



# The countryside charity Staffordshire

## Minutes of the 84th Annual General Meeting 2020

1:30pm, Wednesday 9 December 2020  
Online (via Zoom)

**Present:** Steve Anderson, Philip Atkins, Maggie Bailey, Cllr Len Bates, Mary Booth (Chairman), Sarah Burgess, Anne Clendon, Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Staffordshire Mr Ian Dudson, Steve Hopkins, Gerald Kells, Sue Kneill-Boxley, Jeremy Lowe (from 2:30pm), Cllr Barry Panter, John Russell, Paul Windmill, Anna Woolliscroft.

**Apologies:** Anita Scargill, Jacqueline Smith.

Welcome and Introductions. Mary Booth welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for attending, noting that the meeting had been postponed from 16 September in the hope that an in-person meeting would be possible.

**Minutes of the 2019 meeting.** These were accepted as a true record (proposed by Anne Clendon, seconded by Steve Hopkins).

**Presentation of annual report.** Sarah Burgess provided a brief summary of the annual report and CPRE Staffordshire's work over the past year. Mary Booth proposed that the annual report be adopted, seconded by Steve Hopkins. All 11 members present voted in favour.

**Presentation and adoption of the 2019-20 accounts.** The audited accounts, summarized by Sue Kneill-Boxley, were approved. Expenditure on meetings has declined due to the move to a new building with free meeting rooms. Strategic Collaboration Funding from the national CPRE office was received for the parish councillor training event, which has been postponed due to covid. Costs have not increased and travel expenses are lower. The long-standing problem of struggling to cover running costs remains, hence the decision to use consultant Mike Deegan to prepare a fundraising plan.

**Chairman's Address.** Mary Booth summarized the past year, noting that a few people have done a lot with little funding and achieved remarkable results. New people are joining our team, or have joined recently. CPRE Staffordshire now has an Action Plan for the future as well as a Fundraising Plan. We seem to be making an impression and punching above our weight at a number of levels. We are being noticed nationally. For example, in the latest autumn/winter CPRE magazine the new national Chair Simon Murray referred to CPRE Staffordshire in his article 'Saluting our volunteers'.

Paul Windmill summarised the government's proposed reforms to the planning system in England and the new algorithm for calculating housing targets. He noted that the government has met considerable resistance to its plans to massively overhaul the current system and replace it with a zoning approach; the new algorithm would see much more housebuilding in shire counties. In terms of the new algorithm, the government wants to

divide up housing requirements between authorities, which will see most new housing being constructed in the shire counties. The government said it would introduce the legislation before the next election. Local authorities will have to decide whether to proceed with their Local Plans or wait for the new legislation; Shropshire and Wyre Forest have decided to proceed but other Local Plans are likely to be delayed. In terms of large-scale developments, there has been nothing proposed this year in Staffordshire on the scale of the West Midlands Rail Interchange.

Gerald Kells noted that Robert Jenrick has said that the government will look at the algorithm again, and increase residential development in town centres. Some of the change in the proposed locations for housing is partly because of the algorithm and partly because of the 2018 ONS figures, which are on a short timescale. It is unclear how the government can come up with an algorithm that reverses or changes the housing numbers. As the ONS figures are now much lower than the 300,000 houses target, a large amount of the addition comes out of the increased affordability add-on. This is based on affordability in both 2019 and 2009 and so is also much more volatile. Housing numbers could change dramatically over even a year.

All the figures for the new standard methodology for local authorities are available on request, as Gerald Kells did some work for the national CPRE office this year on housing calculations. CPRE needs to keep up pressure on MPs about the algorithm and housing numbers.

Mary Booth noted that CPRE Warwickshire and others have written to Sir David Norgrove, chair of the UK statistics authority, to complain about the population figures and projections for Coventry. The letter states that both the mid-year population estimates and the population projections for Coventry have been very greatly inflated by ONS without adequate justification or good reason.

Gerald noted that some Local Plans could go forward under the new standard methodology, some under the old, and neighbouring authorities might use different methodology. Mary Booth noted that CPRE Staffordshire has had several meetings with MPs about the green belt and intends to write to all Staffordshire MPs about the housing targets and the Planning White Paper.

Paul Windmill noted that whilst the White Paper states the government's commitment to protecting the green belt, it is being developed at the fastest rate he can remember; land is removed from the green belt and allocated for housing. In terms of affordable housing in the green belt, the White Paper says that affordable housing will not be funded out of market housing; instead, there will be a tariff on new development.

Philip Atkins noted that developers are reluctant to build on brownfield sites and asked whether the algorithm can take account of brownfield land. Ian Dudson agreed and noted that the discussion on planning had been interesting. He offered to raise these matters with our National President Emma Bridgewater who has a factory in Stoke on Trent.

Gerald Kells noted pressure for urban regeneration must be kept up. The greatest need is often where houses are not expensive, but it is also true there are not enough affordable houses.<sup>1</sup>

**Election of President and Vice-President.** MB nominated Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Staffordshire Mr Ian Dudson CBE KStJ to remain as President. This was seconded by John Russell and unanimously agreed by the 11 members present.

Steve Hopkins nominated Philip Atkins to be the new Vice-President, citing his extensive experience in both local politics and farming. He was spokesman for six years for housing and transport policy for all Staffordshire councils and is now helping farmers navigate Brexit (having farmed for five years before entering the CAP).

Cllr Len Bates seconded the nomination and it was unanimously agreed by the 11 members present.

**Election of Officers and Executive Committee.** Anne Clendon proposed Mary Booth to remain as chairman, seconded by Ian Dudson. MB thanked people for their confidence in her and agreed to be chairman for another year, noting that anyone else is welcome to take over.

Mary Booth nominated Anne Clendon to serve as vice-chair for another year, noting that she has been a stalwart of CPRE for many years. Maggie Bailey seconded.

Anne Clendon nominated Steve Hopkins to remain a trustee. Mary Booth seconded and Steve Hopkins agreed to continue in his post.

Steve Hopkins welcomed Steve Anderson and proposed him as a new trustee, as he has extensive experience at various levels with CPRE and was previously a trustee of the national CPRE charity. He lives in Kinver, giving us a presence in the south of the county, and his knowledge of planning matters will complement the skills we have with Paul Windmill and others.

John Russell seconded the nomination. Mary Booth welcomed Steve Anderson to the committee, noting that the national office had said he had been a wonderful trustee who was never afraid to challenge thinking.

All the above appointments were voted upon and agreed unanimously by the 11 members present.

### **Constitution: to consider and adopt updated document**

Steve Hopkins noted there was a brief section in the Annual Report on governance and a link in the agenda papers. Both the Charity Commission and national CPRE lay great store by branches' governing documents. Whilst the previous constitution was sound, it needed to be updated to account for changes such as online meetings and online banking. The

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<sup>1</sup> *Note: Since the AGM the Government has reversed its position on the New Standard Methodology, partly as a result of CPRE lobbying, and announced on December 16 that it would continue with the old methodology. However, the 20 largest towns and cities in the UK would have an additional 35% added to their totals. In the West Midlands this includes Birmingham, Coventry, Stoke-on-Trent and Wolverhampton (although in the latter case it would effectively be an increase in the Black Country figures.) This makes the need to address urban regeneration even more pressing.*

language needed to be simplified without losing meaning, and this was done with the assistance of the national office.

The quorum for the AGM had been reduced to three with permission from the Charity Commission, although it is now being increased to 10 following advice from the national office. The constitution needs to be looked at in parallel with other work, such as the Code of Governance and Action Plan. Having an up-to-date governing document will enable CPRE Staffordshire to effectively pursue its aims. Steve Hopkins noted that even a small-scale charity needs to be business-like and effective and show it is doing a good job and fulfilling the objectives of national organisation.

Mary Booth seconded the proposal for the new constitution to be adopted and this was unanimously agreed by the 11 members present. Steve Hopkins was thanked for his work on this.

### **Volunteer Awards: Paul Windmill and Anne Clendon BEM**

The President, Ian Dudson, announced the awards. Paul Windmill received an empowering communities award for his planning advisory work with community groups. He writes responses, advises groups and attends presentations and hearings. Whilst his expertise is in planning, he has worked with people with knowledge of other areas. Paul brings a passion that underpins everything and was congratulated for his service to CPRE Staffordshire.

Anne Clendon received a long service award. She has been vice-chairman and trustee for about 12 years and previously arranged days out for members that were very well-received. She has done a lot of voluntary work in her own community and took part in planting a tree in memory of our former Chairman, Amyas Stafford Northcote.

### **Talk and Q&A – Jeremy Lowe from Staffordshire NFU about the current state of agriculture in the county and CPRE's Greener Better Faster initiative**

Jeremy Lowe, the NFU county advisor for Staffordshire, summarized his professional background and gave a presentation on some of the political changes affecting farming. Staffordshire is quite a varied county in terms of agriculture, from sheep in the Staffordshire Moorlands to soft fruit in the centre of the county, and potatoes, pigs, poultry, and arable crops in the south. The size of the county farm estate has fallen as some county farms have been sold off. In terms of the impact of covid, some traditional horticulturalists and the ornamental sector were hit hard, as the majority were not set up for online sales. The dairy sector was badly affected by the closure of hospitality venues; Staffordshire has half of all dairy units in the West Midlands. Some farmers found they were not eligible for the government's new dairy hardship fund. Public access to the countryside increased, partly due to the closure of parks. There was an increase in anti-social behaviour, such as cutting fences to gain access to farmland, dog-fouling, and an increase in livestock worrying, fly-tipping, and littering. Whilst the government talks about farmers' provision of public goods in return for their receipt of public money, increased access involves a responsibility to look after the areas that are visited.

Jeremy Lowe described CPRE's Greener, Better Faster report as very aspirational, but a bit light on the details of how to put its vision into practice. His presentation summarized the government's changes to farming following the launch in November 2020 of the

Agricultural Transition Plan 2021 to 2024. This sets out changes to agricultural policy from January 2021. Direct payments will be phased out and replaced with a new system of Environmental Land Management schemes (ELMs).

Gerald Kells welcomed the change towards environmental improvement, noting that some farmers are probably more ahead on this and committed than others. He also questioned whether there will be controls on how land is managed by non-farming investors when payments are delinked from the requirement to farm in 2022, especially if older farmers are able to take one-off payments and leave farming.

In response, Jeremy Lowe stated that a substantial proportion of the money farmers currently receive under the Basic Payment Scheme is dependent on them taking environmental measures on their farms. If the trial schemes are suitable, the NFU will encourage its members to participate. He noted that land must be managed in order to receive payments. It is possible that companies might want to use land for carbon-offsetting through tree-planting, in which case the farmer would do the work.

John Russell asked about climate change and reducing meat consumption, noting the impact of methane emissions on climate change. Jeremy Lowe noted that NFU complained about a recent BBC documentary on meat on the grounds that UK agriculture is more efficient, and grass-fed meat less harmful and not comparable to big feedlots in the US and South America.

Sue Kneill-Boxley asked whether the NFU would support an initiative to put QR codes on farm gates to provide information for the public about the field they are walking through or past. This might increase respect for the countryside. Jeremy Lowe responded that the NFU already has an education team that helps engage children about where their food comes from.

Cllr Barry Panter asked how more people can be encouraged to enter farming, and experienced people discouraged from leaving. Jeremy Lowe noted that Staffordshire has a vibrant Young Farmers federation. Whilst it is always difficult getting a foot on the ladder to farm, there are many opportunities to get involved and the NFU has an education programme targeted at urban areas. Mr Lowe was thanked for his interesting talk. He said he would send links to information on what he had said.

### **Closing remarks**

MB thanked everyone for attending and noted that we may consider holding the AGM in the evening or at the weekend in future.

The meeting ended at around 3:30pm.