



*Alton Castle in the Mist, Sue Green – Countryside on Camera*

## Chairman's Report

Mary Booth

AGM 2021

I am pleased to be able to report that CPRE Staffordshire has come through this difficult period of pandemic and lockdowns relatively unscathed, due to the support of you our members, our trustees and volunteers, our partner organisations, as well as our paid officers. We have not yet quite returned to business as usual, but hopefully we should do so soon. Now in September 2021 the move back to working in the office has slowly begun. We owe thanks to Susan and Sarah for keeping the organisation going by working from home, despite the inherent problems of other family members doing so too and the home-schooling of children happening at the same time. As always, we are most grateful to Staffordshire County Council for providing us with office premises in Eastgate House, as well as other facilities.

This has been a good year as far as recruiting volunteers is concerned. New people with new ideas can refresh our approach. We are grateful for their input. All our trustees, including the two appointed at last year's AGM, Steve Anderson and Philip Atkins OBE, have kept in touch throughout with feedback to our internal Weekly

Digests, participation in online meetings locally, regionally and nationally, and keeping us on the right track as regards governance. For all this I record my thanks.

In last year's Annual Report I said we were looking ahead to a better year, hopefully, in 2021 when we could celebrate our 85th anniversary properly. The 2021 calendar was very popular, with its beautiful photos provided by our Staffordshire Countryside on Camera competition photographers. However, we have still not been able to arrange a face-to-face anniversary event other than our AGM, which will be 'hybrid', partly in person, partly online.

In our newsletters I have given some snapshots of CPRE Staffordshire's history taken from our archives. These have proved interesting. Much has changed, but not our main aims as set out in 1936 in an appeal that all "those who are concerned to save for all time the natural beauty of this County of Staffordshire, one of the most interesting and historic in England, and who recognise the influence of that beauty on the prosperity and happiness of all members of the community are invited to safeguard it by becoming members of the County Branch of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England".

We at CPRE Staffordshire, the Countryside Charity, as we are now called, do not want the countryside preserved in aspic, or for us to be seen just as 'nimbys'. We are realistic and now aim to see the right homes built in the right places. We still await the Government's final proposals after last year's controversial consultation on their Planning White Paper 'Planning for the Future'. Our voluntary planning adviser, Paul, continues to help us with our watching brief on planning applications across the County. We look forward to hearing his update on Local Plans at the AGM.

We are rekindling our involvement with the Best Kept Village Community Competition this year by sponsoring a new community award. Separately you will probably have heard of our project to revitalise the Staffordshire Way long-distance footpath. This has attracted many new volunteers too. We commissioned a new Funding Plan on sources of funding for our organisation which was published in August 2020 and we are working on implementing it. A generous legacy from Mrs Pam Collard of Norbury helped us with our finances this year. We hope that others will remember us in this way too.

There will be an emphasis on recruitment of new members in the coming year. They are needed not only in Staffordshire but also across a lot of the CPRE network. People have come to appreciate the countryside and open spaces more during lockdowns. We hope we may be able to capitalise on that by encouraging them to join. So there will be a theme of 'Building the Movement' throughout CPRE. If you can help us with that in an echo of 1936, we shall be very grateful.

The 2020-21 accounts cover the 12-month period running from 1<sup>st</sup> April 20 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021. Our closing balance of £29,140.37 at the end of March is down from £31,637.26 at the end of the previous March (2019), a deficit of £2,496.89. Our excess of expenditure over income has decreased by £2,532.60. However, we are still very aware that our costs are running higher than our income.

Our share of national subscriptions has decreased by a very small amount, though we do have new members, both organisations and individuals, who we very much welcome. We received no Parish Council donations during 2020-21, perhaps due to the Covid-19 pandemic which has seen many organisations run low on funds. Our funding from last year, of £1,600 from national CPRE for the cancelled parish and town council planning training event set to run at Yarnfield Park, has been carried forward and will be used to fund a series of online training events, in partnership with the Staffordshire Parish Councils Association, starting this September. We also received £962.06 in funding, from national CPRE, this year to update our branding to bring it into line with the new 'CPRE The Countryside Charity' branding.

Other donations, for which we are most grateful, increased greatly, by £3,899.43, due to a generous bequest from the will of the late Mrs Pam Collard of Norbury. We raised £188.84 from our Grand Summer Draw, £371.16 down from last year, however, due to the pandemic we have not been able to hold stalls or face-to-face events which has had the challenging effect of moving fundraising largely online. We would like to thank everyone who has contributed over the year. Simple ways to contribute, at no cost to the donor, are to register with <https://giveasyoulive.com> with CPRE Staffordshire as your chosen charity - we raised £61 this way last year - or send your old mobile phones and other accepted electronic gadgets, old and foreign coins & notes, watches & jewellery and used stamps to Recycling for Good Causes - see <https://www.recyclingforgoodcauses.org/individual-donors/>. Please email Sue or Sarah at [protect@cprestaffordshire.org.uk](mailto:protect@cprestaffordshire.org.uk) or call 01785 277890 for more information.

Sale of standard merchandise was down by over £100. However, income from the sale of our 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary Staffordshire Countryside on Camera calendar and from Robert Cartwright's photographic and informative books, for which we thank Robert, boosted proceeds by £641.08 (after expenses involved had been deducted).

The overall cost of travel, expenses, office running (this includes printing & photocopying, website hosting and purchase of stationery), postage, trips & visits and meetings was reduced by more than £1,600 largely due to home-working and meetings and national events being held online. In addition, Aqua Sign & Print Services of Walsall, kindly printed our autumn 2020 newsletter free of charge. Publicity costs are considerably greater and this is, in the main part, due to upgrading our branding (for which we received £962.06 in funding) - we have purchased a new branded gazebo (much needed as our old one is in a state of disrepair), table cloth and pull out banners. Other publicity expenses include raffle ticket printing, the lottery licence, Staffordshire Day quiz and 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary photography competition prizes. Insurance costs remained the same for the same cover. Other costs include a gift for our accounts auditor, reimbursement for out-of-stock goods, purchase of goods to sell and printing of calendars.

As reported in last year's Annual Report, we have been reviewing our situation and have prepared an Action Plan for 2021-22 (in keeping with the [CPRE National Strategy](#)), we engaged with a local consultant, Mike Deegan Consulting (consultancy costs £625), and now 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 find-raising idea? We very much value your input and thank you for another year of your support.

Audited & 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.



I spent part of the August bank holiday weekend horse-riding in mid-Wales, a few miles from the lovely little town of Hay-on-Wye. Chatting with the guide, the conversation inevitably turned to jobs and I mentioned that I worked part-time for CPRE in Staffordshire. “I wouldn’t have thought there would be much rural left to protect there,” she said, after I had explained what CPRE stood for. Staffordshire definitely has an image problem, and it’s true that some parts of the county are very built up and urbanised - which perhaps makes the bits that aren’t all the more precious to residents (hence the huge opposition to proposals to build on sites like the Seven Cornfields or the former golf course at Silverdale). The county has a wide variety of landscapes, from the Roaches to Cannock Chase to Kinver Edge, as well as plenty of “ordinary” countryside that is worth protecting.



And it could have much wider appeal. By launching a project to breathe new life into Staffordshire Way, we hope to showcase the diversity of landscapes and beauty of the countryside. We want to show that we are more than just “drive-through” Britain that you might glimpse on the M6 or West Coast Main Line on your way to the Lake District. Steve Anderson’s project has got off to an excellent start, with many enthusiastic volunteers signing up to walk sections of the Way and log any potential problems. Whilst parts of the Way are in good condition, in some places the waymarking is poor and the path has become indistinct, obstructed or overgrown - one section was branded a “disgrace” by the popular Walking Englishman website!

Our volunteers have also been helping to build up a rich picture of information that hasn’t previously been collated, such as connections with public transport, places to park, useful businesses for walkers to use along the route, and sections that could be suitable for people with reduced mobility or buggies. One of the most exciting developments is that Staffordshire County Council is getting behind the initiative, with a view to promoting the Staffordshire Way as a tourist attraction in its own right. It will use much of the information we are collecting to create a new online resource for anyone wanting to explore the route, and possibly even a new printed guidebook.

Ahead of the local elections in May, we urged prospective candidates to stand up for the countryside: promoting countryside solutions to climate change, creating a planning system that works for people, nature and the environment and protects the green belt, developing a comprehensive bus network for rural communities and urging central government to introduce an ‘all-in’ Deposit Return Scheme for drinks containers - something that CPRE has been calling for for the past decade!



In the winter, we teamed up with the Cannock Chase AONB Partnership to promote CPRE’s annual Star Count, a citizen science survey in which people count the number of stars they can see with the naked eye in the Orion constellation. Glare from streetlights and buildings can mean that many of us don't get to enjoy the magical sight of a dark,

starry sky. Just 3% of people in England experience truly dark skies, and artificial light can severely disrupt wildlife and ecosystems. Cannock Chase has the highest levels of light pollution of all England’s 34 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) due to its proximity to conurbations, although it does remain an oasis of darkness relative to its surroundings. The AONB Partnership will use the results of the Star Count and additional surveys to produce a Good Lighting Guide to practical advice for homes, businesses, and decision-makers to avoid and reduce light pollution.



Covid has continued to put a damper on our planned events, but Sue and I have been able to give the new gazebo its first outings. We were at the No Planet B! stall and the Green Arts Festival in Stafford in July and August and the county show at the end of the summer holidays. Next year, we hope to work with Staffordshire University to help plant hedges on their campus and to help

students make it more hedgehog-friendly. We will also soon be inviting

applications for our Green Schools Trophy to give all Staffordshire schools a chance to showcase their conservation and environmental work. Together with the Staffordshire Parish Councils Association, we will be running online planning training for parish councillors.

National CPRE has produced several major reports over the past year, including the Six Tests for Planning, Every Village, Every Hour (calling for better rural bus services), and the Hedge Fund, calling for more and better hedgerows. In addition to the well-known environmental benefits of hedgerows, CPRE's research also shows that boosting them by 40% would create 25,000 jobs over the next 30 years and yield almost £4 for every £1 invested. The hedgerow report actually had an in-person launch in Parliament that Sue was able to attend. Following the government's recent U-turn on its proposed planning reforms and Michael Gove's appointment as Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities this month, it will be interesting to see what 2022 has in store.

## Volunteers' Corner

This year we have been pleased to welcome two new volunteers, **Lisa and Gary Salt**.



Lisa and Gary are both parish councillors for Cheddleton and became aware of the work of the CPRE through the newsletter sent to their parish council. Gary is now assisting on checking planning applications for the Staffordshire Moorlands and Stoke-on-Trent districts and Lisa is helping with fundraising.

Gary has a professional background in adult education, primarily focusing on life skills and employability skills. In his free time Gary likes to investigate the history and heritage of areas around the Staffordshire Moorlands. He also enjoys white water rafting, caving and gyrocopter flying. Lisa also has a background in teaching and has taught at several schools in Staffordshire. Lisa spends a lot of her leisure time tending to her allotment or walking her border collie, Bryn.

*Locals call for the former Keele/Silverdale Municipal Golf Course to be transformed into ‘Silverdale Common’ - for the benefit of both people and nature.*

Located in Silverdale and Keele in north Staffordshire, the former municipal golf course comprises 200 acres of pristine undeveloped woods, ponds and open grassland. It's hugely popular for recreation and its central location gives it the potential to develop as a site of national interest. It has provided a lifeline for those living in what the national press dubbed '[the UK's smelliest village](#)' due to the stench from Walley's Quarry. Since the golf course closed in 2015, rewilding has taken place before our very eyes, with an explosion of fauna and flora across the site.



[Designed by the Hawtree company](#), the golf course was highly regarded by players despite complaints of [poor maintenance](#). Superstar golfer Ian Woosnam planned a rescue which aimed to set up an [academy for students](#), but the rejection of his bid by site owner Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council (NULBC) led him to successfully [invest elsewhere](#). The course [closed down](#) and, as landowner and planning authority, NULBC is determined

to sell off its land to the highest bidder for a market-led 'executive' housing estate of between 1,200-1,800 houses as part of its [Keele University Growth Corridor](#). NULBC claims to have a [surplus of green space](#) which it cannot afford to maintain and that concreting over the beautiful open space for executive homes will somehow spearhead economic growth.

As a business plan, building houses in the hope that regeneration will follow is certainly a tried and tested (and failed) model of economic development. Yet in an age of climate emergency and re-connection with nature, the idea that there can be an over-provision of [open space which needs to be developed](#) seems firmly entrenched in the pre-pandemic past. As a combination of established and deliberately planted woodland, the site has a huge variety of different tree species. It is therefore effectively North Staffordshire's only arboretum, with a high ecological value - something recognised by the council itself in the 1950s with tree protection orders covering the site.

Key questions to consider are:

- How does the removal of open space from an area of socio-economic deprivation for 'executive' housing align with the government's promise of a 'levelling up' agenda?
- How does the removal of 200 acres of undeveloped open space align with the government's promise to protect the green belt?

The case for development would appear to be weak, with large swathes of the once-thriving town centre in Newcastle-under-Lyme lying derelict. A walk through it reveals long-vacated council buildings, empty shops and decaying half-built student accommodation; developing these brownfield sites would directly enhance the local environment and economy. House prices are amongst the lowest nationally and the council has a [5 year housing land supply in place](#). The local green belt has already been severely eroded or built upon. The university and science park were removed from the Green Belt in the 1990s, and in Keele village, Green Belt status did not prevent an 80-house estate from being built, with a further 100 houses approved. Several more large estates have also been built in and around Silverdale. Locals can certainly say they've 'done our bit' for housing and development so the usual lazy insult of 'NIMBY' doesn't apply here!

### **Bringing people and nature together**

There is a robust scientific consensus around the clear benefits of easy access to natural environments for both physical and mental well-being. This 200-acre green space site represents the largest public open space owned by Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough council and its loss would be felt by those throughout the borough and beyond. The site is popular for recreational pursuits such as walking, cycling, mountain biking, 'tree bathing', running, jogging and dog walking. As well as official public footpaths, many other paths have developed due to its local popularity. The accessibility of the site was brought home to me when I saw an elderly man on a mobility scooter using the site to take his dog for a walk - this genuinely is a space for all, not for a privileged few.

### **A vision for a green future**

The site provides a wildlife corridor between other open spaces and with very little effort could be developed to become a nature park to attract tourism and for educational purposes. It could connect with other nearby parks (Silverdale/Apedale) to form a 'Three Parks Trail'; the biodiversity of each area having the potential to attract ecotourism nationally. The size of the golf course allows for mixed use for recreation as well as nature recovery.

Silverdale and Keele Parish councils' joint application to have the area accepted as an Asset of Community Value was rejected by NULBC with a key reason being that the site was already 'earmarked' for development. Given that the council has yet to begin consultation on its new Local Plan and the site is legally protected Green Belt land, it is alarming that its mind appears to be already made up. Locals are rightly concerned that their consultation will merely be an expensive legal fig leaf rather than a genuine listening exercise.

While the Council remains adamant that a market-led housing estate is the only approach, a public campaign is necessary to persuade them of the wider long-term benefits of preserving the site for the people and natural environment. The creation of Silverdale Common would provide a vital open space for fresh air, recreation, rewilding, education and green economy employment opportunities. All of this could play a vital role in the area's post-covid economic recovery as well as contributing to what looks to be an increasingly desperate fight against climate change.

### What can I do next?

Here are some of the ways you can get involved in saving this precious green space for future generations. We are looking for volunteers to support us with campaigning, as well as those with legal/environmental expertise to scrutinize council proposals under planning law, appraise site environmental value and develop an alternative vision based on environmental and community needs.



1. Visit the site! The more people experience the area the more will want to preserve it.

2. Contact us to get involved: Email Save Our Green Space: [saveogs20@gmail.com](mailto:saveogs20@gmail.com)

3. [Sign the petition - see the website for details:](#)  
<https://www.sogsnewcastle.co.uk/>

4. Contact NULBC Planning Dept to be kept informed of Local Plan

developments: [planningpolicy@newcastle-staffs.gov.uk](mailto:planningpolicy@newcastle-staffs.gov.uk)

7. Write to Aaron Bell MP: [aaron.bell.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:aaron.bell.mp@parliament.uk)

### **Local Plans Round-Up**

#### **Cannock Chase District Council**

The Local Plan is expected to be published in winter 2021, but with change of political control this may now not happen. We responded to the Review of Preferred Options consultation in April.

#### **East Staffordshire Borough Council**

The update to the Local Plan has been delayed for a maximum of five years. The adopted Local Plan (2021-2031) remains in use, and forms part of the Development Plan for East Staffordshire.

#### **Lichfield District Council**

The Lichfield District Local Plan 2040 regulation 19 consultation ended in August. The plan will then go to examination. Most of the new housing allocation appears to be to meet the needs of Birmingham and the Black Country.

#### **Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council**

The council may hold an Issues and Strategic Options consultation in autumn 2021.

#### **South Staffordshire District Council**

The council is continuing to progress the Local Plan review and is aiming to consult on the Preferred Options in September 2021, subject to Member agreement. It is still on course to submit in 2022 and hopes to adopt the new Local Plan in 2023.

#### **Stafford Borough Council**

The council is currently assessing the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic and the government's proposed planning reforms on its new Local Plan 2020-2040 and its timetable. The Preferred Options consultation stage originally scheduled for January 2021 will not take place. An updated version of the Local Development Scheme will be published in due course.

#### **Stoke-on-Trent City Council**

A consultation on the draft Local Plan is expected in winter 2021.

### **Tamworth Borough Council**

The Issues and Options consultation is expected in spring 2022.

### **Black Country Plan**

The consultation on the Black Country Plan is now open and will run until 11 October 2021.

This joint Local Plan prepared by the four Black Country Authorities (Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton) will direct where new development will be located for the Black Country up to 2039. The Plan includes a number of Green Belt sites, nine of which are in Walsall, including one backing onto Walsall's historic Arboretum. Sites with a history of controversy, such as Sandhills on the A461, are also included.

### **HS2**

Work on Phase 1 and Phase 2a of HS2 has continued over the past year, with woodland and many individual trees and hedgerows removed around Lichfield and Hints. There will also be many indirect impacts. Cemex has received permission for a new quarry at Orgreave to supply HS2 with sand and gravel, and nearly 300 metres of hedgerow will be removed to amalgamate a farmer's remaining fields in Hints after others were compulsorily purchased by HS2.

The Phase One route enters Staffordshire in the Drayton Bassett area, before passing Hints, Weeford, Swinfen and Packington and Whittington. It continues north, to the east of Lichfield, after which the main line of Phase One merges into Phase 2a in the Fradley area. A spur of the route continues northwest to a junction at Handsacre. The Phase 2a route through Staffordshire covers a distance of 51.3km, running north from Fradley to Madeley.

<https://www.cprestaffordshire.org.uk/news/our-view-on-hs2/>

<https://www.hs2.org.uk/in-your-area/local-community-webpages/hs2-in-staffordshire/>

**Applications we have responded to this year include:**

**21/33718/OUT:** Land Northeast of Dingle Lane Farm Dingle Lane Hilderstone Stone Staffordshire. Proposed outline application for the development of land to include the erection of a single dwelling. Objected on the grounds of inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

**P/2021/00062:** Outline application for the siting of 40 holiday chalets with all matters reserved. Objected on the grounds of being contrary to adopted Local Plan policy.

**L.20/03/867 M:** Land South of the A513, Orgreave, Alrewas: application by Cemex for sand and gravel extraction, the erection of plant and infrastructure and creation of new access, in order to supply the HS2 project with ready mix concrete, and with exportation of surplus sand and gravel. Objected.

**20/32222/FUL** | Polyhouses and ground source heat recovery for the production of soft fruit on a permanent basis | Land West of Stallbrook Hall Crossing Lane Derrington Stafford Staffordshire: objected.

We have also supported some applications on brownfield sites, such as the former Rugeley Power Station.

### **Six Tests for Planning**

In July, CPRE and other charities including RSPB and the Wildlife Trusts released six tests that new planning rules must pass to put people and nature first. The six tests provide a scorecard that uses the government's own wording, from its Planning White Paper, to critically assess whether its vision for planning will become a reality in the Planning Bill. The tests include measures across six key areas: local democracy, affordable homes, the climate emergency, nature, heritage, and health. In September, the government announced it was pausing its plans to introduce a zonal system for planning. The changes proposed in the Planning for the Future White Paper would have forced all councils to draw up 10-year plans with all land zoned for protection, renewal or growth. In growth areas, any proposal meeting local design codes would automatically gain approval, with no opportunity for the public to comment on it.

### **Community Planning Alliance**

The scale of concern amongst the public over planning and development all over the UK is reflected in the rapid growth of the Community Planning Alliance. This is a network of over 500 grassroots campaign groups and activists tackling

concerns in their local area. CPA's aims are to lobby on planning-related issues on behalf of their members, and to support them with their environmental or planning campaigns. The key issues for their members include unsustainable housing, local plans, roads and incinerators. Their three areas of focus are the environment and biodiversity, community engagement and evidence-based need/affordability. Locally, Steve Anderson is working on engagement with local campaign groups and looking at how we can best work together to support each other in the campaign to protect our much-loved countryside and green spaces.

<https://grassrootscampaigns.weebly.com/>

### **Brownfield Toolkit**



CPRE has launched an online toolkit aims to help people to tell their local council about brownfield sites that might be developed, and to ensure they are included in the council's Brownfield Land Register and Land Supply dataset. This will increase the chances of these sites being developed and take pressure off less appropriate places.

<https://www.cpre.org.uk/resources/brownfield-land-register-toolkit/>



# The countryside charity Staffordshire

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

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## **Executive committee members and trustees:**

President	Mr Ian Dudson, CBE KStJ, HM Lord Lieut 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
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