



Annual Report 2024-2025



The countryside charity
Staffordshire

Campaign to Protect Rural England

www.cprestaffordshire.org.uk
Registered charity no. 219443

9/6/25

Above photo credit: Sam Carpenter

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT AND REVIEW OF THE YEAR

After the success of our tour of Blithfield Hall for last year's AGM, I'm delighted to welcome you to the beautiful surroundings of Ilam Park.

Looking ahead, 2026 is a big year for both national CPRE, which will celebrate its centenary, and in Staffordshire, where we're marking our 90th anniversary. Our charity was founded in 1936 in response to an appeal by the Earl of Harrowby, the Lord-Lieutenant of Staffordshire, to "those who are concerned to save for all time the natural beauty of this county of Staffordshire." The Lord-Lieutenant became the President of CPRE Staffordshire, a tradition that has continued to this day. When Sir Ian Dudson retired as Lord-Lieutenant in July, we were delighted to gift him lifetime membership of CPRE to thank him for his dedication and support over the past 12 years as our President. We are deeply grateful for his continued impact.

The inaugural meeting of CPRE Staffordshire in 1936 was attended by over 400 people, including much of the "great and good" of the county. As well as looking back on our history and achievements over the years, we will use our 90th year to look to the future and reaffirm our commitment to protecting, promoting and enhancing the countryside. We also want to reach new audiences who may find it difficult to access the countryside and all it has to offer.



We're therefore pleased to report we were successful in our application for funding from national CPRE's centenary fund, some of which will be used to organise a series of walks around the county for people living with visual impairments and sight

loss. These follow from a walk led by trustee Steve Sankey in April as part of the Staffordshire Moorlands Walking Festival, where a small group of visually impaired walkers enjoyed a lovely walk from Froghall Wharf along the canal to Consall and back. We are grateful to the Rotary Club of Uttoxeter for funding the cost of refreshments at the halfway stop at the Black Lion in Consall.

As part of the festival, we were delighted to welcome CPRE's President, broadcaster and anthropologist Mary-Ann Ochota, who helped us uncover the hidden histories of our landscape over a fascinating breakfast talk at the Greyhound Inn in Warslow, followed by a walk in the surrounding countryside to put our landscape detective skills into practice.



We've continued to reach out to younger audiences through our stargazing nights and Green Schools Trophy. In February, children from two Cubs units in Rugeley enjoyed learning about the wonders of a dark, starry sky and why it's important to reduce light pollution at two free events kindly hosted by the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust.



Children took it in turns to look through a high-powered telescope from Keele University's Observatory, and asked many great questions about the solar system. They then enjoyed a walk in the dark around the grounds of the Wolseley

Centre, using bat detectors to listen out for bats, before rounding off the evening with a hot chocolate and marshmallows toasted over the fire.

A huge thank you to everyone who submitted entries for the Green Schools Trophy. We have been blown away by the creativity, innovation, dedication and care for our environment shown by schools across the region. It's been no easy task choosing a winner - we are truly impressed by you all and to continue seeing your environmental projects thrive.

We are equally thrilled by the response to our categories in this year's Best Kept Village and Community. From sustainability projects to creative community initiatives, the entries captured the heart and soul of rural living. Judging has been inspiring, and we can't wait to reveal the winners

of the Trailblazer Award, the Made in Rural Staffordshire Award and the Countryside on Camera Award in September.

Together with CPRE Cheshire, CPRE Derbyshire and CPRE Shropshire, we held two interactive online training sessions for parish councils covering the planning system in England, legislation, designations and statutory development plans. The sessions were delivered by Hannah Barter, Director of Urban Vision. We had lots of positive feedback from parish councillors.

CPRE has always worked to protect the countryside by lobbying to improve the planning system and by making representations within whatever planning system exists at the time. However, the architecture under which we operate is altering. We are having to deal with huge changes to the planning system following the Government's reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), whilst local government reorganisation may lead to fewer councils in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent and changes to what each council is responsible for.

The new standard method means that Staffordshire's housing targets have doubled, and changes to the 5-year housing land supply rule may mean that landowners/promoters see a 'window of opportunity' to obtain planning permission on unallocated land, particularly greenfield sites on the edge of towns and villages. We will continue to advocate for protecting our Green Belts and open countryside at our regular meetings with councillors and in our responses to planning applications.



In March, we joined forces with CPRE Shropshire plant a new hedge at Pasford Farm on the Shropshire/Staffordshire border as part of their Hedgerow Heroes project, in conjunction with Staffordshire Wildlife Trust. The 260-metre hedge will link up with existing hedges in a valley managed for its wildlife by the farmers.

Aaliyah Gibbings-Gardner has very capably stepped into the role of branch manager after Sarah left to take up a post at the county council. Aaliyah's background is in environmental communications, developed during her undergraduate degree at Keele University in Media with Sociology. She co-founded Earth Stories Film Festival, a multi-award winning, environmental film festival, committed to providing a platform for young people around the world to articulate their concerns around the climate crisis. Sarah Burgess, who stepped down as Office & Publicity Manager in May, has now become a trustee of CPRE Staffordshire, and we are also pleased to welcome Sarah Cooke to the trustee board.

As ever, please do get in touch if you would like to help us plan any of our events or if you have any suggestions about how we can best promote, protect and enhance Staffordshire's countryside.

With best wishes,
Mohammed Khuram, Chairman.

FINANCIAL REPORT

I have pleasure in presenting our receipts and payments account for the year 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

In our previous accounting year, we had a very successful "Hedgerow Heroes Project", which inflated our income by some £27,700. Excluding this figure our receipts amounted to £8.4k. It is pleasing to see that in the 2024-2025 financial year our income increased to £10.8k. We were also able to slightly reduce our expenditure from £12,900 to £11,100 and thus the excess payments over receipts was substantially reduced from £4,500 to £300.

Our principal income stream continues to be our share of national subscriptions and, as anticipated last year, this figure increased slightly from £6,300 to £6,700. A further increase is anticipated for the current accounting year, with receipts from this source in the first two quarters of the year being £3,500.

We are again very grateful for charitable donations received from Shell UK, the Rotary Club of Uttoxeter, and the John Hall Charitable Trust, together with some smaller personal contributions. Our receipts also benefitted from the Cannock Chase National Landscape Partnership's payment towards our stargazing events, which had taken place in the previous accounting year.

A small "profit" was made on a planning seminar organised for four CPRE branches. We continue to look for efficiencies on the payments side of our accounts with our newsletter now being distributed digitally thus saving printing and postage costs.

Chris Emsley
Hon. Treasurer

CPRE STAFFORDSHIRE

Statement of Receipts and Payments for the year ending 31 March 2025

RECEIPTS	2023-24	2024-25	PAYMENTS	2023-24	2024-25
Hedgerow Heroes Project income	27700		Hedgrow Heroes Project E:	27687	
Share of National subscriptions	6332.1	6660.3	Travel	299.99	214.15
Parish Council Donations		1070	Office Running Costs	99.68	28.8
			Contracted Hours	5774.9	7396
Other Donations	1591.1	1587.4	Postage	22.05	66.7
AGM	110.5	486.69	AGM	582.44	871.79
Sale of Goods	241.5	60	Consultancy fees		615
Stargazing night		566.8	Events	916.62	121.72
Other	28		Executive Meetings	79.56	
PayPal/Petty Cash Tfr	127.56		Insurance	157	157
Bank Interest		369.84	Other	29.43	137.76
			Calendars	684	
			Newsletter	587.46	438.4
			School/ BKV award	337	162
			SCF & CAF spend	500	
			Office Equipment	2845.2	
			Planning seminar & refund		891.78
Total Receipts	36131	10801	Total Payments	40603	11101
Excess Payments over Receipts	4471.8	300.05			

PLANNING ROUND-UP

Planning Applications

Over the past 12 months, we have responded to 14 planning applications and two Local Plan consultations. Of the planning applications, 5 were for housing development and 4 for solar farms or battery storage facilities.



New houses under construction in Bednall - Stafford Aerial Footage Facebook group - Andrew Drone Bird

Local Plans

We responded to Lichfield District Council's Issues & Options consultation and the City of Wolverhampton Regulation 19 consultation. CPRE's planning advisor Paul Windmill attended the Examination in Public of the South Staffordshire Local Plan in May.

We also responded to the Cannock Chase National Landscape Management Plan consultation, making specific reference to dark skies and the promotion of public transport access to the Chase.

Report on national planning policy changes

Paul Windmill, Planning Advisor

There have been several changes in the last year in planning, with many more changes to come in the next year and beyond.

In the last year:

- New National Planning Policy guidance (NPPF) making major changes which will impact both rural and urban areas.
- Increased national targets for new housing.
- New mandatory housing requirements for each council in England.
- A more streamlined system for Local Plans including new targets to be met.

Currently in progress:

New Planning and Infrastructure Bill intended to:

- Deliver a faster and more certain consenting process for critical infrastructure
- Introduce a more strategic approach to nature recovery
- Improving certainty and decision-making in the planning system
- Unlocking land and securing public value for large scale investment:
- Introducing effective new mechanisms for cross-boundary strategic planning



Bishops Wood - a Green Belt site under threat. Photo by Christopher Dean

New Towns Taskforce

The numbers of New Towns and proposed locations have not been made public. Over 100 locations are understood to have been put forward, including in Staffordshire.

The English Devolution White Paper, published in December 2024, stated that the government wants all remaining two-tier areas in England to be eventually restructured into single-tier unitary authorities. Staffordshire will be affected and debate and consultation has started locally.

New Housing

National targets have significantly increased from the previous Government's target of 300,000 new homes a year (which was not being achieved) to 370,000 in order to try to meet the new Government's manifesto reference to 1.5 million new homes to be in this Parliament.

I do not believe that the target within 5 years of the current Government taking Office will be met - although numbers completed each year should increase and will probably show a major improvement over recent years' delivery.

To try to meet the Government's targets, a number of changes have already been made:

New Mandatory Housing Targets

The Government has introduced a new standard method that now uses housing stock and other criteria to set a baseline figure.

In December 2024, the Government published the new housing requirements to be met by Local Planning Authorities. The table below shows the 'old' and 'new'

requirement for housing completions to be met by each council.

South Staffordshire

<i>Standard Method pre-December 2024</i>	223
New mandatory requirement from December 2024	651

Stafford

<i>Standard Method pre-December 2024</i>	358
New mandatory requirement from December 2024	751

Newcastle-under-Lyme

<i>Standard Method pre-December 2024</i>	330
New mandatory requirement from December 2024	545

Stoke-on-Trent

<i>Standard Method pre-December 2024</i>	704
New mandatory requirement from December 2024	948

Staffordshire Moorlands

<i>Standard Method pre-December 2024</i>	159
New mandatory requirement from December 2024	454

East Staffordshire

<i>Standard Method pre-December 2024</i>	150
New mandatory requirement from December 2024	454

Lichfield

<i>Standard Method pre-December 2024</i>	280
New mandatory requirement from December 2024	745

Tamworth

<i>Standard Method pre-December 2024</i>	123
New mandatory requirement from December 2024	445

Cannock Chase

<i>Standard Method pre-December 2024</i>	248
New mandatory requirement from December 2024	518

In my view no council in Staffordshire can meet these requirements under their existing Local Plans.

Changed Housing Land Supply Rules

The obligation to meet the housing shown in the previous section of this report came into force immediately on their publication published and apply to all applications and appeals.

All local planning authorities are required to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply (at least five times the annual number shown above). So far as I can establish no Council in Staffordshire can currently demonstrate a five year+ land supply.

Planning Applications - What may happen now?

Where a council cannot prove a land supply that meets the government's 5 year supply requirement, it is much more likely that the council will grant planning permission. If consent is refused, appeals against planning refusal are likely to succeed in most cases.

It is no surprise that landowners/promoters have seen the 'window of opportunity' to obtain planning permission for new housing on unallocated land, particularly greenfield sites on the edge of towns and medium-sized villages. I expect that a

significant number of such applications will be made in the coming months and years in all areas of the county - including those currently in Green Belt.

Green Belt and the new Grey Belt

Grey belt definition

In their manifesto, the new government introduced the 'Grey Belt', defined as follows: "For the purposes of plan-making and decision-making, 'grey belt' is defined as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143. 'Grey belt' excludes land where the application of the policies relating to the areas or assets in footnote 7 (other than Green Belt) would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development."

Staffordshire has very little land in the Green Belt that could be regarded as Grey Belt.

Guidance on the approach to Green Belt

The Government has included additional detail within the NPPF to specify the importance of Chapter 9 in assessing the sustainability of locations for development.

It seems highly likely that in seven out of the nine councils in Staffordshire (including Stoke) Green Belts will need to be modified to allow new development.

Local Plans

The Government set deadlines for plans which were at the Regulation 19 stage of plan-making, the last stage, to be sent to the Planning Inspectorate to arrange an Examination in Public.

Three councils - South Staffs, Cannock Chase and Newcastle-under-Lyme - met the deadlines and all three had Examinations in Public opened in May. (CPRE Staffordshire had made representations on each of the plans). Each of the plans have experienced different challenges and difficulties during the Examinations and it is not now clear what the outcomes will be.

If the plans are found to be sound the authorities will be expected to do a rapid review leading to a further Examination under the new 'streamlined procedure'.

For the other six councils in Staffordshire, the Government expects plans to be submitted for examination under its new system no later than December 2026. (In my view this is unlikely to be achieved).

The possible future for Local Plans and Strategic Planning

In my view, the current 'Duty to Co-operate' is clearly failing. Whilst councils are claiming to be meeting the duty, they are patently failing to reach agreements to meet the needs of others.

The unmet needs of the Black Country authorities was stated to be 27,000 homes in the Duty to Cooperate statements at both the South Staffordshire and Cannock Chase Examinations in Public. South Staffordshire offered to provide for 640 new homes and Cannock Chase 500 new homes.

This results, for example in the Wolverhampton case, in the City Council putting forward a Regulation 19 Plan that provides for less than half of its housing needs (using either the previous or the revised standard method).

Although I have no doubt that action is needed now, progress is very slow and outcomes are uncertain. What will happen in Staffordshire, and when, is a matter for conjecture; proposals for the devolution and merging of councils may also have an impact - watch this space!

Devolution and the merging of Councils

The government's English Devolution White Paper stated that the government wants all remaining two-tier areas in England to be eventually restructured into single-tier unitary authorities.

This continues a trend of several decades towards larger single-tier local government in England. Previous rounds of restructuring took place in 1992 to 1995, 2008 to 2009 and 2018 to 2021. The White Paper says the government wants to restructure all two-tier areas so that they become unitary council areas.

The government also wants to restructure “unitary councils where there is evidence of failure or where their size or boundaries may be hindering their ability to deliver sustainable and high-quality services for their residents”.

For most areas this will mean creating councils with a population of 500,000 or more, but there may be exceptions to ensure new structures make sense for an area, including for devolution, and decisions will be on a case-by-case basis.

Existing Unitaries

It is not clear what the population criterion of 500,000 means for existing unitary authorities. A number of city-based unitary councils that were created in the 1990s have smaller populations than 500,000. Examples include Stoke-on-Trent (263,000).

Implications for Staffordshire

It is unclear what this could mean for Staffordshire. Perhaps Newcastle-under-Lyme would be merged with Stoke, South Staffs with Wolverhampton, Cannock Chase with Walsall and Lichfield with Birmingham. The other councils would then be merged to form a new unitary.

Alternatively, the county could simply be formed into two unitaries, as has happened in Cheshire. A single entity would have a population of over 876,000 (Census 2021).

Other options could include cross-border mergers, such as Staffordshire Moorlands joining other Peak District councils in Derbyshire, or Tamworth joining Warwickshire.

Recently, six councils to the South of Staffordshire have employed consultants to consult with the public on what is implied to be their preferred grouping of - Stafford, South Staffordshire, and Cannock Chase to form one unitary authority with East Staffordshire, Lichfield, and Cannock to form a second unitary authority. Neither combination would come near a total population of 500,000.

Will it happen?

Feasibility of achievement within the current Parliament is open to question, as is the political will to add adjoining Districts to Cities or Metropolitan Boroughs - although, with the exception of Birmingham, the West Midlands boroughs are all well below a population of 500,000 (e.g. Wolverhampton has a population of 270,000).



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- Name: The Staffordshire Branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England
- Address: CPRE Staffordshire, Eastgate House, 79/79a Eastgate Street, Stafford, ST16 2LG
- Charity Number: 219443

To find out more visit
www.cprestaffordshire.org.uk

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- We appreciate will gifts of any size.
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The countryside charity
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Chairman	Mohammed Khuram
Vice-chair (trustees)	Mary Booth
Trustees and executive committee members	Sarah Burgess, Sarah Cooke, Dave Evans, Steve Hopkins and Steve Sankey
Treasurer	Chris Emsley
Branch Manager/Administrator	Aaliyah Gibbings-Gardner



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