



Photo credit: Sunset over Maer, Josh Sedgely.

Chairman's Report

Mary Booth

AGM 2020

The year covered by this report runs from April 2019 to the end of March 2020, but one cannot ignore what has happened since. The coronavirus pandemic has led among other things to changes to the way we live and work. Our ideals at CPRE have been in tune with many of the better things to come out of it - appreciation of home and taking exercise close to it; enjoyment of the countryside open spaces, birdsong and clean air, less use of cars (but more delivery vans) and attitudes such as buying clothes today to wear tomorrow and throw away the next day. However, people living in poor, cramped housing have been missing out more than ever. CPRE is campaigning for better design standards for homes.

The loss of two significant figures in the history of CPRE Staffordshire, Amyas Stafford Northcote and Frank Walmsley, occurred in March and April respectively this year. Many tributes to them were made, both

locally and nationally, including CPRE awards at the end of 2019 which they both really appreciated. Frank and Amyas had been trustees. We then were down to three, the minimum we could function with, following the resignation of John Blount due to changes in his personal circumstances. So I must give very special thanks to Anne Clendon, Vice-Chair, and Steve Hopkins for their work with me as trustees through this difficult time. Today, all being well, we hope to welcome two new trustees, who will lighten the individual load and responsibility. We would be glad of more trustees, so please consider joining us.

Our two paid officers, Susan and Sarah, adapted swiftly and efficiently to working from home. They managed to cope with home-schooling and other responsibilities as well. If anything the rate of work seemed to increase, for which we all thank them. We have several volunteers helping us, including our excellent planning adviser, Paul, as well as Anita, James and Anna. Our thanks go to them too.

We adopted the new CPRE 'branding' (not a word I like). The logo and general design have modernised our look as the Countryside Charity. This is shown to excellent effect on our 2021 calendar which marks our 85th anniversary next year, an achievement of which CPRE Staffordshire can be proud.

I would also like to record thanks to our President, Ian Dudson, HM Lord Lieutenant of Staffordshire, for his support during this period. It was good to have him announce the prize-winners of our 2019/20 Staffordshire Countryside on Camera photographic competition and launch the calendar via live-streaming as we could not have a get-together in the usual way.

County, regional and national matters have kept us busy, including the Planning White Paper 'Planning for the Future' and discussions regarding threats to the Green Belt around the West Midlands conurbation likely to arise from potential revised housing need figures. We look ahead to a better year, hopefully, in 2021 when we can celebrate our 85th anniversary properly.

In Memoriam

Amyas Stafford Northcote: 25 November 1937 – 21 March 2020



Amyas Stafford Northcote died in March at the age of 82 following a lengthy illness which he bore uncomplainingly and with great courage. He was our Vice-President and had served as Chairman for about ten years up to September 2018. We had many lovely messages of condolence about Amyas, which we passed on to his family. Su Sayer, national Chair at the time, summed it up well when she said: "What a man, and oh how we shall miss him." His knowledge of the planning system as a former Stafford Borough councillor was invaluable. It meant a lot to us and we think to him to be able to mark his voluntary work for us with the presentation in December of a national CPRE award and medal to mark these achievements. Amyas was delighted to be called a 'countryside hero', a description he richly deserved.



Members of Colwich Parish In Bloom met in Great Haywood on 7th July to watch the commemoration of the flowering cherry tree planted in honour of Amyas.

Cllr John Francis gave a personal recollection of Amyas's life, paying great tribute to his knowledge of planning and also saying it had been a privilege to have known and worked with him.

Cllr Sue Francis also paid tribute to the time she had shared with Amyas. Colwich Parish In Bloom Hon. Treasurer Jean Makin MBE gave a personal and moving tribute to the memory and work Amyas had been involved in, especially his love of gardening and quizzes.

Frank Walmsley: 17 July 1937 – 19 April 2020



Frank Walmsley, who received a CPRE Lifetime Achievement Award in 2019, died of cancer in April at the age of 82. A member of CPRE for over 30 years, he was a trustee and member of the Executive Committee from 2013 to 2018, having previously helped in the office. Frank attended regional West Midlands meetings on behalf of Staffordshire, spoke alongside Baroness Jenny Jones at a public event about possible green belt release around Rawnsley in March 2018, and had extensive experience of the

conservation sector gained through working for the Countryside Commission.

Frank was a keen tree-planter and lover of steam railways, and often helped out on stalls however inclement the weather. He was a regular visitor to the office in Martin Street with some publications or cuttings he thought might be of interest, usually accompanied by notes in his tiny neat handwriting. His knowledge of large-scale projects such as HS2 and the West Midlands Rail Interchange was a great help, and will be sorely missed.

The 2019-20 accounts cover the 12-month period running from 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020 and, for this reason, may be more comparable to the 2017 accounts which cover a 12-month period rather than the 2018-19 accounts which covered a 15-month period.

Our closing balance of £31, 637.26 at the end of March is down from £36,666.75 at the end of the previous March (2019), a deficit of £5,029.49. Our excess of expenditure over income has decreased by a little more than £1,000, however, we are still very aware that our costs are running higher than our income.

Our share of national subscriptions has, surprisingly, increased a little, bucking the general nationwide trend that has seen reductions in membership. Parish Council contributions are disappointingly down, not helped perhaps by a training opportunity to connect with and support parish councils being cancelled towards the end of the year due to the Covid-19 lockdown. The event, which was set to run at Yarnfield Park last March, has secured £1,600 of funding from national CPRE, and we hope to be able to run it next year when we will be more enlightened regarding the Government's planning reforms.

General donations increased significantly, by more than £400 greater than the 2017 figure and £150 greater than the 2018-19 figure despite the latter being a longer year. In addition to regular donations from supporters, for which we are most grateful, Derrington Way Ahead donated £50, Canalside Farm & Shop presented us with a Staffordshire Day donation of £100 and we raised over £100 from giving talks to Penkridge Civic Society, Colton WI and St. Leonards school in Dunston – winners of the 2018-19 CPRE Staffordshire school trophy. We raised £560 from raffles & tombolas and £5.51 from our Staffordshire Day quiz. We would like to thank everyone who has contributed over the year. A simple way to contribute, at no cost to the donor, is to register with Give As You Live with CPRE Staffordshire as your chosen charity – we raised £54.89 this way last year. This year, with more people than ever shopping online, it could prove a valuable source of income – please email Sue or Sarah at protect@cprestaffordshire.org.uk or call 01785 277890 for more information.

The cost of travel, office running (this includes printing and photocopying, website hosting and purchase of stationery), salaries and postage has remained pretty consistent – expenses recuperated from travel are a little down from the previous year, however, expenses paid out in relation to travel are also lower. Publicity costs are also down from the previous year and include raffle ticket printing, the lottery license and stall bookings – including those for this year which have now been deferred until next year, e.g. the Staffordshire County Show. We also, in addition to using current stock, bought items for our lockdown children's activity packs in March. We paid out £103, including a donation, for our visit to Fordhall Farm, although income from the trip covered the event by an additional £3. Expenses have remained consistent from the previous year and covers event and meeting refreshments and a thank you gift for our accounts auditor.

We were pleased to see a decrease in our insurance costs, for the same cover, and a significant decrease in meetings costs, including the AGM, due to free availability of rooms for committee meetings and reduced expenses for the AGM. Remaining costs (Other) have slightly increased, however lower than 2017, and cover monies owed from sales of the There Is No Planet B! Stafford 2020 calendar, social media training and the school award.

Many of our costs, especially travel, will be greatly reduced for 2020-21. However, the pandemic has had a huge impact on live events, such as summer and Christmas fairs, which would normally be a source for fundraising for us. Reviewing our situation, and currently working on an Action Plan for 2021-22 (in keeping with the [CPRE National Strategy](#)), we have engaged with a local consultant, Mike Deegan Consulting – Mike previously worked for Staffordshire Wildlife Trust and specialises in working with environmental organisations, and we have a Funding Plan to guide us. We would, however, still very much appreciate any suggestions or help you may be able to offer – do you know of a business that might be able to offer sponsorship or have an idea for a new and potentially lucrative fundraising idea? We very much value your input and thank you for another year of your support.

Audited and signed accounts, with many thanks to our auditor, are displayed below. Larger print copies are available on request and you will also be able to access this report from our website after the AGM.

CAMPANION TO PROTECT RURAL ENGLAND

STAFFORDSHIRE BRANCH

Statement of Income and Expenditure Year Ending 31st March 2020

	01/01/18	01/01/19	01/01/20		01/01/18	01/01/19	01/01/20
Income	2017	2018-19	2019-20	Expenditure	2017	2018-19	2019-20
Share of National Subscriptions	5882.94	7,313.80	5,797.41	Travel	550.40	775.50	808.37
Parish Councils' Donations	304.00	279.00	279.00	Office Running Costs	855.12	707.08	813.58
Funding Awarded	0	0	1,000.00	Salaries	9205.32	11904.40	11210.57
Other Donations	205.11	493.90	645.89	Postage	285.82	327.38	248.59
Trips and Visits	0.00	0.00	100.00	Publicity	2411.51	750.34	488.80
B Society Interest	43.72	39.25	34.07	Trips & Visits	72.59	0.00	100.00
AGM	17.55	85.00	34.85	Expenses	15.58	109.97	104.98
Sale of Goods	449.87	398.28	290.96	Exec Meetings	50.00	128.49	12.00
Sale of Raffle Tickets	318.52	158.77	550.00	AGM	299.34	366.50	280.82
Other	1088.87	124.00	5.51	Insurance	303.40	444.12	411.24
Travel Expenses Recouped	0.00	200.00	110.95	Other	254.54	87.38	154.50
Total Income	8098.00	9092.01	9,404.64	Total Expenditure	14275.83	15,508.61	14,434.13
Excess of Expenditure over Income	-6188.83	-6,406.60	-5,029.49				

Opening Balance @ 1/04/2019
Less excess of expenditure over income

£ 36,666.75
-£ 5,029.49

Reconciliation

Nationwide Building Society £ 30,162.20
Cash Float £ 61.80
Current Account - Nat West £ 2,733.75
PayPal a/c £ 87.99
£ 32,975.74

Less Accruals: Salary £ 1,121.68
Print & Photocopying £ 150.45
Postage £ 66.34

£ 1,338.48

Closing Balance

£ 31,637.26

£ 31,637.26

..... Hon Auditor MJCross 4th December 2020

Date *B.E. Lambell* Treasurer T.A.2.2020 Date

Statement Summary Calculations: Correct

2020 has been a very unusual year for most people, and CPRE is no exception. Lockdown highlighted the importance of having nature and green spaces close to home for our mental and physical wellbeing, but sadly littering,



already a long-standing problem, reached epidemic proportions. (At our Green Clean at Marquis Drive in September 2019, volunteers (including Amanda Milling, MP for Cannock Chase) collected 64 plastic bottles, 89 cans and 59 glass bottles of varying sizes in just 1.5 hours. Over the past decade, the government has spent less than £2,000 on promoting the

Countryside Code.

Sue and I rapidly adjusted to working from home, and online committee meetings became the norm. Sue hosted an online quiz to mark Staffordshire Day on 1 May. Whilst all the events at which we would normally have had stalls, such as the County Show, were cancelled, we were kept busy with a flurry of consultations and new initiatives and publications from the national CPRE office in London, as well as the launch of the new website. In its Greener, Better, Faster report, CPRE set out its vision for how the countryside can play a vital role in tackling climate change, including restoring hedgerows to their pre-war levels by 2050. It has also launched a Regeneration campaign, with adverts reaching large audiences on social media. Chief executive Crispin Truman has regularly been quoted in the national press, expressing CPRE's concern about the loss of local decision-making in the Planning for the Future White Paper (see Planning Report, page 16).

We have continued to respond to planning applications in the green belt and greenfield sites, such as the Hawkesyard Estate near Rugeley, and have commented in support of some applications for new housing on brownfield

sites, including the former Alstom factory in Stafford, Rugeley Power Station, and Stafford town centre.

Helping to manage CPRE Staffordshire's social media accounts has shown me that the public debate around planning is often polarised and over-simplified: anyone who questions the very high housing numbers or objects to a particular development is automatically branded a NIMBY who does not care about young people being priced out from the property market. Even something as apparently uncontroversial as promoting a brownfield first approach leads to accusations that CPRE wants to consign families to former industrial estates at the dodgy end of town. However, whatever some might claim, people are not simply fantasising about the green belt being a bucolic idyll when the reality is scrappy nettle-strewn fields with no public access: they are passionate about protecting specific areas of the countryside that they know and love.

In November 2019, Gerald Kells and I attended a meeting of the Save the Seven Cornfields campaign group, where a much-loved area of countryside might be released from the green belt to meet housing targets. People from diverse backgrounds spoke passionately about their love for this little bit of countryside on the edge of Wolverhampton and what it means to them. The Kinver Green Belt Action group shares photos on social media of beautiful countryside, including parts of the Staffordshire Way, that has been released from the green belt and allocated for housing, or which has been safeguarded for future development use. In Newcastle-under-Lyme, residents are campaigning for a former golf course in the green belt to be designated as public open space rather than sold off for housing. It is clear that people attach immense importance to the countryside and other green and open spaces, both designated and non-designated, particularly when they live in built-up areas like the West Midlands conurbation, and will campaign tirelessly to protect them. However, many people are still unaware of CPRE, and tapping into this strength of feeling in order to grow our membership and better stand up for the countryside remains a challenge.

Unfortunately, our planning training event for parish councillors due to be held in March had to be first postponed until September and then cancelled due to covid. Paul Windmill, our volunteer planning advisor, prepared some briefing

notes that were circulated by the SPCA, and we hope to hold the event either online or in person next year.

Our Grand Summer Draw raised £173 – a huge thank you to everyone who bought tickets, donated prizes or made a financial donation. Mary, Sue and our president Ian Dudson took part in our very first livestream to launch our 2021 calendar, which showcases the superb entries to the Countryside on Camera competition.



All Staffordshire schools were once again invited to enter the competition to win our Green Schools Trophy. The winner, St Bartholomew's Primary School, a tiny school in Longnor, received £50 cash and will hold the trophy for a year. The school has its own hives, and the children help with bee-keeping, making honey, and

learn about the importance of pollination and moorland ecology. Last year's winners, Kingsmead School in Hednesford, received the award for protecting and rescuing hedgehogs, repairing and improving its school pond, and creating a wildflower meadow.

We are hoping that next year might herald a return to organising community activities. Last year, Mary and Sue helped schoolchildren in Ranton plant trees during National Tree Week. We are also currently working with the Cannock Chase AONB Partnership to organise a local Star Count next February to assess the extent of light pollution around the AONB and showcase the value of dark skies.



CPRE Volunteering & Partnerships Team

Jacqueline Smith, CPRE Volunteering Development Office, West Midlands



Left: CPRE's Volunteering & Partnership team in June 2020, taking part in the 'Wave Your Appreciation for Volunteers' as part of national Volunteer's Week.

National CPRE's Volunteering & Partnerships (V&P) team have had a busy and productive year, despite all the challenges. Like many other teams, we quickly adapted to home-working and online meetings in the Spring and continued to engage with all 42 individual CPRE groups across the network.

We've been so impressed by the dedication, commitment and energy that local groups have demonstrated and CPRE Staffordshire is a great example of this: not only have they continued their vital planning work but they've sought to broaden the scope of what they do, engaged new members and successfully recruited a number of valuable volunteers. They're a highly committed team of staff, trustees and volunteers working together to enhance and protect our beautiful countryside.

The V&P team has provided a range of support to CPRE Staffordshire and the network during the year including:

- Coordinating events and activities for recognising and thanking volunteers during national Volunteers' Week in June and national Trustees' Week in November
- Organising a 2-day online conference, with inspirational keynote speakers, workshops and networking sessions, bringing the network together to look at a wide range of issues from planning and policy to public engagement and fundraising. The conference was of course an online-only

event this year but it was hugely successful and enabled many more people to attend that would normally be able to.

- Running Good practice training sessions for trustee recruitment in partnership with the specialist trustee recruitment charity Getting on Board, and offering a networking and volunteer management training workshop as part of the conference.
- Launching Assemble, our new cloud-based online volunteer management software. A highly sophisticated programme, Assemble is a one-stop-shop to enable network groups to more easily recruit, manage and stay in touch with all their volunteers. We were delighted that CPRE Staffordshire was one of the first network groups to adopt Assemble.
- Bi-monthly Induction sessions for new volunteers and staff, now held online, where people come together to meet each other and hear from our CEO Crispin Truman and other national charity staff about the work we do as a network of charities across England. It's been lovely meeting some of CPRE Staffordshire's new volunteers at these sessions in recent months.

We're now putting the finishing touches to our 2021 plans, which will include a range of new resources and tools to support volunteer recruitment and management, new training sessions and more opportunities for those involved with managing volunteers to network together including a bi-monthly national volunteer coordinators' forum.

It's been a pleasure working with CPRE Staffordshire during the year and I'm looking forward to celebrating their continued success in 2021.

Staffordshire is one of the smaller CPRE branches. However, it is not without ambition. Even a branch the scale of Staffordshire needs to demonstrate that it works in an open and effective way, and follows the principles and priorities of the national organisation.

To achieve this, the trustees have embarked upon three related pieces of work. First, we have updated the Branch Constitution. This has been agreed with the national organisation, and will be submitted to this year's AGM for approval. Secondly, Trustees have reviewed how well the Branch complies with the Charity Commission's Code of Governance for Smaller Charities. We concluded that while the Branch complied fully or partially with the Commission's recommended principles, its decision-making, risk assessment and control mechanisms could be strengthened. Work is now in hand to improve the production of relevant information, and to ensure that the Executive regularly checks the Branch's policies and procedures. Thirdly, trustees have produced an Action Plan for the financial year 2021/22. While the current pandemic makes forecasting and planning even more difficult, the Plan formally sets out what we want to achieve in the forthcoming year. We are now turning our attention to producing a more strategic document, which we intend to use for publicising our activities and in applying for funding.

When these pieces of work have been completed, we are confident that we shall be able to show our members, partner agencies and the people of Staffordshire that CPRE Staffordshire is an effective and well-run organisation.

Affordable Homes - how the village of Gnosall tackled the problem

Mary Booth

The question of affordability often crops up in CPRE's work and how to help young people get their own first home, the first step on the ladder. This brief description illustrates the work that has taken place over the last 15 years or so in the civil parish of Gnosall, Staffordshire. The village experienced major housing development in the 1960's and 1970's resulting in over 75% growth in that period. Some further increase was recorded in 1991 until the population stabilised to 4877 in the 2001 census. Many of the new residents commute to employment in nearby towns.

Housing needs In February 2010 a housing needs survey was carried out by Gnosall Parish Council working with Housing Plus and an independent rural housing enabler. As a result needs were identified and the enabler sought sites for affordable housing. Ten sites were put forward and investigated. There was a public exhibition and consultation, with comments invited by January 2011. Simultaneously a group consisting of parish councillors and volunteers with relevant expertise put together a Parish Plan for the area. Consultations had also taken place for this process. The Plan, containing a section on New Housing, was published in March 2011.

Village Green A site for affordable social housing had been identified by the Parish Council next to the relatively new Health Centre, which was bought by the developers who built the Brookhouse estate in the 1970s. However, it was outside the residential boundary of Gnosall and they therefore were not allowed to build houses on it. The housing needs survey had shown that such homes were needed in the village. After careful consideration of possible sites, this one seemed the best. It could only be built on for such a special reason, under certain terms and conditions set down by the Government. GPC worked with the landowner and a housing association, to develop a scheme and a planning application was submitted.

However, the site was being used by some local residents for dog-walking and informal recreation as it was not fenced and an association

was set up and applied to register the land as a village green. They had to prove that these activities had been going on unchallenged for at least 20 years, and were still ongoing. A three-day Public Inquiry was held in March 2010. To cut a long story short, the Inspector decided that the land in question should be designated a village green. The land was transferred to the Parish Council, who took on the management and maintenance of the green. It is protected from development in perpetuity. Since the future of the green was decided, the law has been changed and the rules regarding registration are now different.

Development pressures At this time the local planning authority, Stafford Borough Council (SBC), still only had a draft Local Plan. Developers started to look at a number of sites in and around Gnosall with a view to getting permission to build housing on greenfield sites outside the residential boundary. A local action group was set up to campaign against inappropriate, unnecessary and unwarranted development within the Parish and support development where it improves the infrastructure, enhances the quality of life and properly protects the environment.

Affordable housing for local needs It was agreed following the consultation on the housing needs survey that two sites would be used to provide 36 homes. One site within an existing social housing area would be used for six bungalows where derelict and largely unused garages stood. Stafford and Rural Homes (SARH) Housing Association look after the social housing here and would undertake the new development. The second site opposite the Village Hall and near the primary school would be a rural exception site for 30 new affordable homes for local people. In 2012 it was proposed that these would be a mix of properties for rent and shared ownership. All these homes have now been built by SARH and are occupied.

Neighbourhood Plan Because of all the pressures GPC decided to work at producing a Gnosall Neighbourhood Plan. Again a Working Group of volunteers was formed and first met in September 2013, progressing with a major questionnaire survey, followed by a sites' invitation exercise. Policy development work continued through 2014, with discussions and presentations along the way, culminating in a Draft

Neighbourhood Plan to cover the whole of the Parish for the period up to 2031, the same period as the Local Plan. There was a consultation ending in January 2015.

An independent examiner was appointed, published his report on the draft Plan in June 2015, and asked for some revisions before it went to referendum. These having been done, the final Plan was published in July and the referendum took place in November 2015, with the result being 93% in favour of acceptance. Gnosall's was the first Neighbourhood Plan to be adopted as a supplementary planning document in Stafford Borough. A new settlement boundary was defined, along with policies on the economy, community & housing, housing distribution, green infrastructure and recreation, planning obligations & local infrastructure priorities.

Housing developments Before the NP was adopted, two greenfield sites got planning permission for housing, both outside the original residential boundary. The first one on good agricultural land got through on appeal in October 2014. There are now 55 homes on it, including 22 units which are affordable homes, making up 40% of the estate. They are administered by Walsall Housing Association. The homes were built by March 2019. The second site was granted detailed permission in March 2015. There are 68 dwellings on the site, of which 20 (30%) are affordable. Of the latter there are 12 for social rent. Eight properties are described as 'intermediate' and there are 48 open market 3 to 5 bedroom properties, now all built.

Conclusion and summary Therefore the total number of affordable homes built in the Parish of Gnosall since 2012 is 78. This is a not inconsiderable total for one village to achieve in the time scale. A combination of an active parish council, the development of a Parish Plan and later on a Neighbourhood Plan with the help of local volunteers and the local planning authority, persistence despite obstacles such as the village green application, a housing needs survey, and working with an independent rural housing enabler and housing associations, has led to this unusual total of affordable homes being built. A large percentage of the homes are specifically for people with local connections to the Parish of Gnosall.

Planning Report

CPRE Staffordshire continues to make representations to the relevant local authorities where we may be able to make a difference in relation to Local Plans and similar documents. The majority of our representations have been on planning applications and in appeals, mainly in relation to new housing on unallocated greenfield and green belt sites, but have also commented on a variety of other applications. We co-operate with other CPRE groups where there are cross-border issues.

Both at a national and local level CPRE continues to lobby and campaign effectively and has every reason to be proud of its impact. The countryside is under huge pressure and too much of it has been lost or degraded unnecessarily. CPRE continues to raise relevant issues with Government and tries to influence decisions to help the countryside.

Planning for the Future White Paper

Planning has been hitting the headlines recently following the publication of the government's White Paper. This outlines the fundamental long-term reforms the government wants to introduce, such as moving from the current discretionary system to a zonal planning system. An earlier consultation on changes to the current planning system (C2PS) looked at what changes could be made to the current planning system in the short-term to support our economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.

CPRE has been warning that the government's plans would limit public participation and hand developers free rein in determining new developments, many of which are likely to be poorly designed. A recent debate in Parliament in which CPRE was mentioned seven times saw 'a torrent of criticism of the proposals', with some MPs branding them a 'developers' charter'.

The Government proposes setting a new 'required' number of new homes to be provided by each council. This 'New Standard Method' involves 'top down' methodology calculated using a new algorithm. It

starts from much higher national requirements and gives radically different results to the current assessment. Councils will be obliged to accept the number of new homes required in each and to bring land forward, as a minimum, to provide for the required number. All local authorities in Staffordshire will be required to build more houses than they are at present - in the case of Cannock Chase District Council, there will be a 108% increase!

In September 2020, Mary Booth took part in an online meeting between CPRE groups and Robert Jenrick, Secretary of State for Housing, to discuss CPRE's concerns about the White Paper.

In the West Midlands, the Association of Black Country Authorities (ABCA) is proposing to release land for nearly 27,000 homes in the Green Belt as part of its forthcoming Joint Plan, which would have knock-on effects on neighbouring areas. In response, CPRE West Midlands commissioned a report by Gerald Kells arguing that this level of development in the countryside is not genuinely needed and suggesting alternative actions to reduce the loss of countryside.

We sent the report to all Black Country boroughs (Walsall, Wolverhampton, Dudley and Sandwell), in addition to South Staffordshire District Council, Lichfield District Council and Cannock Chase District Council, as well as to all local MPs, two of whom (Marco Longhi – Dudley North and James Morris – Halesowen and Rowley Regis) held online meetings with CPRE representatives to discuss our concerns. The report is available [on our website](#).

Around the county

Disappointingly, in May 2020 the Secretary of State granted consent for the **West Midlands Rail Interchange** planned for land west of Junction 12 of the M6 in South Staffordshire. The proposal is to build 740,000 square metres of warehousing, up to 30m high, within 643 acres of Green Belt. The plans include a modest rail freight facility with over 90% of the plant not directly served by rail.

CPRE Staffordshire responded to initial consultations stating, "CPRE is opposed to the urban sprawl of Birmingham and Wolverhampton into the

attractive open countryside of southern Staffordshire. Provision of houses and roads for 8,500 employees would place additional pressures on the Green Belt. Penkridge, Cannock, Lichfield and Tamworth already face huge pressure from house building companies.”

In February and July Paul Windmill attended Preliminary and Issue Specific Hearings. Further focussed post hearing representations were made regarding impact on Green Belt, economy, highways and movement.

HS2 also received notice to proceed in April 2020. Enabling work in Staffordshire started in the autumn, with extensive tree felling and hedgerow removal in Hints and around Fradley, near Lichfield.

Staffordshire Moorlands

The Local Plan was approved with recommendations in June.

Stafford Borough Council

We responded to the new Stafford Borough Local Plan 2020-2040: Issues and Options consultation (which closed in April) and commented on the Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document. We also commented on the borough council’s draft empty homes and climate change strategies.

South Staffordshire District Council

We responded to the Spatial Housing Strategy last December. A consultation on the Preferred Options will take place summer 2021. The consultation on the Black Country Plan has also been postponed until summer 2021.

Accountability of the Planning Inspectorate

CPRE Staffordshire’s county committee meeting in January 2020 discussed the issue of the Planning Inspectorate overturning the refusal of planning permission by local authorities. One application for 250 houses on open green space in Burton on Trent was rejected by councillors but subsequently approved by the Inspectorate. The area was not allocated in the Local Plan, which had allocations for housing

until 2031, and the decision had been supported by a qualified Landscape Architect. Following a refused appeal to the PI, the same application made two years later was approved by a different Planning Inspector.

In reply to our letter about this, Matt Thomson, then head of land use and planning at CPRE, told us that CPRE has regular meetings with senior managers in the Planning Inspectorate. He is of the opinion that the problem of bad decisions does not really lie with the Inspectorate, but with the political and policy context that they (and we) are working with. The Inspectorate's role is to uphold local and national planning policy, so when they come to a different conclusion than the local authority, it is because they are applying established policy, albeit possibly in a different way to the council.

We would be very interested to learn of any cases in which two identical or very similar applications have had different responses from the Planning Inspectorate. Additionally, if you are aware of any such cases, please get in touch. If you are aware of an appeal case where an Inspector has clearly made a decision that conflicts with the relevant policies of an up-to-date local plan, without the context of a clearly explained rationale for doing so, please let us know.



The countryside charity Staffordshire

Campaign to Protect Rural England: Staffordshire Branch. Registered charity no. 219443.

Our office is situated at: All post should be sent to us at:

Eastgate House	CPRE Staffordshire
Eastgate Street	2 Staffordshire Place
Stafford	Stafford
ST16 2TX	ST16 2DH

Tel. 01785 277890. Please leave us a message if we are not able to answer your call, giving your name and telephone number first before leaving your message.

Email: protect@cprestaffordshire.org.uk Website: <http://www.cprestaffordshire.org.uk>

Executive committee members and trustees:

President	Mr Ian Dudson, CBE KStJ, HM Lord Lieutenant of Staffordshire
Vice-president	Philip Atkins OBE
Chairman (trustee)	Mrs Mary Booth, BA, MSc
Vice-chair (trustee)	Mrs Anne Clendon, BEM
Trustee	Mr Stephen Hopkins
Trustee elect	Mr Steve Anderson

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