

# Our year

A review of 2023-24





# A year of impact and regeneration

Last year on joining CPRE, I spoke about change – and this year has indeed been one of transition as we've refocused our strategy, prepared for the general election and started looking further to the future and our centenary in 2026.

It was a particular pleasure to see CPRE's campaigning – and planting and restoration projects – recognised by the Charity Awards when our hedgerow campaign won first prize in the Animals and the Environment category. We subsequently encouraged more people to become involved as over 4,600 joined in our Hedgerow Help Out, CPRE's contribution to the Big Help Out, which was part of the coronation celebrations.

Much of our campaigning in 2023, however, focused on our rooftop solar work and on planning: autumn saw the Levelling-up and Regeneration bill became an act with a range of changes to the planning system that we campaigned for over the previous 18 months.

Looking forward, we refreshed our strategy to take us to our 2026 centenary. CPRE works at the juncture of so many issues that affect the countryside and we want to use that expertise to help local people and decision makers collaborate to make best use of land and spark a big conversation on balancing the demands on our land from people, nature and climate. And talking of the future, do look at our manifesto calling on whatever new government is elected to make sure our beautiful countryside can thrive.

Our centenary is not just an opportunity to celebrate a proud history but, perhaps even more important, is the chance to look forward and champion a new vision for our countryside. We are asking the countryside to work harder than ever, continuing to operate as if land was an infinite resource. There's an opportunity for us to articulate what positive progress for our countryside looks like - a countryside for all, that plays its part in delivering

net zero but also values what makes it unique. For that we'll need friends and new partners, but most of all we'll need you, our members.

I hope this review will be as inspiring for you as it has been for me in showing how we have been such a campaigning force for the countryside in 2023/4, highlighting its value and its critical role in answering the nation's challenges.



Myer Mut work

Roger Mortlock
Chief Executive
CPRE The countryside charity



# Access to green space

We're working to ensure that everyone can enjoy the benefits of green space – whether that's in the glorious countryside or the parks in and around our towns and cities

### Protecting green spaces

From community gardens to recreation areas, more than 7,286 locally valued green places have been protected with a Local Green Space (LGS) designation. Yet our 2023 report on LGSs, which included the first ever map of designation locations, revealed that although their numbers are increasing, some of the most deprived parts of the country are still lagging behind. Although 771 LGSs were designated in 2021-22, areas of high deprivation have fewer than more affluent regions, and LGS take-up varies widely nationwide. While London increased its tally by 75, Hull and Blackpool currently lack any. We're calling for more action to encourage LGS designation through neighbourhood planning (80% of LGSs were designated through neighbourhood plans). We also want to see compulsory standards for access to nature, so that everyone - including those in the poorest areas - can enjoy green spaces on their doorsteps.

#### Valuing Green Belt

The value of England's Green Belt land is often underestimated, but our 'State of the Green Belt 2023' report highlighted its very real benefits for people, nature and the planet – when given the right care and investment. If protected and well managed, the Green Belts around major towns and cities not only provide space for recreation, wildlife and food production, but also help tackle the impacts of climate change by storing carbon and creating a natural buffer against flooding. Our analysis shows, however, that much of this land is still being lost to development, with nearly 208,000 houses in the pipeline on land taken out of the Green Belt. We're calling for all political parties to commit to Green Belt protection – and for more joined-up planning, farming and forestry policies that will help unlock the potential of this 'countryside next door'.

#### An outdoors for all

We teamed up with more than 40 other leading environmental and outdoor organisations in early 2024 on a manifesto seeking to extend responsible access to green and blue landscapes. Currently, just 8% of England is access land on which the general public enjoys a right to roam, and this limited freedom only extends to walkers, excluding riders, paddlers and cyclists. In our joint Outdoors For All manifesto, we're calling for public rights of access to be expanded. We want to see the government deliver the promise of the last Environmental Improvement Plan: that everyone will have access to green or blue space within a 15-minute walk of their homes. Expanding outdoor access would get more people active and improve their physical and mental wellbeing, potentially saving £2.1 billion in health spending each year.

# Creating thriving communities

From tackling the affordable homes crisis in the countryside to driving a more democratic planning system, we're campaigning for a brighter future for every rural dweller



#### Shaping planning policy

Over the past year and a half, we've campaigned tirelessly - both as an organisation, and as a leading member of the Better Planning Coalition – to positively influence national planning policies through the government's Levelling-up and Regeneration bill. Those efforts helped secure key gains in 2023's act. For example, the legislation included stronger legal controls over short-term lets, and greater powers for local authorities to purchase land for social housing at a cheaper price. In line with the recommendations of our Still Targeting the Countryside report, it also included measures to prevent local plans being undermined by speculative planning appeals. And in a clear win for local democracy, the public will be consulted on all the proposed new 'national development management policies' introduced under the act, other than in exceptional circumstances.



#### Affordable homes

Everyone deserves an affordable, healthy place to live. But our November 2023 crisis report on the state of rural affordable housing revealed just how difficult it is for many people to put a roof over their heads. It underlined how record house prices, stagnating rural wages and the growing number of second homes and short-term lets are all contributing to a chronic lack of affordable housing in the countryside. At current build rates it will take 93 years to clear social housing waiting lists. The report included plenty of practical ideas to help change this, such as increasing the minimum amount of affordable housing required by national planning policy. We followed this up in spring 2024 by launching a new campaign in support of rural affordable homes, calling for the future government to commit to delivering more genuinely affordable and social homes in the countryside.



#### Highlighting homelessness

With levels of homelessness in the countryside increasing by 40% over the past five years, we and our allies in the 'Rural Homelessness Counts' Coalition have been advocating for robust action to tackle this often-hidden crisis. As part of our wider research on the affordable homes shortage (see left), our recent analysis revealed that rates of rough sleeping are higher in some rural areas than in urban ones. In September 2023, a greater proportion of people were sleeping rough in the seven worst-affected rural local authorities (Bedford, Boston, North Devon, Cornwall, Bath and Northeast Somerset. Torridge, and Great Yarmouth) than in London, Leeds or Norwich. Together with our allies, we're using research like this to call for improved community support services for the rural homeless, better methods for identifying homelessness and greater investment in social housing.



# Enhancing the countryside

Alongside our supporters, community volunteers and citizen scientists, we're working to highlight, restore and protect stunning landscapes and skyscapes



#### Hedgerow successes

We've once again been busy championing England's hedgerow network at national and local level in 2023-24. It was the third year of our ambitious Hedgerow Heroes project to restore and regenerate hedges around the country, with nine county CPRE groups getting involved. As well as planting 19 miles of new hedgerow and restoring degraded examples, local initiatives included providing hedge-laying training and organising talks, walks and events to engage communities. Our national #40by50 campaign to increase hedgerow cover by 40% by 2050 already celebrated a huge success in early 2023, when the government announced an official target to create or restore 45,000 miles of hedgerows by 2050. We were delighted when our hedgerow campaign was recognised with the top prize in the Animals and the Environment category at the prestigious Charity Awards in 2023.



### Hedgelife Help Out

Hedgerows were also the focus of our participation in the national Big Help Out volunteering event in May 2023. Our Hedgelife Help Out initiative, held in partnership with the Tree Council, proved to be a huge success, with more than 4,600 people surveying a local hedgerow and reporting back on the wildlife they spotted. Encouragingly, 81% of respondents saw blossom on the hedges they surveyed (great news for pollinators), while 58% spotted between one and five birds and 32% noted six or more. This accessible citizen science project not only gave us an insight into the state of the nation's hedgerows, but also helped people connect with the natural world. The majority (70%) said that taking part in the project felt good or great for their wellbeing, and 72% agreed that it helped them feel closer to nature.



#### Rewilding the sky

Our 2023 Star Count event was one of our biggest yet, with nearly 4,000 people taking part across the UK. Unfortunately, however, the results showed that only 5% of people are enjoying the natural wonders of a truly star-filled night sky. In fact, three-quarters of us are having our view seriously obscured by the light pollution from buildings and roads. We used these findings to make the case for stronger local and national policies to tackle light pollution, with more than 1,800 of our Star Count participants and supporters contacting their MPs to request their support for rewilding the night sky. In spring 2023 we presented our evidence to the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee, recommending that local authorities should have better legal powers to control light pollution through planning regulations.



**Hedgerow Heroes volunteer** 

# Tackling climate change

From promoting rooftop renewables and the decarbonisation of the whole energy system, we're calling for meaningful action against the single biggest threat facing our countryside



#### The rooftop revolution

In May 2023 we kicked off a major new campaign in support of rooftop renewables, with an in-depth report demonstrating the enormous potential for clean, affordable solar electricity generation on the roofs of buildings and covered car parks. The research, produced on behalf of CPRE by UCL (University College London), showed that more than half of the solar energy needed to hit national net-zero targets could be fitted on rooftops. This would help minimise the need for groundmounted solar farms, which often take up land that could be better used for food production or other purposes, as well as leading to planning disputes. We also launched a petition, signed by nearly 28,000 people to date, calling for 60% of the solar energy required by 2035 to come from rooftop solar.



#### Common-sense solar

A major element of our rooftop renewables campaign is supporting practical, common-sense measures to increase the rollout of renewable energy, such as incorporating solar panels into all suitable new developments. We surveyed over 3,000 supporters for their views, finding that 97% of people believe rooftop solar should be a standard requirement on new housing, while 95% support a rooftopfirst approach to solar energy. We responded to the government's 2023 consultation on Future Homes and Buildings Standards to support the option of all new homes and other buildings including solar panels, and rallied our supporters to do likewise. Then in spring 2024 we launched an inspiring report on how to unleash the full potential of rooftop solar. Carried out for us by WPI Economics, it reveals how other countries worldwide are advancing the rooftop revolution.



#### Decarbonising energy

In early 2024 we teamed up with sustainable economy alliance Aldersgate Group and renewable energy trade association Renewable UK on a new initiative exploring how the UK's planning system needs to change in order to help deliver national net-zero targets. To generate and transport green electricity, the country urgently needs new infrastructure - from wind turbines and solar panels to cables and substations - and we need this to be sited in the right places. Together with our allies, we're developing a set of shared principles that will support the transition to net-zero emissions and enable the rapid decarbonisation of our existing energy system, while protecting landscapes, nature and local democracy. With the collaborative project now well under way, our final recommendations will be made later in 2024.



Finding from our Shout from the Rooftops report

## Local action

## Enhancing shared spaces



In autumn 2023 **CPRE Hampshire** launched an ambitious initiative to create
The Hampshire Hedge – a
14-mile nature corridor linking the county's New Forest and South Downs National Parks.
During the 2023-24 planting season, over 25,000 hedgerow

trees were planted across eight sites with the help of thousands of volunteers. The group is also engaging with schools and communities along the route and has set up three hedgelaying traineeships to pass on this countryside craft.



Traditional fingerpost signs are getting a new lease of life with the help of CPRE Somerset and local parish council volunteers. No longer maintained by Somerset Council, these much-loved landmarks have been falling into disrepair. Twenty signs have been restored in five parishes thanks to a grant from the Hinkley Point C Community Fund, while CPRE Somerset has now established its own fund and supported six more parish councils to repair another 15 to date.



CPRE London has been championing its vision of a Tree Ring Community Forest: a ring of tree cover around the capital combined with radial walking and cycling routes that also link into London's most greendeprived neighbourhoods. A route for the outer ring – an

'M25 of trees' connecting existing woodland with top woodland-creation opportunity sites – has already been mapped, and CPRE London is liaising with local councils to get this reflected in local plans and climate and biodiversity strategies.

CPRE's nationwide network was as busy as ever improving and protecting our countryside and green spaces over the past year. Here are just some of our local highlights:

## Promoting rural assets



Work is nearing completion on the GM Ringway, the new 200-mile walking trail for Greater Manchester that's being created by CPRE Lancashire, Liverpool City Region and Greater Manchester and the Ramblers, thanks to a National Lottery Heritage Fund grant. All 20 stages of the route, which links up existing footpaths and

natural and historical sites, will be waymarked by summer 2024. Meanwhile, CPRE Oxfordshire has been improving access to the Oxford Green Belt Way, the 50-mile route it created in 2007, by replacing stiles with accessible gates – enabling more people than ever to enjoy Oxford's beautiful Green Belt.



Rural churchyards can be a tranquil haven for local communities and nature alike, as CPRE Devon and CPRE North and East Yorkshire have highlighted through their 2023 best churchyard competitions. The overall winners, St Michael's in Alphington, Devon, and St Oswald's in Newton under Roseberry, North Yorkshire, both combine space for wildlife and contemplation with a strong volunteer spirit.



CPRE Sussex group organised a very successful Countryside Day in September 2023 to mark its 50th anniversary as well as promote the countryside and green spaces. Held at the Knepp Estate, the Sussex home of rewilding, the day included a variety of stalls offering natural produce, charity partners, talks and tours. The event will return on 7 September 2024 and we hope to see it rolled out more widely, with other CPRE groups piloting their own events next year.

## Protecting special places



### A win for Wirral

CPRE Cheshire celebrated a victory for Wirral's Green Belt in autumn 2023, with 45 hectares of farmland and wildlife habitat being saved from development. The CPRE group, working with the Wirral Society and Wirral Green Space Alliance, successfully opposed appeals by Leverhulme Estates to build housing on seven Green Belt sites. CPRE's planning policy lead made the case that the scheme was completely out of step with the emerging local plan, as it was proposing to sacrifice protected countryside rather than regenerate urban areas of the Wirral.



An application to build a major truck stop on farmland in the Cotswolds National Landscape near Cirencester has been dismissed at appeal, with the help of **CPRE Gloucestershire** and its supporters. The local group provided expertise and funding to support CARG

(the Cotswold AONB Residents Group) in their case. In an important ruling for wider National Landscapes, the planning inspector agreed that the scheme's limited benefits did not justify overriding national and local planning policy.



**CPRE Dorset** successfully opposed a speculative application to gain planning permission for 135 houses in the village of Blandford St Mary. North Dorset district campaigners and the parish council argued that the scheme would overwhelm the historic hamlet of Lower Blandford St Mary - and with the area already on track to meet housing targets, there was no justification for developing a site not allocated in the existing local and neighbourhood plans.

## Inspiring communities



## Recognising a countryside champion

To mark its centenary in 2024, CPRE Peak District and South Yorkshire (PDSY) enlisted writer Helen Mort to pen a biography of its founder, Ethel Haythornthwaite MBE. Ethel helped preserve many Peaks landscapes and drive the creation of National Parks

and Green Belt, yet remains little known, even in her home town of Sheffield. The group hopes the book will raise awareness of her legacy and inspire others to safeguard the countryside for future generations.



A number of CPRE groups have been encouraging community-led green energy initiatives. CPRE Avon and Bristol recently hosted a free workshop for supporters, parish councils and other groups to help support their transition to community-led rooftop renewables. CPRE Rutland produced a report drawing on its own series of community

workshops on renewable energy, as well as hosting a public event on future energy security. Meanwhile, a previous initiative cosponsored by CPRE Derbyshire and CPRE PDSY – Community Energy Visioning projects in Bonsall and Woodsetts – was Highly Commended at the 2023 Community Energy England Awards.



CPRE Herefordshire is continuing its mission to end pollution in the county's waterways with a series of community talks asking 'Can our rivers survive?' The inaugural event in Llangrove in early 2024 was a chance to engage more people with its water monitoring work in the River Wye – which more than 400 volunteer citizen scientists have participated in to date and launch the new app Wye Viz, which showcases the resulting pollution data.

# Our year in numbers





The number of signatures on our rooftop solar petition to the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, Claire Coutinho MP, to commit to a target for at least 60% of the solar energy required by 2035 to be delivered through rooftop solar.



3,507

The number of our supporters who emailed their MP about rooftop solar to draw attention to our campaign and ask them to support it publicly.



37

The Parliamentary Rooftop Solar Champions signed up from Conservatives, Labour, Lib Dems and Greens supporting our target of 60% of solar delivered on rooftops.



117 gigawatts 🦇

The amount of electricity all suitable roof space and car parks in England could generate according to our analysis.



4,600

People who joined in our Hedgelife Help Out survey created for the Big Help Out initiative to mark the coronation.



**30.5** ���

Kilometres of hedgerow planted or restored as part of the Hedgerow Heroes project by local volunteers.



350 ₩

Hedgerow campaign events held across the country by CPRE groups.



Over 2,600 %

People who got involved in Hedgerow Hero events planting and laying hedgerows.

### Our year in numbers



## More than 40 55

Mentions in Parliament, particularly related to amendments we suggested to the Levelling-up and Regeneration bill that we worked on with Parliamentarians from all parties.



771 🅸

The increase in Local Green Space designations since 2022, according to our report. Most of them in are northern England although London saw its total number grow by 64%.



42 💸

The number of organisations who have joined to create the Outdoors for All manifesto, including CPRE.



30 🗐

The number of organisations we worked with to make sure crucial amendments were made to the Levelling-up and Regeneration bill.

# Our volunteering year in numbers

## 10

New volunteer roles developed in 2023: from Local Transport Champions to Orchard Restoration Volunteers. Also a pilot online campaigns activist micro volunteering role aimed at people aged 18-30.



## 337

The increase in volunteers over the past year to 1,684 volunteers.



## 1,796

Roles taken on by volunteers for the charity over the year.



## 16

Volunteers presented with CPRE awards in 2023. From diversifying CPRE audiences to empowering communities to protect their local environment, the awards recognised volunteers who made a real difference both locally and nationally.



New CPRE hedgerow volunteers recruited.



## 296

Big Help Out volunteers signposted to their local CPRE group, many new to CPRE.





# Funding and finance in 2023

£6.2m

Our total income, thanks to our loyal supporters and fantastically generous legacy donors.

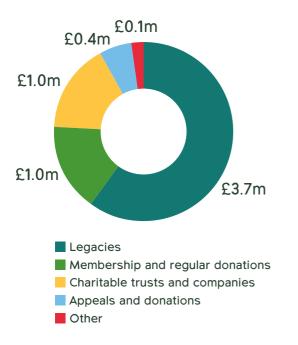
£598,000

Funds shared with local groups to support their communities.

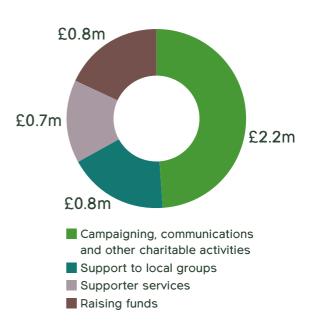


# Financial summary 2023

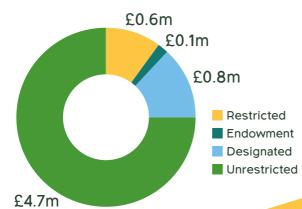
# Our total income £6.2m



# Our total expenditure £4.5m



## Our total reserves £6.2m



## Importance of gifts in wills



Gifts in wills account for more than half of our income and underpin our key achievements, so many of which are highlighted in this annual review. They allow us to plan and resource our campaigns to ensure the countryside is at the heart of the government's priorities so that people and wildlife can thrive. It's a very special way to let your love of the countryside live on.

We are very grateful to our loyal supporters who have informed us of their decision to leave a gift in their will to CPRE. And while we understand that some consider this a private matter, we often receive legacies from people we don't know and it would be lovely to say thank you properly.

Therefore, if you have nominated CPRE as a beneficiary and haven't yet told us – or if you are considering leaving a gift to CPRE but would like more information – please do get in touch with me: Catherine Phillips, Individual Giving and Legacies Manager at legacyinfo@cpre.org.uk

Thank you so much.

# Thank you

The generosity of our wonderful supporters continues to be the foundation of all CPRE's work. Your commitment to giving is helping us achieve our vision of a beautiful and thriving countryside that enriches all our lives.

We're incredibly grateful to the CPRE supporters who remembered us in their wills. Their gifts will help us to ensure the countryside they loved will be protected and enhanced for generations to come.

Mr R V Ball
Mr P H Barry
Mrs G Bishop
Mrs I J Broadway
Mrs M L Brocklesby
Mr M J Brooks
Mrs J Cassell
Mr J A Cook
Mr C W Cooke
Ms M V Cude

Mr D E Cutforth

Mr G E D'Araujo
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Mr K F Goddard
Mrs K A Goodacre
Mrs J D Gray
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Mrs C H S Welsman
Mrs V M Willnecker
Mr A J Wimbury

Sincere thanks to the generous individuals and anonymous donors who made major contributions to our work this year. The significant successes we've achieved would not have been possible without you.

Dr C Beels Ms M de Botton Ms S Hall

Mr J Marriott

Mrs D Moggach Mr P Thompson Mr A Wood

We hugely appreciate the support of the trusts who kindly facilitated so much of CPRE's work in the past year.

B and J Lloyd Family Charitable Trust Bartleet Family Fund (Administered by Essex Community Foundation)

Dingwall Trust

Foundation for Integrated Transport

Harford Charitable Trust Jennetts Charitable Trust Monkswold Trust

Nancy Bateman Charitable Trust

TD Paton Trust

The Constance Travis Charitable Trust The Moore Trust

The Percy Hedley 1990 Charitable Trust

The Scouloudi Foundation The Underwood Trust

We would also like to thank the following businesses that have supported our work through corporate donations to CPRE:

Canns Down Press Ltd Hedgewild MW TOPS Wildlife Conservation Fund Sany UK & Ireland

## **CPRE The countryside charity**

CPRE is the countryside charity that campaigns to promote, enhance and protect the countryside for everyone's benefit, wherever they live; today and for generations to come.

We work with communities, businesses and government to find positive and lasting ways to help the countryside thrive.

#### What we do

We connect people with the countryside so that everyone can benefit from and value it.

We promote rural life to ensure the countryside and its communities can thrive.

We empower communities to improve and protect their local environment.

Through all our work we look at the role of our countryside in tackling the **climate emergency**, including seeking ways to increase resilience and reduce impact.

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