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

**Annual Report of Trustees 2023 -2024**

**Foreword**

The year 2023-2024 was my last year as Chair of CPRE Bucks and I stood down in July 2024. I am delighted that Andy Chapman agreed to become Interim Chair whilst we carry on with our recruitment. I am continuing in a volunteer capacity supporting the branch. Neil Salisbury has also stood down as a Trustee due to coming to the end of his term but is continuing as a volunteer leading on planning. We have also recruited a new trustee Tanya Arora.

We have continued to make full use of our new website, newsletters and continued to increase our presence on social media to reach more Bucks residents,

Planning again has been our primary focus with a constantly changing national picture and the frustrations of delays in new guidelines and legislation coming forward. This year we have focused on development in the Green Belt. We have responded to the application for film studios in Lower Marlow on land designated as a Country Park. We used a specialist-planning consultant to help with this work. The application was turned down by Buckinghamshire Council but has now gone to appeal.

The change in government in the summer and the revised focus on increased house building, the new ‘grey belt’ and the revised NPPF all present challenges ahead. We feel the local countryside and in particular the Green belt could be a greater threat. We are also concerned about the amount of agricultural land being taken for solar farms when it should be used for food production. We have so many large buildings in the county that could have solar on their roofs.

I 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.

**Paula Buck Former Chair**

1. **Overview**

With 425 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 new 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.

1. **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

Paula Buck, Chair stood down as Chair and Trustee July 24 due to length of service

Andy Chapman , Interim Chair from July 24

Priya Kantaria, Treasurer

Neil Salisbury , stood down as Trustee Nov 23 due to length of service

Andrew Garth

Frances Nash

Giles Draper , resigned Jan 24

Tanya Arora - co-opted February 24 up for election at AGM

Christa McDermott our part time Office Support Manager and a small number of volunteers support the trustees. Christa Mcdermott resigned in August 24 to move to a new full time job. the current decision is not to immediately recruit to the Support manager post.

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.

1. **Objectives and activities 2023 -24**

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

1. **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](mailto: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.

1. **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 virtual 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/>

1. **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 have participated in national Campaigns at a local level, eg The Hedgerow Campaign and Star Count. These activities do attract interest from local media outlets, which have enabled us to draw attention to CPRE Bucks from a wider population

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 2023-24 we have focused on development in the Green Belt. We have responded to the application for film studios in Lower Marlow on land designated as a Country Park. We used a specialist-planning consultant to help with this work and attended the Council meetings. We were delighted the application was turned down but have recently heard this has gone to appeal.

A number of large planning proposals e.g. new prison in North Bucks, Film studios in Marlow and housing developments in Beaconsfield have all required specific responses which are on-going.

We have also responded to applications for solar power on productive farmland. We support renewable energy but there are so many opportunities for sites e.g. warehouse roofs, car parks rather than take out productive farmland.

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.

The general election inJuly 24 and the change in government has created great uncertainty in the planning process. A revised NPPF was out for consultation over the summer of 2024 with revised housing targets and potential risk to the green belt. We contributed to the National consultation.

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

1. **Financial Review 2023-24**

We continue to hold most of our meetings online. With a wider age range of trustees some of whom are working this proves to be much more effective. It also saves on travel expenses. We have had no major expenditure this year. We had a slight planned overspend of £1093 which was covered from our reserves. We hold £49,104 in assets.

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.. |
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