

Countryside... or Concrete?

A SPECIAL CPRE SUSSEX PUBLIC EVENT

Saturday 21st March 2015

10am

**Drill Hall, Denne Road,
Horsham, RH12 1JF**

Admission is free. (Book in advance).

Come and hear what the parties have to say

With a General Election due in May 2015, this is your opportunity to hear the views of the Conservative, Green, Labour, Liberal Democrat and UKIP parties on issues affecting valued countryside in Sussex.

Prospective Parliamentary Candidates, from each of the five main parties, will be questioned on issues of importance to your local countryside, much of which is currently threatened by massive urbanisation and transport infrastructure. This is a fantastic opportunity to put your candidates under the microscope.

Have you got a burning question you think CPRE Sussex should ask the candidates?
Send your suggestions to **info@cpresussex.org.uk**
You will also be able to ask questions on the day.

Please book via:

**Eventbrite at <http://bit.ly/cprehustings>
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For membership information please contact the office
or join on line **www.cpresussex.org.uk**

Please demonstrate your commitment to the health of
the countryside by signing the CPRE Sussex Countryside
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CPRE Sussex
Countryside
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Promoting & Protecting
your Countryside

WINTER 2015

SUSSEX REVIEW

**LET'S GET THE ENVIRONMENT BACK ON THE AGENDA
WHY WE NEED A NATURE AND WELLBEING ACT
STAND UP FOR THE COUNTRYSIDE: THE CPRE MANIFESTO
HOUSING IN HORSHAM: THE LATEST UPDATE**

**GRANDIOSE ROAD SCHEMES PROPOSED FOR THE A27 AT
ARUNDEL RISK SCARRING THE LANDSCAPE IRREVOCABLY.**

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CPRE Sussex Countryside Trust
The Campaign to Protect Rural
England: Sussex Branch CIO

We exist to promote the beauty, tranquility and diversity of our countryside by encouraging the sustainable use of land and natural resources in town and country.

The opinions expressed in the *Review* reflect the views and interests of individual contributors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Branch.

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Foreword



Above: Georgia Wrighton Director of CPRE Sussex to January 2015 with David Johnson, Chairman.

Recent threats to the Sussex countryside remind us why the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act, and all it represented, was so important to our shared future. CPRE was set up at a time when there was no rural planning system, and piecemeal and unplanned development threatened to destroy precious countryside that early campaigners held dear. Government planning reforms in our own time leave us seriously worried that the planning system will continue to be weakened beyond repair, and that when the 'party is over' and the damage is done there will be no going back.

Our Sussex Countryside Charter asks politicians and the people of Sussex to sign up to six key commitments to the countryside: please do sign it and send to your MPs, Councillors and candidates, and a big thanks if you have already.

Plans for the A27 and concerns about the prospect of a second runway at Gatwick, along with fracking and unplanned developments let in by pro-growth, but not pro-planning, sentiment mean that the countryside needs all the friends it can get right now. Leaving brownfield land in town to rot is in nobody's interests, when towns need regenerating to thrive and grow alongside green infrastructure and quality open spaces.

Join us in giving a voice to standing up for the countryside, and for healthy and vibrant towns and cities. Look out for our Hustings event in Horsham in March 2015: please come along as this is a fantastic opportunity for you to call your local General Election candidates to account on countryside issues that matter. More details are on the back of this magazine.

Georgia Wrighton, Director

David Johnson, Chairman of CPRE Sussex

We are now looking to recruit a new director. The 0.6 paid flexible post is for three days a week. If you are interested or know someone that might be please contact info@cpresussex.org.uk for more information.

Georgia Wrighton is moving on to become Director of CPRE London. Her commitment and enthusiasm have enabled us to move the organisation forward and achieve an even stronger focus on campaigns, high profile events and promotion to raise greater awareness of today's tremendous threats to the Sussex countryside. We thank her for all her hard work and wish her every success in her new role.

Georgia said: "The legacy of a thriving and beautiful countryside is what we aim to leave our children, a mark of our success (or failure) as an era, and that includes planning for the protection of the natural environment, designing settlements well and providing homes which are affordable.

"Sadly good planning and the benefits of 'the right development, in the right place' have had a bad press recently in favour of the current 'development at all costs' pro-growth story. CPRE has provided a vital voice in standing up for forward-thinking development and genuine progress for Sussex.

"It's been a privilege working to defend the special countryside and landscapes of Sussex."



An evening of celebration: the Countryside Awards

The restoration of a mill, new local food outlets, and a stairway in the woods were just some of the amazing projects that received an award at the recent CPRE Sussex Countryside Awards Ceremony.

A total of ten awards were presented by Lady Caroline Egremont on the 16th October at the beautiful home of Lord and Lady Gage, Firle Place, in East Sussex, where award winners, CPRE volunteers and staff, representatives of local community groups and organisations, and other countryside champions gathered together.

The evening was a celebration of the Sussex countryside and recognition of the commitment and hard work of members to create opportunity, enhance cherished landscapes through innovation, and tackle pressing environmental issues across the county.

The panel of distinguished judges who visited the shortlisted projects in July were thrilled to have met so many passionate groups and individuals as part of the shortlisting process, and were delighted to have the opportunity to share their achievements with our enthusiastic audience.

The panel was chaired by Lady Egremont of Petworth House, and included: Nick Gant, assistant head at the School for Research, Economic and Social Engagement, and lead on sustainable design at the University of Brighton; Sir Charles Burrell of Knepp Castle; and Miss Margaret Moore, Vice President of CPRE Sussex.

Lady Egremont said that 'Sussex is lucky to have such a dedicated group of people who are committed to enhancing its landscape and helping its rural communities in new and enterprising ways'.

"It's been a thrilling experience being on the Judging panel of the CPRE awards 2014. You get to see and understand so many different and diverse projects in our region, it's amazing and encouraging what is going on out there."

'It has been a privilege to be asked to judge such a fine group of entries.'

Sir Charles Burrell added that 'It's been a thrilling experience being on the judging panel of the CPRE awards 2014. You get to see and understand so many different and diverse projects in our region, it's amazing and encouraging what is going on out there.'

The 2014 Sussex Countryside Awards Winners

We presented ten awards in total across our three categories.

New Sussex Landscape

THE PETER BRANDON AWARD

Oldland Mill received the Peter Brandon Award in memory of CPRE Sussex's past President. This award is presented at the judges' discretion to the project they deem to be the most outstanding.

Stuart Meier, Chairman of the Oldland Mill Trust, said: *'This project has come together through the work of volunteers over several generations and is now a tremendous landmark in Sussex – a huge credit to all those involved.'*

FULL AWARDS

Ashplats Wood Conservation Group, East Grinstead – for building a stairway in the woods in East Grinstead

Ditchling Museum of Art and Craft – for their restoration work and learning space

Oldland Mill (in addition to the Peter Brandon award) – for the restoration of the Mill near Hassocks

HIGHLY COMMENDED AWARD

Sussex Prairie Garden – for the development of a garden with prairie vegetation, café, plant shop and craft courses

Rural Enterprise

FULL AWARDS

Slindon Forge – for the restoration of the old forge building and development of a community space, café and grocery shop

Ringmer Community College – for students' work on renewable energy sources and environmental education

The judges were impressed by the Year 10 & 11 students who presented and spoke enthusiastically and confidently about their work on sustainability and environmental issues.

Margaret Moore said of their judging visit: *'The students' enthusiasm was almost overwhelming, and certainly inspiring – these students could teach us all a thing or two.'*

HIGHLY COMMENDED AWARDS

The Grove Café and village shop, Blackboys – for building a community space and a local foods outlet

Woodland Flora and Fauna Group – for their work on owl and bat boxes and pond and meadow restoration, in Hurstpierpoint/Sayers Common

Field to Table

FULL AWARD

The Sussex Produce Company – for developing a grocery store and café, serving local foods and drink, in Steyning

Nick Hempleman, owner of The Sussex Produce Company, said: *'Thank you for this award – it is tremendously well deserved, not for us, but for our customers who support us; which enables us to support local producers and suppliers and to employ local people too.'*

Visit cpresussex.org.uk to find out more about the projects.

Photos from left to right: Ashplats Wood, Ditchling Museum, Oldland Mill, Sussex Prairie Garden, Slindon Forge, students from Ringmer Community College

Now is the time to stand up for our countryside

Neil Sinden reviews the growing threat to our countryside and outlines the solutions being put forward in the CPRE manifesto.

We are just six months away from the General Election, yet the outcome is very difficult to predict. But one thing we can say with reasonable certainty is that housing and planning issues will figure prominently in the election debate at the constituency level. This is not just because all main parties recognise we face a major challenge in providing new homes, but also because it is increasingly apparent that the planning system – the main mechanism for deciding how many houses are needed and where they should go – is not working properly.

Not a week goes by at CPRE national office without us hearing more evidence about this growing problem – and Sussex has had more than its fair share of worrying

“CPRE’s manifesto – Stand up for the Countryside – focuses on how we can improve the planning system.”

planning cases. That’s why CPRE’s manifesto – *Stand up for the Countryside* – focuses on how we can improve the planning system so that it can protect the countryside from damaging and unnecessary development while making our towns and cities better places in which to live.

At the top of our agenda is how we can best meet the need for new housing. CPRE’s report *Targeting the Countryside* demonstrated the scale of the problem faced by many local planning authorities which are struggling to get up-to-date local plans in place in the context of national planning policies that are proving almost impossible to follow.

The infamous National Planning Policy Framework, which CPRE and others strived so hard to improve as it was being prepared, has been shown to be not fit for purpose. There is no evidence that it is delivering the housing development we need, and growing evidence that what is being delivered is in the wrong places.

This has led to what some politicians have described as villages feeling ‘under siege’ as developers submit speculative planning applications on surrounding fields. One senior backbencher has gone as far as to suggest that the harm being done by ‘rapacious developers’ could become a ‘defining legacy of this Government’.

CPRE has been promoting a better approach. Our new research, *From Wasted Space to Living Spaces*, provides a definitive picture, based on official statistics, of the availability of brownfield land for housing development in England. It found that there is enough brownfield for a minimum of 976,000 new homes and that this is likely to be an underestimate as it does not include currently underused land that could be suitable for housing. As our manifesto makes clear, the next Government should ensure that brownfield sites are prioritised for new housing over greenfield sites. We also want to see more

new housing meeting local needs, such as for affordable housing, and support given to the small-scale and custom-build housing providers which are often able to build housing that fits in with the local area.

Some aspects of the Government’s planning reforms are very welcome. CPRE strongly supports neighbourhood planning as a way of giving communities more power in the planning process. There has been encouraging progress in setting up neighbourhood plans in Sussex and across the country, but dismay that some developers have deliberately sought to frustrate them through speculative planning applications and court challenges. In cases where a neighbourhood plan has been made or is well advanced, CPRE is calling for the introduction of a community right of appeal against any application granted by the local authority that runs contrary to the neighbourhood plan.

Our manifesto also addresses how we should plan for the big infrastructure – transport and

energy schemes – we need for the future. First, we argue we must make better use of existing infrastructure and make careful decisions on new investment to reduce rather than drive demand for energy and car travel. Building the wrong sort of infrastructure not only risks devastating our landscapes, but also locks us into unsustainable and increasingly expensive lifestyles.

Sussex looks set to be in the frontline of this debate with proposals for expansion at Gatwick and plans for creating dual carriageways along the A27 at the foot of the South Downs, our newest National Park. The ongoing debate over the environmental impact and safety of fracking which put Balcombe in the news, is one in which CPRE intends to play an active role.

Ultimately, it’s the countryside that we need to value more and protect for the countless benefits it provides for our health, prosperity and wellbeing: vital space for recreation and reflection, a rich diversity of landscapes and a home for nature. It is encouraging

“Sussex looks set to be in the frontline of the infrastructure debate.”

that the South Downs National Park is seeking ‘dark sky status’ so that more people and future generations are able to experience the awesome spectacle of a stunning starlit night.

As we state in the introduction to our manifesto, and as all CPRE supporters know, **‘the beauty of England’s countryside is a national treasure renowned throughout the world’**. That is why we need to stand up for the countryside now as the general election approaches.

We must make sure that all political candidates are left in no doubt about the need to fix the planning system. It needs to enable us to protect the countryside we love and, in the right places, get the development we want.

Please sign up to the CPRE’s National Manifesto. Go to www.cpre.org.uk/manifesto

Development in the countryside: where do the Parties stand?

In the run up to May's General Election, planning issues and the environment are likely to be trampled underfoot as politicians slug it out on the economy, immigration and Europe. It is vital that we make sure the green fields of Sussex stay on the political agenda, argues Andy Boddington.

When voters went to the polls in the 2010 General Election, green issues counted. Politicians were glowing with the success of the Copenhagen agreement to cut greenhouse gas emissions. David Cameron declared that the newly formed coalition would be the 'greenest government ever'.

Since those heady days, the political and public mood has swung away from environmental crusading. As the recession deepened and spending cuts increased, concern for the future of the planet was eclipsed by fear for the economy. Environmental scepticism has soared. In Britain, this has been fanned by the blades of wind turbines marching across green fields, but it is a worldwide phenomenon. Recent climate change talks in Lima got almost nowhere.

UKIP is now talking of a return to coal. Many Conservative MPs are publicly climate-sceptic. The Lib Dems, Labour and, of course,

the Greens, remain committed to greening power supplies and deeper emissions cuts. Yet even the Green Party recognises that the environment will not be the main battleground in this election.

Sussex could buck this trend. Expansion of Gatwick, dualling of the A27, and rows over planning rules, are bound to make travel, housing and energy hot topics within the county in both the general and local elections.

TRAVEL

Nationally, most of the political parties are quietly backing a new runway for the South East. Labour is nudging towards Heathrow expansion. David Cameron is softening on Heathrow, but will not declare a preference ahead of the Airports Commission verdict in the summer. Lib Dem leaders wanted to back a second Gatwick runway but their party members have blocked the policy. UKIP is silent on airport expansion. Only the Green Party is absolutely

clear. It says there must be no new runways in the South East.

Most Sussex MPs say they back expansion at Heathrow and oppose a second runway at Gatwick. They are also backing road building. Some supported the controversial Bexhill Hastings Link Road across the Combe Valley. Others have described the proposed upgrading of the A27 as good news. The Greens want more freight on rail and better public transport. UKIP is saying nothing much on roads and infrastructure at the moment, but it criticises the government's 'outdated obsession with carbon inhibition'.

HOUSING

Planning rules are unlikely to be more than a footnote in the national election campaign. Some Sussex MPs are set to come under pressure for not opposing greenfield housing around county towns or demanding a rewrite of the National Planning Policy Framework. But Sussex MPs are

"The danger is that in the political maelstrom to come, the environment and countryside will be forgotten."

united in condemning proposals for Mayfield 'garden city'.

Both UKIP and the Conservatives say that the green belt is sacrosanct. Labour wants to give cities the 'right to grow' into neighbouring council areas. That will often mean building in green belts. The Lib Dems are backing a necklace of garden cities from Oxford to Cambridge.

All the parties talk of putting brownfield first. UKIP wants to issue low-interest bonds to fund decontamination, and to give VAT and stamp duty relief on brownfield housing. Labour says that there is not enough brownfield for the housing we need.

UKIP says that communities should be able to overturn planning permission for large-

scale developments in a local referendum. The Lib Dems are backing a right of community appeal. Labour says that it will bring in a 'use it or lose it' policy to tackle landbanking by developers. It will not make substantial changes to the NPPF.

ENERGY

Politicians are already taking sides on the costs of subsidising green energy and there is a growing anger about the spread of solar farms and windfarms along the south coast. The Lib Dems, Labour and the Greens remain enthusiastically in favour of renewables. The Conservatives are growing ever more sceptical and are trying to restrict subsidies. UKIP is firmly against both solar and wind. Labour wants to ban fracking in national parks.

All parties are equally committed to accelerating house building. But there has been little political reaction to new

rules that exempt small housing developments from having to pay towards affordable housing. It's a policy that will increase the shortage of affordable homes in the South Downs National Park.

MAELSTROM

In the 2005 General Election, we had a two-party race. In 2010, we engaged in three-party politics. We could now be in a five-party race. The danger is that in the political maelstrom to come, the environment and countryside will be forgotten.

We can't afford to let that happen. The local and national elections are a vital opportunity to challenge politicians on their countryside and rural credentials.

"The local and national elections are a vital opportunity to challenge politicians on their countryside and rural credentials."

Housing numbers bazaar

800 acres of countryside north of Horsham could become a development of 2,500 houses and a business park.

The Examination in Public (EiP) by a planning inspector of Horsham District Council's Planning Framework, which is intended to cover the period 2011 to 2031, was held in November. Dr Roger Smith, CPRE Sussex Trustee who represented CPRE Sussex at the examination, summarises the key issues.

As is acknowledged by the Planning Practice Guidance, 'establishing future need for housing is not an exact science. No single approach will provide a definitive answer'. This was apparent at the EiP where developers advocated numbers ranging from 16,000 new houses (800 pa) to 19,000 (975 pa), causing the inspector to liken the hearing to a bazaar, and to ponder whether the district could accommodate 1,000 new houses per annum.

These numbers are substantially in excess of the 13,000 (650 pa) considered sustainable by Horsham District Council (HDC).

The developers and inspector agreed that the starting point should be Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) household projections; a baseline figure of 730 houses pa was specified. Note

that in a recent Appeal decision (Blaby, Jun14), an inspector cautioned that the weight given to CLG projections 'should take account of the fact they have not been tested or moderated against relevant constraints'.

Seizing the opportunity afforded by the EiP to bypass more rigorous examination by HDC and objections of local people, developers put forward applications to the inspector to build on their preferred greenfield sites at locations across the district.

The inspector advised that he would take into account the 'unmet needs' of other local authorities, including London, and allocate a proportion of those 'needs' to Horsham District.

However, the mechanisms by which the makers of the abolished South East Plan (SEP) determined house-building allocations across the region no longer exist. CPRE Sussex is therefore very concerned that the inspector's decision will result in an arbitrary and excessive allocation to Horsham District.

Disturbingly, the inspector would not accept that achievement of a set annual build rate to the year 2031, whether 650 pa or higher, could not be assured. This is recognised, for example, by the Office for Budget Responsibility:

'Economic and fiscal outlook' (March 2014) which acknowledges there is considerable uncertainty around any economic forecast. After all, SEP allocations were predicated on the mistaken presumption that economic growth would continue unabated over the 20-year plan period. Instead, we have had a prolonged recession during which build rates were reduced, five-year housing-land supply targets were not met, and developers were subsequently able to gain approval for inappropriate development at Appeal.

Not allowing for economic and market uncertainty when setting targets means that councils and communities will continue to be vulnerable to decision-making by Appeal after their plans have been approved and adopted, should developers for whatever reason not build the requisite number of houses on the sites allocated by the local plan ... **and protection of the natural environment weakened.**

Although countryside that does not have statutory protection is particularly vulnerable to development, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) does provide some protection for the natural environment outside as well as inside protected areas.

Decision makers, including planning inspectors at Appeal, consider planning applications against policies in local plans as well as NPPF policies. Consequently, the wording and content of a local plan's policies matter greatly and the inspector at the EiP advised that local-plan policy carries greater weight in decision making than those in the NPPF.

The NPPF requires councils to achieve not only the economic and social dimensions of sustainable development but also the environmental dimension – and net gains across all three. It also stipulates that plans should be in conformity with the policies in the NPPF. It is therefore reasonable to

expect councils to reflect fully the requirements of the NPPF within their own policies.

Consequently, CPRE Sussex is very concerned that the wording and content of Horsham District Planning Framework policies for the countryside and natural environment do not conform in detail with the NPPF – and would afford less protection in consequence.

A planning consultancy provided an independent and objective appraisal for CPRE Sussex and proposed amendments needed to align the policies with the NPPF, which we submitted at the EiP. All but one was rejected by the council on the grounds that to incorporate them would be 'overly protective',

'too restrictive', and 'could conflict with the provision of necessary housing and employment growth'.

In reality, conformity would not prevent development, but it would require proper due diligence by the Council and at Appeals by the planning inspectors when considering applications and determining appropriate mitigation measures.

Apparently, in the Council's view the environmental dimension of sustainable development carries less weight than economic growth and it can therefore be selective about which of the NPPF's requirements concerning the natural environment to include in its policies. **This is not CPRE Sussex's view.**



Application submitted to build 2,250 plus houses on pasture west of Southwater Green.

Act for Nature

Richard Benwell, RSPB Parliamentary Programme Manager wants members to support the idea of a Nature and Wellbeing Act to ensure positive action is taken to protect the natural world.

So often when we think about saving nature, we're obliged to take the defensive – investing our energy in opposing unsustainable plans for development, beating back bad laws, or demonstrating the ongoing folly of unrestrained fossil fuel consumption. Or we focus on the big risks of the day – fears about fracking, the plight of our bees, or the ongoing persecution of protected species. Of course, these are big news for a reason. They represent the sharp end of the threat to our natural world.

But now it's time to be positive – and to focus on all the decisions that affect nature. Every day, millions of decisions are made to the detriment of our countryside and wildlife, without a thought for their consequences. The truth is that nature never even features in most of the decisions made in Westminster, local authorities and boardrooms. It is this unheeding damage that is leading to the slow demise of our most wonderful landscapes and wildlife.

“We need a big change in the way we think about our environment to start putting the life back into our country.”

We need a big change in the way we think about our environment to start putting the life back into our country. That's why CPRE has added its voice to a growing movement calling for a Nature and Wellbeing Act in the next Parliament. Together, a coalition of conservation organisations is taking a step forward in positive environmentalism. We're calling for new laws to turn around the decline in our natural world. Our aspiration is that nature's needs and our need for nature should be a part of decision-making from the outset. Instead of fighting a rearguard action in nature's decline, Government and businesses should be considering what they can do to contribute to nature's recovery.

The magic ingredient is this: perhaps for the first time, we can

prove that by acting for nature, we'll be acting for ourselves as well. A thriving natural world is critical to a strong economy, to vibrant communities and to everyone's health and wellbeing.

Of course we should protect nature for its own sake. Millions of people are members of CPRE, RSPB, The Wildlife Trusts and other NGOs to make that very point. But we also know instinctively that we need to think about nature to solve some of the UK's most pressing social crises, like the condition of our physical and mental health and the long-term resilience of our economy.

So, the Nature and Wellbeing Act would put nature at the heart of our economy, our local communities and our health and wellbeing. To begin with, we would set a positive direction of travel, locked into law, to say that we need more nature. We would set long-term targets for our natural environment. Specifically, we want legal targets for our politicians to deliver a 10% increase in

biodiversity and for 80% of our most precious wildlife sites to be in good condition by 2040. That's a tall order — currently, 60% of the species we know about are in long-term decline, and only a third of our finest sites are up to standard — but it's achievable.

Of course, there have been targets and commitments for nature before. Many have been missed, without anyone even knowing about it. So, alongside legal targets, we need a new commitment to accountability. Our Nature and Wellbeing Act would establish an Office of Environmental Responsibility (or give new powers to the Natural Capital Committee) to hold the Government to account for



delivering its nature objectives and advise on the best ways to achieve them. If we're not meeting our goals, it's right that Parliament and the public should know it.

But to achieve our aims, we also need to make a difference in our communities and in our day-to-day lives. We know that children are far less likely to play outside than ever before and many communities are cut off from wild, green places to relax, exercise and reflect. Even in rural areas, natural places to visit and play in may be hard to find and hard to get to. So, we're proposing that local authorities should plan for ecological networks, to protect and improve the nature near us that people need to thrive. Basic standards for access to natural green space should be set down so that no one is isolated from nature.

With elections coming up, it's easy for politicians to get caught up in the most eye-catching debates, following the money and the media in their political pronouncements. We

need to remind them how much nature matters in our lives and make sure that there are strong commitments for the environment at the General Election. It's a question of fairness (making sure that everyone has fair access to nature, not just the affluent); it's a question of prudence (making sure that we don't use up limited resources today that we'll also need tomorrow); and it's a question of making a positive commitment to doing what's right.

“We need to remind politicians how much nature matters in our lives and make sure that there are strong commitments for the environment at the General Election.”

So, join us today and Act for Nature – <http://bit.ly/1F90TYL> – and let's make sure that all the political parties join us in the call for a Nature and Wellbeing Act.



Brownfield sites can be havens for wildlife

Prof Dave Goulson suggests an alternative use for brownfield sites.

I have always been obsessed with wildlife. As a child I spent my weekends and holidays catching newts and great diving beetles in the local canal, scrambling about in disused quarries for rare orchids, or hunting for butterflies on the waste ground around gravel pits. This was Shropshire, where the industrial revolution began, and these wildlife-rich sites are a direct result of that past. My friends and I hardly ever went hunting butterflies in farmland, as we quickly learned that there was rarely much interesting wildlife to be found in the pastures of rye grass or monocultures of wheat. The places we chose to go were, essentially, brownfield sites, though some had been reclassified as nature reserves.

Such brownfield sites are often regarded as eyesores or at best as a waste of space, in urgent need of redevelopment. I would like to offer you a different view. These sites are wonderfully, surprisingly, rich in wildlife and being close to urban areas, provide an opportunity for city dwellers to encounter rare animals and plants.

A prime example is Oliver Road Lagoons, formerly part of Thurrock

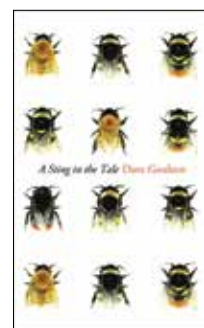
“Britain’s wildlife is in trouble, and we cannot afford to lose more of the few places left where it is flourishing.”

Power Station in East London. The site supports over 1,300 wildlife species, 50 of which are classified as endangered. This site is now safe, thanks to the work of Natural England, Buglife and the Land Trust, and will soon open to the public, but sadly many similar sites have been lost.

Why do these derelict industrial carbuncles end up supporting so much wildlife? Partly it is simply because they are no longer disturbed by man; no pesticides are used and they are not ploughed or cropped. It is also often because the soil is poor. This may seem counterintuitive, but much of our wild flora is adapted to low fertility soils; the widespread use of cheap artificial fertilizers has rendered most farmland too fertile for them to thrive. Orchids and cowslips get swamped by nettles, docks and cow parsley in the field margins.

I’m not suggesting that all brownfield sites should become nature reserves. But we should pause for thought before calling

in the bulldozers. Britain’s wildlife is in trouble, and we cannot afford to lose more of the few places left where it is flourishing. I hope future generations of children will be able to pond-dip, find beautiful wildflowers, hear the sound of birdsong and the buzz of bumblebees. Our increasingly urban population has a dwindling opportunity to encounter wildlife, and some brownfield sites provide just such green spaces right on our doorstep.



Dave Goulson is Professor of Biology at the University of Sussex, specializing in the conservation of bumblebees and other insects. He is author of the bestselling *A Sting in the Tale*, and the recently released *A Buzz in the Meadow*.



Connecting with the countryside

How local action saved the elm tree in Brighton

Stuart Derwent reminisces with his good friend Ray Strong about the Save The Elms Campaign (STEC). Ray was the proud recipient of the Arboricultural Association’s Annual Award 2008.

SD: Ray, I remember going to a meeting at the Booth Museum in Brighton one evening in 1975 almost 40 years ago. The elms forming most of our treescape were then considered by many to be doomed to die from Dutch Elm Disease.

RS: Yes. The fungus carried by elm bark beetles had been allowed into the country on imported timber from North America, when it was known that it had already swept across that continent. It had then spread dramatically eastwards from the ports of Avonmouth and Southampton. The view of the authorities was that the trees in each area were falling like dominoes and the loss of our elms was inevitable.

SD: Fortunately, you had the vision to see that Brighton and Hove had an advantage with the protection of the elm-free South Downs to the north and to the east plus the sea to the south, leaving us only exposed to the disease coming through the Shoreham gap. You organised the volunteers of the STEC to protect that gap whilst endeavouring to persuade the local authorities – then West Sussex CC, East Sussex CC, Adur DC, Hove BC and Brighton BC – that there was a prize to be won.

RS: The volunteer effort gave the local authorities the time to

get their act together. Probably the most significant actions were when a local MP knocked some heads together and joint meetings including STEC were established.

SD: Then in 2005, with little learned from 30 years before, the risk arose again as elm trees to the west had re-grown sufficiently to support another generation of elm bark beetles. STEC was resurrected and more volunteer effort was put in place. I will never forget your commitment or that of your fellow tree experts, local firms of tree surgeons and other volunteers plus everyone’s determination to save their elms in their town.

“Brighton & Hove Council have just proposed to “Cease planting of new and replacement trees” in 2015/16. That is a lack of commitment to the long-term future of the town’s treescape.

It’s often forgotten that our National Elm collection in Brighton and Hove is the only one in the UK and is probably the best collection of elms in the Northern Hemisphere if not the world.”
Stuart Derwent

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THIS?

This was not localism as such, but it was very much a local effort with the inspiration and vision of a few backed up by the commitment of many volunteers able to work across borders which seem impenetrable to others. I don’t see that much has improved in the last 40 years, so how can we use this form of localism again to encourage the authorities to work with each other and with locals? Surely thinner structures in all organisations make this even more essential in the future?

We would love to hear your views so please get in touch via Twitter, Facebook, e-mail at info@cpresussex.org or via the website at www.cpresussex.org.uk.



Top: Volunteer’s Day of Action, March 2007 Above: Ray inspecting the bark of an elm tree