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

Annual Report of Trustees 2025-2026

Foreword

This year we have had the challenge of the new draft Buckinghamshire Local Plan to respond to as well as changes to the trustees in the charity. The highlight was being awarded a grant from CPRE Head office to help us celebrate in Buckinghamshire the Centenary of the foundation of CPRE. We have continued to operate as a remote branch, continuing after Covid not having a full-time office location. The costs of maintaining a physical office versus the expenditure and income are still not justifiable, so our Trustees and the new Office & Communications manager remain spread out across the county and further afield. We have been actively recruiting to fill the vacant Treasure/Trustee position and hopefully for next year we will have found a suitable applicant living in Buckinghamshire.

Our previous Trustee, Neil Salisbury has been key with his detailed planning knowledge this year in driving the initial response to the new Buckinghamshire Plan, and it is with sadness that he steps back at the end of March to have a well deserved rest. We did successfully attract 6 volunteers to help work on the Buckinghamshire Plan and along with the Trustee Michael Blackwell supported the initial response. We were recognized by Bucks Council as one of the main consultee contributors, and some - though inevitably far from all - of our points were taken on board in the later draft of the Plan.

Our website continues along with social media feeds, to be the main sources of information for members. This is bolstered by newsletters, which are preferred by some Bucks residents. We will be looking next year to expand on the physical presence around the county following on from a successful expedition to the Chesham Green market. Having applied for a grant for the centenary of CPRE, we will be looking to grow our presence for both younger people (via an art competition) as well as attendance at the Bucks County show, and a roving exhibition. We also hope to collaborate with other local CPRE branches in supporting an award at Thames and Chilterns in Bloom.

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. We had some news early in the year in that, having worked hard with other local groups to oppose the building of a film studio on valuable scrubland in Marlow, Bucks Council agreed with us and turned down the application. (Unfortunately, however it was subsequently approved by the Secretary of State.)". Our internal expert (Neil Salisbury an ex-Trustee) was key to this helping us liaise with the other participants in this application.

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
Oliver Gascoyne
Holly Gascoyne
Devindi Kumarsinghe

Chloe Harmsworth joined as our Office and Communications Manager and has added significantly to what we have been able to do as a branch.

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 2025-26

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. .] We work with neighboring 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 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 2025-26 we have focused on development in the Green Belt and on the emerging Bucks Local Plan

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.

7. Financial Review 2025-26

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 £54,915, 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 previous Office manager resigned. It should be noted that this coming year we will increase our expenditure to cover the Centenary year tasks, for which we have been awarded a £5,000 grant.

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 nation charity. We are signed up to various charity giving initiatives e.g. easy fundraising, and loc lotteries.

Andy Chapman

CPRE Buckinghamshire - Interim Chair