

# OUTLOOK

June 2020

The newsletter of CPRE Northamptonshire

Photograph of Hall Park, Rushden, by kind permission of Suzanne Bowen



The countryside charity  
Northamptonshire

[cprenorthants.org.uk](http://cprenorthants.org.uk)

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Whatever happened to our plans for summer 2020? Oh, that's right – Covid-19 happened. The whole world planned confidently but was blindsided - by

something invisible to the naked eye. Our first event to fall was the April Planning Road Show – which had generated great demand from parish council members and others who wanted to know about the reorganisation of

local government into unitary authorities. We are hopeful of re-scheduling the event in the autumn.

As the cinemas closed, so did any chance of seeing our special screening of 'Chasing Ice' at Northampton Filmhouse, on May 2. This was a novel event for us, which hopefully will still happen at some future date.

We had no alternative but to cancel our Midsummer Concert planned

for June. The choir Musica had been due to repeat the successful evening that many of us still recall from midsummer 2019.

Traditionally this edition of Outlook would have included an invitation to our AGM. The invitation is still there – please take a look. Inevitably this year it will be quite different.

We were to sponsor ACRE's Northamptonshire Village Awards again this year. Regrettably, the judges felt that it would not be possible to go ahead but are hopeful they will go forward in 2021. In their place, however, ACRE will run Northamptonshire Covid Community Champions, which will recognize the outstanding work of the many volunteers in our communities during this pandemic. All entries will receive a certificate and examples of the many innovative ways volunteers are supporting their communities will be recorded in a booklet. It will culminate in a celebration evening, probably in 2021. Details will be circulated to all communities by ACRE or you can contact them on 01604 765888.

Our planned Litter Heroes Awards have had to be re-imagined. Let us hope that normal service is resumed as soon as possible.

## Community Awards are going ahead

It has been decided to continue with the Community Awards for 2020 since entries do not need to be received until the end of September. Full details for entries were included in the last Outlook. As a reminder, entries should demonstrate a community venture that has enhanced either the countryside, a village, town or urban area or has enhanced the quality of life for those who live in, work in or visit Northamptonshire. All entries should have been completed within the past five years and should be volunteer based. Entries should be sent to [alanmayes123@gmail.com](mailto:alanmayes123@gmail.com) with photographs if possible.





For years the management team at CPRE Northamptonshire has viewed the world of social media as uncharted "here be dragons" territory, hoping that one

photographs. We expect the photographs to show all aspects of our county – the good, the bad and the ugly. From bluebell woods to the horrors of fly-tipping; from glorious landscapes to grisly views of unsuitable development. We want to present Northamptonshire as it really is - worth protecting and with much protection

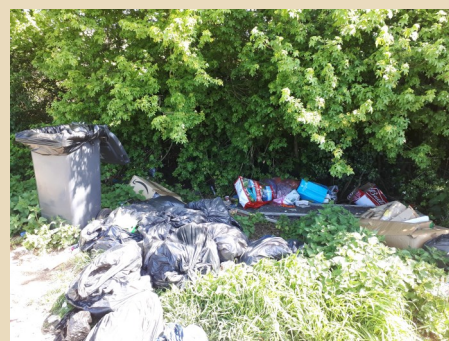
## Better late than never

- Robin Jones

day a young explorer would turn up to lead us into the second decade of the 21st century. Well that hasn't happened but lockdown has forced many of us to turn to communication tools like Zoom, Skype and Google Meet just to stay in touch with family and friends. Embracing Facebook now seems a small step and we are about to take it.

We don't intend to start with anything too dramatic - just a statement of what we are about as an organisation, contact details, how to become a member, forthcoming events (that won't take up much space at the moment) and

needed. We would like your help with our Facebook project. Members must have thousands of photographs taken over the years or perhaps more recently on the walks lockdown has brought with it. We would love to see them - not all of them of course, but those you feel would fit the broad criteria we set out above. Please send them to us at [info@cprenorthants.org.uk](mailto:info@cprenorthants.org.uk). We won't be able to use every photograph but, one way or another, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you helped make CPRE Northamptonshire on Facebook something for us to be proud of.



## Litter Heroes - how we changed our plans

If you were able to hold a community litter pick before lockdown commenced, then well done - very few people did! The coronavirus pandemic has severely affected our awards this year, as well as virtually everything else in life. There is no reasonable way to judge the relative efforts of our 2020 Litter Heroes, so we can no longer award money prizes on a fair and equitable basis.

However, we do want to stay true to our stated aims and to be as fair as possible to all our litter pickers. Our promise in early February was: "To fight litter, this summer a total of

£2,000 in prizes will reward litter picking groups from villages, towns, schools and communities across Northamptonshire".

We thought hard about how we could stay true to our pre-pandemic intentions. Having consulted with our generous sponsor, David Laing, we concluded that the least bad option was to rollover £500 to an extra prize in our 2021 Awards and then to offer the remainder to our litter-picking supporters this year. All the groups that registered a litter pick plan with us in February or March were given priority access to litter-picking grants. These were available for picking or safety equipment, publicity materials or other costs of organising the next pick. The remaining funding was then opened to all our picking community on a similar basis.

We hope to be announcing another series of Awards in 2021. If you would like to get onto our emailing list on behalf of your community or youth group, contact us at [info@cprenorthants.org.uk](mailto:info@cprenorthants.org.uk).

In the meantime, if you're home schooling, you can find excellent resources about litter on the CPRE Northamptonshire website in the Schools Rubbish Campaign [cprenorthants.org.uk/primaryschools/](https://cprenorthants.org.uk/primaryschools/)



In re-evaluating landscape and land use we'll have to produce more of our food now we're leaving the EU. Given the ever increasing probability of future pandemics, communities should not sprawl as land is developed for housing or industry.

Are we protecting natural features, agricultural resources or habitat? There is an argument for the preservation of landscapes which reflect historical use but all 'preservation parameters' need to be melded with future need and totally new ways of using the land.

There is a great balancing act in preserving sustenance and health against the need for economic viability of land use. Increasing pressure for energy projects is encouraged by grants but alternative viable strategies for saving energy or rewilding land have less financial support.

#### Brownfield sites and food production

Existing infrastructures and land use could

be modified or repurposed. The identification and re-evaluation of brown field sites becomes more relevant. One way of protecting the countryside from industrialised food production and inevitable loss of habitat can be met by

movement of goods they can be repurposed for food production.

This is where local communities can have a real impact on how the land is used. In the CPRE Fieldwork summary of summer 2019, Jackie Copley explained how CPRE

## Our use of land against future need - a delicate balance

- Yvonne Dean

urban food production. The movement of 'Continuous Productive Urban Landscapes' shows urban populations with their own food production have a long history, such as Machu Pichu in Peru. Fifteen years ago I saw in Havana how urban farming was producing salad crops for local people. The East End of London has a flourishing production of bean sprouts in warehouses. When warehouses become redundant for the storage and

Lancashire had developed a toolkit which eventually saved 74 hectares of land from development. Here she outlines how this worked:

*Colleagues in CPRE Lancashire, Liverpool City Region and Greater Manchester developed a toolkit to help people identify more previously used sites on Brownfield Registers in order to stop land in the countryside, including protected Green Belt, from development pressure. The Brownfield Registers were introduced in December 2017 by Government, following CPRE lobbying, to raise developers' awareness of the existence of previously used sites. Local planning authorities should record all 'suitable sites' on the Brownfield Registers, and update them annually. Sometimes sites are not known about and hence are missed off the databases. The toolkit enables people to highlight the existence of a 'missing site'. If people are aware of vacant or underused land that could be used for the development they can use the toolkit, which replicates the information contained in the Brownfield Registers. When council planning teams have been contacted with brownfield site information, irrespective of how much information is known (an address will suffice) they have responded positively and are happy to include 'missing sites' when next updating the Brownfield Register. The toolkit is a useful engagement mechanism. To find out more search online for CPRE Lancashire Brownfield Land Register Toolkits.*

Last year in West Northamptonshire, a quick evaluation of estate agents' sites showed 1.73 million sq ft of empty warehousing. There must now be a way of recommending a more innovative re-use of land and property.

## Membership matters

- Robin Jones

Like most charities, CPRE Northamptonshire is not having a good time financially during this dreadful pandemic. In normal times we might expect to raise between £6,000 and £8,000 to help cover running costs and the various initiatives we get involved in. We won't reach £1,000 in 2020. We have had to cancel all our fundraising activities so far this year and there is little likelihood of that changing in the near future. Indeed, if you believe some experts, some aspects of lockdown might be with us for a very long time, thus casting a potential shadow over next year's fund-raising as well. It may seem trivial to bemoan the effect of the coronavirus on our small charity when so many are losing loved ones, but life goes on and we must plan for it.

That is why membership matters. Membership subscriptions

are what will enable us to survive this crisis until "new normal" returns. We need you, our loyal members, as

never before but we need new members too. The age profile of our membership does not encourage optimism. We badly need younger reinforcements. At a national level, CPRE has already acknowledged this problem and rebranded itself as "the countryside charity" hoping to appeal to a younger, more diverse element of the population. We must hope that it is successful.

I'm encouraged by one effect of lockdown. I see many more people out walking – young and old – taking advantage of our amazing network of footpaths at a time when the countryside has been coming back to life. Let's hope this newfound enthusiasm for walking is not just a feature of our present rather limited lives but becomes something more permanent. We CPRE members should hope so – our organisation's future may depend on it.

## Our county's country houses - seventy years on

- Alan Mayes

Northamptonshire is often called the county of spires and squires because of the number of ancient churches and country houses. It's seventy years since a government report was produced by Sir Ernest Gowers, which marked something of a turning point for some of the county's stately homes. The post-war government recognised that they had a problem with so many empty and boarded up stately homes, of which many were architectural gems and sadly being demolished. Ernest Gowers' team surprisingly came up with the recommendation that it was far better for houses to remain lived in, rather than be taken into state ownership or becoming institutions. They recommended grants and repair funds, many of which did not come to fruition until years later but the seed had been sown.

Today, within our county, there are houses which remain family homes: Rockingham Castle, Holdenby House, Althorpe and Cottesbrooke, together with those now run by trusts at Lamport and Kelmars. We look forward to visiting them when these difficult times are over.



Lamport Hall

For those interested in the fortunes of Northamptonshire country houses, Neil Lyon produced a fascinating book in 2018 called "Useless Anachronisms", which charts the rise and fall of many houses since 1880. This is obtainable, once circumstances allow, from the Northamptonshire Records Society.

## Are more wind farms on the way?

- Brian Skittrall

Despite the government recognising the value of our countryside, it seems that it may again be under threat as the government is in the process of ending the moratorium on onshore wind farms and allowing developers to benefit from subsidies.

There has been no announcement, but a recent consultation that we chanced across is proposing changes to the subsidy system for renewable energy that would enable onshore wind farms to bid for subsidies. This is despite repeated claims that onshore wind and solar farms can produce electricity at a lower cost than even conventional power stations, which makes this a surprising move. Perhaps most concerning is that onshore wind will be in competition for subsidies with solar farms, energy from waste and hydroelectricity. This is likely to mean that more expensive but reliable technologies are likely to be squeezed out by intermittent onshore wind and solar.

Northamptonshire was heavily targeted in the last rush to profit from wind farm subsidies, despite our county being among the least windy in Britain. We fought hard to protect our countryside and rural communities but despite our efforts we ended up with one of the highest densities of turbines in the

UK. Many schemes were turned down by our local councils because of their adverse impacts. However, these local decisions were nearly all overturned by planning inspectors, who acknowledged the harms but decided that they had to be accepted because of the urgent need to generate renewable energy.

We worked closely with Northamptonshire MPs Chris Heaton-Harris and Andrea Leadsom who led the way in getting a change in policy and putting an end to the over generous subsidies that were making wind farms so popular with developers. Eventually over 100 MPs came together to say "enough is enough" and subsidies were withdrawn and a moratorium imposed.

We have responded to the consultation, highlighting how the proposals are likely to undermine other technologies that would be far more effective in addressing climate change. Nevertheless we are very concerned that there will be no change and the developers will once more descend upon our county. Last time they were armed with a government paper expressing an urgent need to deliver renewables. This time they will no doubt exploit the declaration by parliament and some councils of a "climate emergency".

## Planning update

With the onset of the Covid-19 lockdown local authority planning committees have ceased to meet but planning offices have continued to process applications. We offer our thanks to planning officers who have helped to keep the system going. The Government has effectively given authority for each planning department to make appropriate arrangements. CPRE has written to each planning authority in the country encouraging them to arrange virtual meetings with the elected members to enable the democratic process to continue, rather than increasing the number of delegated decisions.

Two interesting decisions were made by East Northants Council, just prior to lockdown:

- the refusal of 105 houses at Irthlingborough, which would have impacted on the wildlife areas of the Nene valley as well as giving rise to access and possible flooding problems
- the refusal of housing at Kings Cliffe on a site not allocated in the Neighbourhood Plan - thus upholding the values of neighbourhood planning