

## Strategic Growth Plan raises major concerns

*- says CPRE Leicestershire*

For CPRE Leicestershire, the threats posed by the Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan (SGP) have been a major focus of our branch activities in recent months. In May, we submitted a substantial and critical response to the public consultation on this plan.



### **Priority Campaign for CPRE Leicestershire**

This plan is being developed jointly by representatives of the nine Leicester and Leicestershire local authorities. It will have, when adopted, an important role in shaping future local plans and decisions on development across Leicestershire for the period up to 2050. Given its importance and our concerns about what was being proposed, the branch committee made campaigning on the SGP a top priority.

### **Wide range of activity**

Our consultation response was a culmination of many months of intense effort, hard work and campaigning. This was undertaken by a small task group, chaired by Tony Stott, working with an experienced consultant and campaigner, Gerald Kells.

As part of the campaign, we submitted our views to the County Council Scrutiny Commission, held a successful meeting in Great Glen in February, wrote to local councillors and to the press and met with four Leicestershire MPs and other environmental and conservation groups. We also met with potential members of an action group about the A46 Expressway proposal and corresponded with the SGP team.

### **Consultation Response**

In our consultation response, which ran to some 96 pages, we were critical of the way in which the SGP, with its emphasis on economic growth, development and large scale road-building disregarded the impacts of its proposals on the countryside, the environment, pollution, climate change and rural communities. In addition, in our view, the SGP ignored the importance of Leicestershire's unspoilt countryside and the value of its landscape character, agriculture, heritage assets and its biodiversity.

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**CPRE Leicestershire**

**AGM**

**Wednesday**

**12th September 2018**

**6-30pm**

**Speaker: Shaun Spiers**

*Author of*

***How to Build Houses and  
Save the Countryside***

**The Parlour,**

**Roots Farm Shop, Thorpe Farm,  
King Street, Barkby Thorpe,**

**Leicestershire LE7 3QE**

(see page 8 for details of this event)

**For more details on CPRE Leicestershire, visit our website:**

**[www.cpreleicestershire.org.uk](http://www.cpreleicestershire.org.uk)**

**To contact us or to join, email: [info@cpreleicestershire.org.uk](mailto:info@cpreleicestershire.org.uk)**

# Busy time for Charnwood District CPRE Group

## District Group Chair Rick Hoyland reports:

### **Charnwood's Lack of Five Year Land Supply**

For some time Charnwood Borough Council has been unable to demonstrate a five year supply of land for housing because of a failure to deliver projected completions from sites allocated within the Local Plan. In particular, building on the Sustainable Urban Extension sites around the edge of Leicester at Thurmaston and Birstall and between Loughborough and Shepshed has been seriously delayed due to infrastructure problems.

### **Resisting Speculative Applications**

As a consequence Charnwood Council is struggling to resist speculative developments on unallocated sites. In the absence of a five year supply of land for housing, the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) take precedence. These permit developments outside Local Plan allocations provided they can be shown to be sustainable. After a brief respite following adoption of the Local Plan in 2015, the housing delivery shortfall noted above has fostered an avalanche of applications for sites outside those identified in the Local Plan.

### **Responding to Applications**

Since July 2017 CPRE Charnwood has responded to applications for approximately 1550 new homes across 13 sites, all of them outside the Local Plan. Some of the applications have been resurrected following refusal prior to Charnwood losing its five year supply of housing land.

Of the foregoing total, 388 homes have been consented including 195 homes on Seagrave Road, Sileby (P/18/17/2182/2). This was finally approved on appeal

due to the housing land shortfall after a complicated back history of refusals and non-determinations. Three applications for sites in Queniborough, Rearsby and Rothley totalling 391 homes have been refused and the remainder are undecided.

Housing delivery on allocated sites is subject to temporary setbacks, not least because of the lack of commitment of developers to progress building works promptly. Accordingly, land supply targets fluctuate and thus the NPPF effectively encourages speculative development and sabotages Local Plans. Ultimately this leads to an oversupply of homes located in the wrong places.

### **Other activity**

In addition to challenging the sustainability of housing developments, CPRE Charnwood has responded to a consultation regarding an updated Charnwood Local Plan and contributed to the Branch response to the Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan.

The District Group unsuccessfully opposed floodlighting at Sileby Town Football Club. It is also preparing a response to the application for a new Leicester City Football Club training facility at the former Park Hill Golf Club and is highlighting serious misgivings regarding traffic management and issues connected with the A46 Seagrave junction.

CPRE Charnwood have objected to an application for retrospective consent following the regular practice of 'doing first' and asking afterwards and have also commented on contentious proposals for a Community Hub in Barrow upon Soar, located outside the Limits to Development.

## **New 'planning rulebook' heavily criticised by CPRE**

CPRE has labelled the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) a 'speculative developers' charter', as the government published its new planning rulebook recently. CPRE's key concern is the new 'housing delivery test'. The NPPF continues to encourage councils to set high targets for housing delivery. However, the 'housing delivery test' will penalise councils when house builders fail to deliver homes in their areas by removing local control over planning decisions. This in turn will leave them and the countryside open to speculative development.

Other concerns relate to a failure to provide an effective brownfield first policy, a continuing failure to support provision of affordable housing in rural areas and the discouragement of neighbourhood planning because of uncertainty over the validity of plans older than two years. However, CPRE are pleased to see that government has taken some positive actions which include improved clarity and focus for policies on making better use of land, clearer guidance for viability assessments, and 'social housing' being reinstated in the definition of affordable housing.

# Focus on our volunteers

## Tony Simpson

### *Branch Treasurer*

I am a qualified Chartered Accountant who has spent almost all of his working life behind a desk or staring into the screen of a computer, which probably explains my love for the open spaces, the green fields and the beautiful countryside of my beloved Leicestershire.

My chief pastimes involve cycling long distances across the country and walking somewhat shorter distances among the hills and dales of the county, and, having lived almost all of my life in Loughborough, over the years I became more and more aware of how quickly the countryside was disappearing under roads and houses.

In 2015 I decided it was time to stop bemoaning the disappearing rural landscape and to actually do something about it. The problem was, what could I do? If only there was some organisation that contained people who felt as I did and who I could join to try to preserve some of the countryside before it disappeared altogether – fortunately, there was! I was vaguely aware of the existence of CPRE, and after a little investigating via the internet I took the plunge and joined up.

Although I work full time as a financial accountant for the NHS, and therefore don't have as much time as I would like to spend on CPRE activities, my accountancy experience and qualification enabled me to become Branch Treasurer at the beginning of 2017, a post I have held since then and hope to be able to hold for the foreseeable future. My work in this respect includes day to day monitoring of the Branch's finances, regular reports to the Committee of actual income and expenditure v budget, and ensuring that the Annual Accounts are completed, approved and submitted in accordance with statutory requirements.

As a Trustee and member of the Committee, I am also involved in the ongoing activities of the Branch, and as a member of the Charnwood District Committee, I also work closely with local colleagues in analysing and, where necessary, opposing, applications for development submitted to the Charnwood Borough Council.

Joining CPRE was one of the best decisions of my life. I am extremely proud to be part of the vital work done by the charity. I would urge anyone who loves the beautiful countryside of Leicestershire and wishes to see it preserved for future generations to join as well, and become an active participant in our important activities.



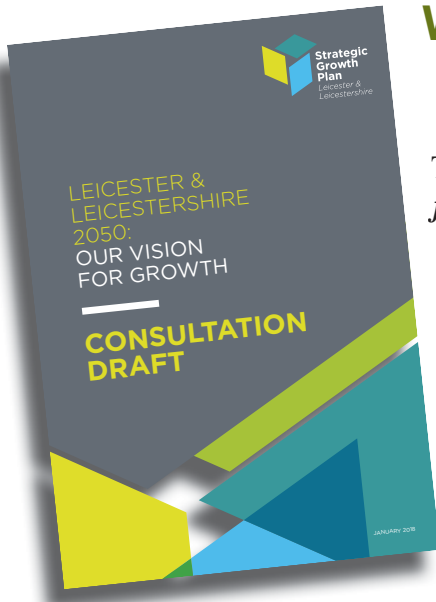
*Tony Simpson*

## ***Volunteer with CPRE Leicestershire***

**The work of the Leicestershire Branch of CPRE is undertaken by a small group of volunteers. We are always looking for new people to bring their skills, knowledge and enthusiasm to expand this group.**

**You might have expertise in planning, marketing, desktop publishing, social media or fundraising which would help us to develop the organisation and take the work forwards. You might be an experienced manager from the not-for-profit-sector or you might just love the Leicestershire countryside and want to contribute to looking after it.**

**Please get in touch on [info@cpreleicestershire.org.uk](mailto:info@cpreleicestershire.org.uk) if you would like to find out more.**



## What does the Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan propose?

The consultation document, *Leicester and Leicestershire 2050: Our Vision for Growth* presents a broad brush strategy that, it is claimed, will promote long term economic growth, planned transport and infrastructure development as well as delivering more homes and more jobs in the period up to 2050. As a growth plan, it has a narrow focus on strategies for development rather than on wider planning, countryside and environmental issues.

The consultation document is relatively short and lacking in much important detail. However this report only highlights some of the key proposals. If you want to discover more, the document can be viewed at [http://www.l1strategicgrowthplan.org.uk/download/pdf\\_document/ONLINE-Strategic-Growth-Plan-9-Jan-2018.pdf](http://www.l1strategicgrowthplan.org.uk/download/pdf_document/ONLINE-Strategic-Growth-Plan-9-Jan-2018.pdf)

### The main proposals in the SGP include:

- **New Houses** - The delivery of more than 180,000 new homes between 2011 and 2050. 96,580 are planned for 2011 to 2031 and a further 90,000 between 2031 and 2050.
- **Roadbuilding** - A central element of the SGP is a major new road – the A46 Expressway – running from the existing A46 near Syston around the east and south of Leicester to a new junction on the M1. This new road, emanating from a Midlands Connect transport strategy, is seen as ‘critical’ to the whole development strategy. However, there was no indication of the precise route in the plan.
- **Development Focus** - The plan signals a shift in the focus of development away from small and medium sized sites to large strategic locations especially after 2031. This will reduce the amount of development taking place in existing towns and villages.
- **New Development Corridor** - A new corridor to the east and south of Leicester associated with the proposed A46/A5 Expressways was identified as the ‘Primary Growth Area’. The A46 Expressway is seen as creating the opportunity and road infrastructure for large strategic developments, capable of providing 40,000 new houses.
- **Growth Areas** - Different levels of development are identified for the Primary Growth Area (the A46 Expressway corridor), and Secondary Growth Areas (around the A42/M1 and Loughborough in the north and the A5/A46 Expressways in the south of the county), together with Key Centres (Melton Mowbray and Lutterworth). In addition, there are to be areas of managed growth in Local Plans (Coalville, Hinckley, Loughborough and Market Harborough), geared to local needs.
- **Leicester Housing Shortfall** - Councils bordering Leicester, especially Harborough but also Blaby, and Hinckley & Bosworth will provide for the shortfall in the City’s projected housing requirements in locations well connected to the City especially between 2031 and 2050.
- **Garden City Concept** - Drawing upon a ‘Garden City’ concept, with Leicester playing a ‘pivotal role’ as the ‘central city’, the SGP proposes to deliver “21st Century Garden Towns, Villages and Suburbs” that are based on ‘strong social, economic and environmental foundations’.
- **Special Protection** - The Consultation Document claims that the SGP will ensure “that development does not damage the special places that we cherish”.



## Our Response: What concerns CPRE?

CPRE has concerns about both what is included and what is omitted from the SGP. Following on from the article on the front page, we highlight some of those concerns below. If you would like to view a copy of our response to the consultation go to <http://www.cpreleicestershire.org.uk/news-sp-461057384/item/2292-robust-response-to-strategic-growth-plan-consultation>.



CPRE meeting on the Plan - February 2018

### Our concerns relate to:

- **Housing** – The plan focuses too much on housing numbers rather than housing needs. We have doubts about the housing figures, in particular how they exceed genuine demographic and economic need and how the 2031-2050 figures are calculated. Too much emphasis is placed on delivering the housing figures through the extensive use of greenfield developments while the contribution of brownfield, windfall and undesignated sites, particularly in urban areas, is neglected.

- **Types of Housing** - The plan also fails to address housing types required, the need for affordable housing (especially rural affordable housing), and housing for a growing number of elderly and disabled residents.

***“Without some clear principles in the SGP we fear that the proposed development will end up as environmentally destructive, car dependent, low density greenfield sprawl with large dormitory suburbs and with a lack of sustainable transport infrastructure.”***

- **Road-Building** – CPRE are highly critical of the strong emphasis placed on large scale road building, in particular the A46 Expressway. In our view, the plans for this expressway are flawed and involve a lack of detailed evidence of its impact on local roads as traffic is decanted from the expressway on to them. We have serious reservations about the transport assessment, published very late in the consultation process, which only considers how to accommodate increases in car travel.

- **Sustainable Transport** – This appears to have low priority. The lack of comprehensive local public transport improvements as alternative sustainable transport solutions is a serious omission in the SGP.

- **Impact of SGP** – The SGP fails to address how its growth and development proposals impact on Leicestershire’s rural areas, countryside, and attractive landscapes. A particular concern is the

cumulative impact of the A46 Expressway and 40,000 new houses in several new settlements on the countryside of High Leicestershire to the east and south of Leicester. The SGP offers no vision of how the protection of the landscape, the environment and the ‘special places that we cherish’ will be incorporated into the development process.

- **Leicestershire Countryside** – The SGP has little to say about the Leicestershire countryside and rural communities. The low priority, scant attention and lack of detail devoted to the environment, nature, historic assets and biodiversity is disappointing. Insofar as there is any recognition of their value, they tend to be seen only as ‘constraints’ to development. They should not simply be seen as things which get in the way of development but as valuable assets to be enhanced and protected.

- **Climate Change** – The SGP is silent on the issue of climate change. CPRE would have expected a plan for 2050 to be future proofed with measures to reduce carbon emissions. There is not even a sustainable public transport strategy!

- **Garden City Concept** – This sounds very grand and visionary but in reality the SGP does not present a picture of what a garden town, suburb or village would look like or how it would differ from other developments.

- **Rural Proofing** – The Plan needs to be rural proofed with more emphasis on the rural economy, rural diversification, farming and policies to support villages and communities to enhance their local areas.

# Rural Housing - an urgent need for affordable housing

*CPRE Leicestershire has for many years argued the need for more affordable rural housing and past newsletters have included regular reports from Richard Mugglestone of Midlands Rural Housing on developments in Leicestershire. Too often, as witnessed with the Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan, the needs of rural communities are overlooked and plans are not 'rural proofed'. On this page, we reproduce a recent article by Crispin Truman, Chief Executive of CPRE, in which he argues that there needs to be a new focus on affordable rural housing, while on the next page, Richard Mugglestone gives us a brief view of some developments during the recent Rural Housing week.*

## Crispin Truman writes:

Too often, the housing crisis is portrayed as an exclusively urban issue. Rural poverty remains largely unacknowledged, even though low wages and high living costs mean there are pockets of real deprivation in the countryside. The fact that house prices are more than eight times higher than average incomes in over 80% of rural local authorities, or that a single person on a median rural wage can expect to spend 46% of their income on rent, gets lost in the focus on cities.

Across much of rural England, communities are being quietly eroded by an acute lack of low cost rented homes. An analysis by the National Housing Federation last year found that 52 rural schools in England had closed since 2011, along with 81 rural post offices and over 1,300 pubs.

Affordable homes can help secure the future of our rural communities. Just a handful of new properties can make the difference between a primary school being forced to close and one which goes on welcoming new pupils; a village shop shuttered up and one which continues to serve customers; a pub converted into holiday cottages and one which remains a hub for the local community.

As rural housing practitioners have long highlighted, there are a number of key barriers to the delivery of affordable homes in rural areas. These include inflated land values, difficulties finding appropriate sites, the abandonment of a specific rural target for grant funding, and the Government's decision to define 'affordable rent' as up to 80% of market rates, a level which is simply not affordable for many low-paid rural workers.

These are the real barriers. Not the democratic planning process, nor Green Belt protection. As the Local Government Association recently highlighted,



**Crispin Truman**  
**CPRE Chief Executive**

councils and their communities granted nearly twice as many planning permissions as the number of new homes that were completed in the financial year 2016/17, approving more than 321,000 new homes, of which only 183,000 were built. But perhaps the most fundamental problem is that the realities of rural life are not well understood, in Westminster or by the general public.

If we want to solve the rural housing crisis, we must work to change perceptions of rural areas. We must help to build a better public understanding of what life in the countryside is really like, and inspire empathy with the struggles of those who live there. And we must embed rural issues more firmly within the wider housing debate, so that whenever politicians, charities and think tanks talk about the need for more truly affordable homes, they recognise that rural communities need them too.

We need stronger measures to reconnect rural rents and incomes, encourage land to come forward more cheaply, and promote better rural-proofing of policy. In an age of declining faith in Government, developers and the planning system to deliver the right homes in the right places, it is vital that communities are empowered to push for the kind of development they want and need.

CPRE believe that it is possible to build the homes that people need and preserve the green spaces they benefit from. We must protect the countryside and enhance it, by promoting the right kind of development in the places where it is needed most. Only by pursuing both these aims will we ensure that our villages and market towns remain vibrant and thriving places for future generations to live and work.

# Rural Housing Week – A Triumph of Collaboration

CPRE and Leicestershire's rural housing partners were extremely active during Rural Housing Week in early July. Crispin Truman, CPRE's Chief Executive, opened the Rural Housing Week Conference with a passionate speech that posed a question to all those involved in rural areas; 'what is our vision for rural housing and how can we deliver sustainability to our rural communities?'



CPRE has joined forces with Midlands Rural Housing (MRH) and other partners to work with the Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) to commission and launch their paper "A New Rural Settlement – Fixing the Affordable Housing Crisis in Rural England". With even the most affordable rural homes costing more than eight times average incomes in rural areas it seems that people are increasingly supporting the building of some affordable homes to help sustain our villages. The recommendations of the IPPR report mirror many of the conclusions reached in the National Housing Federation's 'Manifesto for Affordable Rural Homes' which was also launched during Rural Housing Week. Both of these publications state the importance of 'rural proofing' housing policy and recognise the value of affordable homes to the rural economy.

Policy suggestions such as the Entry Level Exception Site idea in the draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) have unintended consequences which would be detrimental to the delivery of rural affordable homes so organisations like MRH and CPRE must continue to scrutinise and shape emerging policy.

This work is vital to secure a better future for our rural communities and we know that lobbying must also be carried out alongside work in our local communities to support small, well designed, future proofed, fuel efficient and affordable rural housing developments for local people in villages.

These small developments make a huge difference to keeping the lifeblood of our rural communities flowing. Local people support shops, schools, services, the local economy and the community. By working to deliver small rural developments in villages we are making a big statement to government – this is what is needed on many levels and welcomed locally so please provide the policies and funding to enable it to happen.

*Thanks to Richard Muggleston of Midlands Rural Housing for this article.*

## **Strategic Growth Plan raises major concerns** - continued from page one

### **Procedural Concerns**

We have serious concerns about the lack of transparency, accountability and independent scrutiny surrounding the development and the final adoption of the SGP. These relate to the lack of public engagement with the SGP especially the poor publicity surrounding the consultation process, the late availability during the consultation of the Sustainability and Transport Appraisals and the inadequacy of the key evidence presented.

### **Lack of Challenge and Scrutiny before an Independent Inspector**

A major concern, which we have highlighted with MPs, is that the SGP will not be subjected to external scrutiny and challenge in an Examination in Public (EIP) before an Independent Inspector. CPRE is calling for an EIP to be held before the SGP is finally adopted.

### **The Next Steps**

Following the consultation, a revised draft of the SGP will be produced (expected in September) and it will then be considered by each local authority and adopted once all have agreed. As far as we are aware, there are still no plans for an EIP or for further opportunities for public engagement in the process.

For CPRE Leicestershire, this is an on-going campaign that will enter a new phase in the autumn. If CPRE is to stand up for Leicestershire's countryside and challenge the SGP's ill-thought out policies and plans, we need more members to join with us and help with this fight.

**If you agree with us that there should be an independent inquiry (EIP) into the Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan, write to your MP asking them to press for such an inquiry.**

## Shaun Spiers to speak at our 2018 Branch AGM on 12th September

The keynote speaker at the CPRE Leicestershire AGM on 12th September is Shaun Spiers, who is the author of a recently published and thoughtful book, *How to Build Houses and Save the Countryside*. He was Chief Executive of CPRE from 2004 until 2017 and is now Director of the Green Alliance.

In his talk, he will explain why the current house building model doesn't work and why there needs to be a rethink and what that rethink involves.

The meeting will take place in **The Parlour at Roots Farm Shop**, starting with refreshments from 6.30 pm and finishing at 8.30 pm. Following a welcome from our Branch President, Janie Martin, the AGM business part of the evening will be from 7 to 7.30pm and then followed by Shaun's talk and questions.

This is a free event. All members are welcome. A light buffet with tea and coffee will be available from 6-30 pm. In addition the Farm Shop will stay open until 6.30 pm for the sale of local produce, cakes, bread as well as some local beers and UK wines.

The evening is an opportunity for members and guests to find out more about the work of the Branch in the past 12 months. In addition, it is a chance to hear from Shaun about the ways in which needed housing can be provided without destroying vast areas of countryside. With extensive proposals for new housing sites in the Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan (SGP), these thoughts are of major interest to CPRE Leicestershire.

Please come and join us for this interesting and informative evening. **The address for the meeting is Roots at Thorpe Farm, Thorpe Farm, King Street, Barkby Thorpe, Leicestershire, LE7 3QE. Parking is available.**

**So we can organize the catering, please let us know if you are attending. To book your free place, please email [info@cpreleicestershire.org.uk](mailto:info@cpreleicestershire.org.uk) or phone Caroline Pick on 0116 2595669 by 6th September.**



## Taking CPRE Leicestershire Forward – October 10th meeting

In October, the branch will be working on our new Branch Forward Plan which will set out CPRE Leicestershire's priorities for the next 2-3 years. There will be a meeting on the Forward Plan on Wednesday 10th October led by a CPRE Facilitator, Judith Crabb, who has helped other branches locally. The purpose of the meeting is to review where the branch is now, the policy, planning and organisational challenges we face going forward and also to identify key priorities and the actions needed to meet those challenges.

Some key questions for consideration include:

- How do we make CPRE more attractive to a wider audience and recruit more members, supporters and active volunteers?
- How should we engage with our members and supporters?
- What should our core CPRE Leicestershire message be? Should it be couched more in emotional and positive terms that emphasise the importance and value of the countryside to the residents of Leicestershire?
- How do we campaign regarding our concerns about the impact of the economic growth, housing and road-building agenda at the core of the SGP on Leicestershire's countryside? Which particular issues do we focus on?
- How do we work in partnership with other organisations which share our concerns? How do we as a branch relate to CPRE's national campaigns?
- How do we communicate our local and national messages? How can we use the web-site and social media more effectively?

**Members interested in contributing to the discussion of the new Forward Plan are invited to join us at this meeting. If you would like to attend this meeting, email Caroline Pick on [info@cpreleicestershire.org.uk](mailto:info@cpreleicestershire.org.uk). Equally, if you are unable to attend but wish to contribute to the discussion, please send your thoughts or views to Caroline.**