Park. Our internal expert (Neil Salisbury an ex Trustee) was key to this helping us liaise with the other participants in this application.

Since the change in government back in July 2024, we have seen many new policies being pushed out, with several of them being of a big concern for Buckinghamshire and the green belt. The two to call out where the push for 1.5 million new homes that had no guidelines on where these should be focussed, as well as the continued move to allow ‘Graybelt’ land to be used for development. Its items like these that CPRE Bucks needs to keep a close view on, so that we can continue to represent the people of the county.

On a final note, we would like to thank all trustees and volunteers, past and present, for their considerable efforts to make CPRE Bucks an effective force to protect our beautiful county. The last few years have brought about new challenges but our appreciation of our green spaces and countryside has never been greater.

Andy Chapman Interim Chair

1. Overview

With 386 members, including 42 Parish Councils, CPRE Buckinghamshire is one of 42 county-based branches that make up the field organisation of the Campaign to Protect Rural England. Our aim is to protect and promote the character of the Buckinghamshire countryside. We want to see a working countryside that enriches our quality of life, as well as providing us with crucial natural resources, including food.

We work with other campaigning organisations, local government, businesses and individuals. We seek partnerships with those who share our values and goals, and open dialogue with the uncommitted. We challenge those who threaten the countryside.

We operate in the area administered by the Buckinghamshire Council and by Milton Keynes Council. Working with and as part of the national framework, each CPRE branch is an independent organisation. As such, we are a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee.

2. Governance and structure

The Buckinghamshire Branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England is an incorporated charity, number 1163356, set up to promote and encourage for the benefit of the public, the improvement and protection of the English countryside, particularly that of Buckinghamshire and its towns and villages, and the better development of the rural environment. The charity was incorporated on 21st August 2014 as a private company, limited by guarantee number 09186100.

To provide the branch governance, the following were trustees and directors during the period up to the AGM:

Andy Chapman, Interim Chair
Frances Nash
Tanya Arora
Michael Blackwell
Andrew Turton-Ward

Christa Mcdermott our Office Manager resigned in August 2024 to move to a new full time job. After much thought and deliberation from the Trustees, we will look to fulfill an expanded role during the middle of 2025.

A Board of Trustees administers the company and the trustees are all directors of the company. New trustees are recruited by specialist advertising and informed of their role by attending trustee meetings as an observer before appointment, given detailed information on activities and governance and invited to attend training workshops held by the National Charity.

The executive group, which includes trustees, contract and employed staff and some volunteers, meets every two months to manage the business of the charity and provide governance. We also welcome guests, including those from CPRE national and regions.

Since February 2020 we have been holding most meetings via Google Meet. We now hold most of our meetings in the evenings as a number of our Trustees are working.

In April 2021 we approached our members to formally agree to us changing our articles to allow online meetings going forward.

Charity Commission Governance Code

Although this code is not a legal regulatory requirement, it is designed to encourage charities to review and improve their governance processes. Accordingly, the company has reviewed its procedures and made changes that are proportionate to its size and resources.

Risks

The company maintains a risk register, which is reviewed and updated on a regular basis.

3. Objectives and activities 2024-25

Our Charitable Objectives are, to promote and encourage for the benefit of the public, the improvement and protection of the English Countryside and in particular that of Buckinghamshire, its towns and villages and the better development of the rural environment.

Vision

A beautiful and living Buckinghamshire countryside that is valued and enjoyed by everyone.

Aims:

To promote and enhance the character of the Buckinghamshire countryside.
To promote a more sustainable approach to land use

Strategic objectives:

Respond to planning issues in Buckinghamshire, where they fit with our charitable concerns.

Campaign at a local level on selected priority issues.

Take an active involvement in national CPRE housing campaigns.

Raise the profile of CPRE to members and the general public.

Engage and collaborate with other CPRE branches, local groups and organisations.

Develop resources (volunteers, funds, members) and build capacity

Improve and maintain good governance and financial management

4. Volunteers

We are always looking for volunteers to help us meet our objectives. If you have any time or expertise that could help us protect and promote our countryside, please contact us at office@cprebucks.org.uk

Our small number of volunteers has already made a big difference in our ability to respond to planning matters, undertake research, write articles for a range of publications and increase our social media presence.

However, other demands on their time does mean some of our volunteers need to step down or halt their volunteering periodically. More volunteer capacity would enable us to get even more involved.

5. Communications

Communications are vital and we have continued to develop our newsletter this year with four issues either distributed online or in print format. We also have a Twitter site @cprebucks, where we can share local information and link up with other branch groups and national stories. We have updated our website inline with the revised CPRE new branding. This year we have been out to some groups to give presentations and done interviews on local radio.

We will continue to develop our digital presence. Communication is a large part of what we do and we need to do it in a cost effective way. Email is virtually cost free to us, post is not. I urge all our members to let us know if they are prepared to accept email communication. The form is on our website. – <https://www.cprebucks.org.uk/>

6. Joint Working

The trustees head up a variety of tasks to expand and further the work of CPRE Bucks, in collaboration with volunteers. The aim continues to be growing the influence and activity of CPRE Bucks in saving the countryside. This has meant considerably more activity in responding to planning issues, inputting to CPRE National charity in writing or via the Assembly, Regional Board and working groups. We have also collaborated with other like-minded institutions such as the Chiltern Society, Chiltern Conservation Board and Bucks Rural Affairs Group. Since the formation of the Unitary in Bucks, our attention is now turning to a new Local Plan for the whole of Bucks, while Milton Keynes Council has also begun work on its new Local Plan.

We have liaised with local MPs and Councillors to support our aims – particularly inappropriate development in Areas of Natural Beauty and Green Belt. Making members aware of the damaging plans in their locality. Communicating with and informing members via newsletters and digital media and receiving feedback on what our members require of us.

We continue to respond to some individual planning applications that we consider could have a significant impact on the countryside. These have been identified either by our volunteers or members of the public writing to us. As our resources are extremely limited we haven't been able to respond as much as we would like, so we focus on those we consider to have strategic importance. In 2024-25 we have focused on development in the Green Belt.

Although CPRE Bucks is an independent organisation, we work with a number of like-minded organisations. We participate in national working groups and attend regional groupings to share the issues we are involved with. We work with neighbouring CPRE Branches, such as Oxfordshire and London, as a number of issues are cross boundary. We are well supported by National Charity with staff and volunteers attending induction days and national conferences.

We have been having meetings with the new and returned MPs.

7. Financial Review 2024-25

We continue to hold most of our meetings online using the Google 'Meet' tool as this saves on travel expenses and fits into the lifestyles of many of the Trustees who live throughout the county. It also saves on travel expenses.

We have had no major expenditure this year as a focus on consolidating the branch and planning items was looked at. We ended the financial year with a reserve fund of £52,839, which was an improvement from the previous year of £49,104. This saving can be brought back to both a focus on costs as well as reduced staffing costs after the Office manager resigned.

This report has been prepared in accordance with the special provisions of Part 15 of the Companies Act 2006, relating to small companies.

We took outside advice and due to our income level we did not need to have our accounts independently reviewed this year.

Reserves

The policy on reserves is to hold a minimum to cover 3 months activity. Current reserves are substantially higher than this, giving the flexibility a small charity requires to be able to support appropriate campaigns, when the need arises.

Sources of funds

The main source of income is the company's share of membership subscriptions to the national charity. We are signed up to various charity giving initiatives e.g. easy fundraising, and local lotteries.

8. Forward-looking statement

The year 2025-26 will see the branch expanding its Trustees and volunteer base so that we can look to celebrate and expand in the CPRE Centenary year. We continue to look for a permanent Chair who can enhance the role with a network of people in Buckinghamshire.

This will open new avenues of fundraising and give us an expanded footprint in Buckinghamshire. We will look to recruit an Expanded role for the Office and Communications areas, as well as a larger base of volunteers to support us in the upcoming work around the Buckinghamshire Council local plan.

Andy Chapman

CPRE Buckinghamshire - Interim Chair