



CPRE Leicestershire Annual Report and Financial Review October 2019 to November 2020

Introduction

The main activities of CPRE Leicestershire are to promote and encourage the improvement and protection of the Leicestershire countryside for the benefit of everyone. These activities are achieved in part by monitoring and commenting on planning applications, many of which are brought to our attention by CPRE members, Parish Councils or the general public, as well as advising on Neighbourhood Plans and responding to local and national consultations.

Structure and Governance

CPRE Leicestershire is constituted as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), which is a financially independent charity related to the National CPRE charity, and is managed and run, on a voluntary basis, by a Committee of Trustees. Serving on a continuous basis for a maximum of six years, they are selected by the Committee subject to confirmation of their positions annually at the AGM. In Charnwood, there is a District Committee which focuses on local planning applications and consultations for the Borough.

Trustees

At the October Branch Committee meeting Tony Stott, a Trustee who had chaired the SGP Task Group since 2017, agreed to become the Branch Chairman for the coming 12 months. Currently the Trustees are:

- Tony Stott, Trustee; Branch Chairman; East Midlands Regional Chair
- Rick Hoyland, Trustee; Chair of Charnwood District
- Tony Simpson, Trustee; Treasurer
- John Marriott, Trustee
- Helena Edwards, Trustee
- With Jill Prior as Committee Administrator

Branch Activities 2019 – 2020

The branch has been extremely busy during the past year. Although as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, face/face branch meetings were suspended and replaced with on-line virtual meetings in March 2020, there has been no 'let up' in our activities.

- In November 2019, we held a campaign workshop, with various national CPRE and other colleagues joining us, to consider a strategy for further campaigning by the Branch regarding the Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan (SGP). Further action envisaged included developing a critical analysis of the Plan, the lobbying of councillors and politicians, and promoting an alternative 'Vision for Leicester and Leicestershire'. Following this event, Trustees agreed to focus on Evidence Based Research; Working with 'Allies'; and Public Engagement.
- During the General Election we wrote to all candidates standing in Leicester and Leicestershire inviting them to support CPRE's national manifesto, "Our Countryside: a Manifesto for the Next Government" and our views on the SGP, the A46 Expressway plan, undesignated countryside, Neighbourhood Plans and Rural Affordable Housing.
- In December 2019, the Branch and the Charnwood District Group responded to the consultation on an updated Charnwood Local Plan. We were particularly concerned about proposals which allowed building in flood risk areas, car dependent development in the countryside and failure to provide proposals for the development of sustainable transport. A major concern was that a number of sites which had been refused consent previously had been allocated in the draft.

- Following on from the campaign workshop, in late March 2020 the team started work on a bid for funding our Leicester and Leicestershire Vision Project from National CPRE's Strategic Collaboration Fund (SCF). After much discussion this has been approved, allowing the launch of the Vision project from November 1st 2020. Developing the evidence base for a Vision statement, engaging with partner organisations and interested individuals, and publicising and campaigning for our Vision will be major focus of our work through most of the next 12 months, culminating in a launch of the Vision in the Autumn of 2021.
- In June 2020 we responded to the Strategic Transport Priorities (STP) 2020 – 2050 consultation for Leicester and Leicestershire and submitted a 23-page critique of the County and City Councils' transport policies and proposals.
- From August through to October 2020, along with the rest of CPRE nationally and locally, we were heavily engaged with responding to two Government consultations regarding proposed planning reforms: 'Planning for the Future' and 'Changes to the Current Planning System'.
 - In the case of the latter consultation, which primarily concerned a new method for calculating the housing requirement for each local authority, we commissioned a report on the implications of these proposals for Leicester and Leicestershire. Using this report, Trustees lobbied Leicestershire MPs, County Councillors and key Council Planning Officers, including a Zoom meeting with staff members for the MP for Hinckley & Bosworth.
 - We also contributed to the CPRE National 'One CPRE' response to each of these consultations.
 - Tony Stott attended a virtual meeting at which members of the CPRE National Team and Branch representatives met with Robert Jenrick, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government. He was able to ask a question about the protection of undesignated countryside in Leicestershire under the Government's proposals.
 Both the National and Branch campaigns received considerable publicity and CPRE's campaigning continues.
- On the 26th September 2020 the press announced that Midlands Connect had withdrawn support for an 'Expressway' to the east and south of Leicester, 3 years after it was first proposed as a major component of the Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan (SGP). This added urgency to CPRE Leicestershire calls for the SGP to be revisited and revised. One of our Trustees, John Marriott, was quoted in the Leicester Mercury as saying "An urgent review must now take place, based on wider consultations and mindful of the changes in the world. The Climate Crisis and Coronavirus have greatly altered the ways in which we will be working, living, and moving around in the future." All this emphasises the need for our Vision project.
- September 2020 also saw the launch of the City of Leicester Local Plan, and the Trustees prepared and submitted a detailed response that focused issues relating to housing numbers and supply, sustainable transport, climate change, and nature and the natural environment.
- Alongside these activities, we have responded to a number of applications that are handled by the County Council. These included a County Council application for a Solar Farm and Industrial units between Quorn and Barrow and applications for a Materials Recovery facility at Shawell, which was rejected, and for an Anaerobic Digester at Manor Farm, Beeby. We raised concerns about the lack of information and transparency in connection with the County Council's planning applications website.
- Since the last AGM the Branch has had contact or collaborated with the following organisations: SELAG, Willoughby Waterleys Residents Association, the Charnwood and Harborough Green Parties, Friends of the Earth Leicester, principally regarding SGP and Climate Change issues, and Harborough District Council.

Charnwood District Group update

Rick Hoyland and Joyce Noon remain as Chair and Vice Chair respectively, but Liz Astill felt obliged to withdraw as Treasurer and Committee member due to a potential conflict of interests. Tony Simpson has taken over as Treasurer. Our small team is ever smaller and we would welcome active helpers.

The District Committee continues to focus on challenging and questioning the detail of significant local planning applications, particularly applications that are outside the provisions of the Charnwood Local Plan. Among the applications were ones for 135 dwellings on Melton Road, Barrow on Soar, 105 dwellings on Loughborough Road, Quorn and 200 dwellings at Melton Road, Queniborough. Others included a notification for 'change of use' from offices to residential for 91 flats at the Hawker Business Park, Burton on the Wolds, an environmental screening request for a Garden Village on Land NW of Seagrave and a County Council application for a Solar Farm and Industrial Units on land between Quorn and Barrow on Soar.

For much of the year to 31st March 2020 Charnwood were able to demonstrate a supply of land for housing in excess of 6 years and as a result there was a significant reduction in the number of speculative applications for development on unallocated sites. We responded to several appeals arising from these unallocated applications but in November 2020 Charnwood were obliged to declare that the land supply figure had fallen below five years and there has since been a marked acceleration in 'rogue' applications.

We note that the village of Woodthorpe is under siege with applications threatening to double its size and proposals for a major development between Woodthorpe and Quorn. In addition, the group are monitoring a move to resurrect an application for 35 new homes on Maplewell Road, Woodhouse Eaves, notwithstanding a recent refusal by a Planning Inspector of an appeal for 50 homes.

However, in addition to contributing to the joint response to the Charnwood Local Plan consultation, the Charnwood group responded to the Charnwood Green Wedge and Areas of Separation consultation. Contributions were also made to the Branch's responses on the Strategic Transport Priorities, Government planning changes and draft Leicester City Local Plan consultations.

National CPRE

The new branding, 'CPRE The Countryside Charity', has now been fully established, and is embodied in the new national website and National CPRE communications. This is not just about new image but creating a sharper campaigning focus.

The roll out to branches is underway and in the near future CPRE Leicestershire will be launching its new website – watch out for more news on this.

The management of the many volunteers within CPRE is now facilitated by a system called Assemble, on which vacancies are advertised and individual details maintained. CPRE Leicestershire is still looking for volunteers and if you have time and feel you can help us in anyway please have a look at:- <https://volunteer.cpre.org.uk/opportunities> - just type in your postcode. We are seeking Trustees, Planning Advisers and a Communication and PR Volunteer.

What 2021 and beyond will bring

The Branch will continue to campaign about the Government's planning changes along with CPRE nationally and in conjunction with other CPRE branches. Locally, our key focus will be on developing our Vision Statement for the future development and planning of Leicestershire and its countryside.

Finally, we look forward to a Covid free 2021 and wish all members a safe and Happy Christmas.

Financial Review – Year Ending 31st March 2020

The Branch’s Accounts for the year to 31/3/20, including a detailed analysis of income and expenditure, are enclosed as a separate document. The main points to note are as follows:

- The Charity recorded a deficit of £3,504 for the year, compared with a deficit of £3,373 for the previous year. This was expected – the budgeted result was for a higher overspend of £5,750, which could easily be accommodated by the high level of reserves; therefore, although a deficit, the outcome was better than forecast by £2,246. This positive result was due to an underspend of £2,149 on consultancy costs in relation to the Leicester & Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan (£6,500 budgeted, £4,351 actually spent). All other income and expenditure was in line with budget.
- The assets of the Charity at 31/3/20 amounted to £44,574, compared with £48,078 at 31/3/19. This consisted of bank balances plus cash in hand as follows:

	As at 31/3/20	As at 31/3/19
Bank: Business Account	2,378	5,965
Business Savings Account	41,972	41,825
Cash	224	288
	<hr/> 44,574 <hr/>	<hr/> 48,078 <hr/>

- There were no amounts owing to or from the Charity at 31/3/20.