



The countryside charity Worcestershire

CPRE Worcestershire Branch Newsletter & Annual Report 2021/2022



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

We live in peculiar times. The COVID pandemic has changed a lot of things, potentially for ever. I never expected to see another international war in Europe during my lifetime. Many of the regional and national CPRE meetings that I attend are now held on-line, so that I merely sit in my armchair at home, rather than having to travel to Birmingham or London. However, I did attend the National AGM in person in London in June.

We continue to be very short of active volunteers. We are not systematically monitoring planning application in Wychavon, because we have nobody on the ground to take this on. We also need volunteers to become trustees, including someone who can ultimately take over the chairmanship from me.

- Peter King

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PLANNING REPORT

Black Country Boroughs

We handle strategic planning in the Black Country through the regional CPRE group. The present indication is that little of their housing or other development needs is likely to be imposed on our country or Dudley's countryside along the southern fringe of the conurbation. However we expect a major consultation in the autumn.

Bromsgrove

The last plan was adopted with provision for its early review to find land for more housing. To date two large developments on the edge of Redditch have planning consent or are on their way to it. One of the large Bromsgrove sites (Whitford) has planning consent, but the developers seem still to be in negotiation with the planners on the other (Perryfields). A considerable amount of further land will have to be taken out of the Green Belt for housing. What land that will be remains unclear. I have been told that the next consultation (again, this autumn) will be about making choices, rather than a preferred option.

Redditch

Redditch's last plan significantly overestimated its housing needs and demanded that Bromsgrove provide land for its needs. Bromsgrove now wishes to recover some of those allocations for its own needs. This means that the Redditch Plan is also under review. The two councils share officers, so that it is quite likely that their consultations will happen together.

Wyre Forest

Wyre Forest has recently adopted the plan that had its examination in the midst of the pandemic lockdowns in February 2021. This plan allocates for development two large sites one around the former Lea Castle Hospital and the other Kidderminster East – between the Birmingham and Bromsgrove roads, as well as some smaller sites. Kidderminster East has been the subject of a series of preliminary applications, with the main application expected shortly.

-Peter King

South Worcestershire

The City of Worcester and Malvern Hills and Wychavon District Councils have been working together for several years to develop the local plan for South Worcestershire. The first version of this came into force in 2016. The same authorities are now preparing an updated version, called the 'South Worcestershire Development Plan Review (SWDPR). An initial draft was published in 2019, but work since then has been delayed, with a further delay announced in April this year.

South Worcestershire continued...

At the time of writing, no date has been set for the publication of the next version of the SWDPR or for its final adoption. This delay has empowered speculative developers, particularly in Malvern Hills, after a planning inspector over-ruled the District Council and permitted a large new housing estate in open countryside on the grounds that the Council no longer has a five-year land-supply. This is a contentious judgement because South Worcestershire as a whole does indeed have a five-year land-supply, and the aims of the draft SWDPR are to concentrate new development near transport hubs, mainly on the Wychavon side of the River Severn.



There has therefore been a flurry of planning applications for new housing estates on greenfield sites in Malvern Hills District, usually to be built at some distance from the centres of our small towns and villages. As with many such estates, these comprise houses built to standardised designs on good agricultural land, each occupying a small plot, with an assumption that residents will travel to shops, schools and elsewhere by car. Fortunately, there has been a perceptible shift in Government housing policy from quantity to quality. The most recent version of the National Planning Policy Framework (in 2021) has stated that:

“Development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes.”

The Government also published the National Design Guide in 2021 to promote good practice in the design of new developments. However, it is not yet clear whether this greater emphasis on quality will have sufficient influence on decisions by planning inspectors when developers appeal against refusal by a local planning authority. Either way, CPRE Worcestershire will assist local communities who wish to object to inappropriate planning applications. To do so more effectively, it is essential that we recruit and train more volunteers. Your help is needed.

-Stuart Cumella

THE FUTURE OF OUR CHURCHYARD COMPETITION

The Best-Kept Churchyard competition, which we have held in association with the WFWI since the 1960s, is due to take place again next year. Unfortunately, there has recently been a substantial decline in the availability of judges (from 33 in 2007 to 14 in 2019) whereas the number of churches that enter the competition is holding fairly steady at around 30 (out of a potential number of 140). Because the number of judges is always subject to possible decline due to old age or worse, whereas the number of entries may rise or fall due to factors that are not predictable, there is a risk that the ratio of judges to churchyards could fall below one half next year. This would make it almost impossible to guarantee that we can allocate two judges to visit every churchyard, which is a rule that helps to counteract the consequence of some judges marking more harshly or generously than others.

CHURCHYARD COMPETITIONS CONTINUED...

Most judges are willing to visit 2 or 3 churchyards but, once there are more than twice as many churchyards as judges, most would need to judge 4 or 5, which I believe some judges would refuse to do in view of the much greater time and expense incurred, especially now that petrol and diesel cost over twice as much as in 2007.

Indeed, even in 2019 and 2021, eight churchyards were seen by only one judge, and I fear that, without several new volunteers coming forward in the next few weeks, I will have to notify the churches in November that we will be unable to hold the competition in 2023 due to a shortage of judges.

- *Frank Hill*

THE DUNCLENT IRRIGATION SCHEME

CPRE was unsuccessful in opposing a large eastern extension to Kidderminster at the examination of its new Local Plan in February 2021, but the issue of what has been called Lord Foley's Irrigation System came up, because a leat (which still runs) forms the eastern boundary of the proposed development. This encouraged me to get an article published describing the history of the system. This should be in this year's volume of Transactions of Worcestershire Archaeological Society.

The system as operating in 1918 when the Earl of Dudley sold his Broome and Hurcott Estates is recorded in the sale particulars. Two of the 'courses' began at Barnett Bridge (where the Stourbridge-Worcester road crosses the brook. One was on the left bank and watered the lord of the manor's Mease Farm in Chaddesley Corbett on two days per fortnight. This was created by Thomas Foley the ironmaster in 1662 to improve his Dunclent and Hurcott Estates.

The Hurcott Course from the right bank of the brook watered five farms, eventually running into the Wannerton Brook, just above Hurcott Paper Mill. One of the other two courses left the Barnett Brook at a mill built (like it) in about the 1710s. The other left the brook at the next bridge and once carried all the rest of the water in the brook, so that the old course of the brook (which was the parish boundary) was lost and Dearnford Mill was deprived of water, being in 1658, when Thomas Foley renewed a lease, 'a house wherein a corn mill now decayed did heretofore stand'. This Lower Dunclent Course may have been made in 1637 by Edward Brode, the then owner of Dunclent: in that year he borrowed an extra £1000 on mortgage. These two courses served five farms, with the water rights divided between five farms with a cycle of sharing the water over 48 days. Dunclent Farm had the water for 24 days. Ultimately both courses ended off at Heathy Mill, re-joining the brook, now known as Hoo Brook.

The whole scheme is an example of the floating of meadows. By letting water on to them in late winter, the ground was warmed, encouraging grass seeds to germinate and grass to begin to grow sooner than otherwise. This meant there was an early bite for grazing animals at a time when fodder was beginning to run out. After some grazing, the land was watered again a crop of hay could be taken in June and July. Alternatively (without spring grazing) it could be taken in May, followed by a second and even a third crop of hay. Watering made the land more productive. At Dunclent, much of the land was pasture, rather than strictly meadow.

What was previously a barren sandy warren not worth five shillings an acre was worth 30 shillings and yielded two waggon loads of hay per acre. This was good for horse but would not feed an ox well.

Today the Lower Dunclent Course still carries water, though only part of what flows down the brook. Detailed provision was made on the 1918 sale for the irrigation system to continue, but it seems to have fallen out of use not long after the sale, presumably through the buyer of Bellington Farm (where the weir was) having little incentive to repair the weir below Barnett Bridge. It was certainly 'long disused' in 1939. The Lower Dunclent is still periodically used by the owner of Dunclent Farm to irrigate his land.

-Stuart Cumella

LEVELLING UP AND REGENERATION BILL

The new session of Parliament saw the government introduce a bill, which will make significant changes to the way planning will work. As ever with such things the devil is in the detail, much of which is not in the bill, but will appear in regulations and other documents which will follow its enactment.

The principle is that the rule of law should apply to planning, with rather less scope for the exercise of discretion. There is to be a new National Development Management Plan, which will have the same authority as a council's Local Plan and may overrule it on strategic matters. One objective is to have a national plan on matters such as heritage assets and the Green Belt, so that national policy on these matters does not have to be endlessly copied and pasted into local plans.



The process for producing a Local Plan is extremely long-winded, but a supplementary plan can in future be prepared, to deal with specific issues, such as allocating more sites. It will be compulsory for Councils to have a design code. The duty of councils to cooperate is to be abolished, but there will be power to require a council to give assistance to another.

Neighbourhood Plans will continue, but there can also be a Neighbourhood Priorities Statement to highlight local issues that need to be addressed in the district's Local Plan, but this will not be able to stop housing provision allocated in the Local Plan or its scale.

Environmental Outcomes Reports will replace three current lots of environmental and sustainability reporting. There is new provision for Infrastructure levies, some changes on Compulsory Purchase Orders, new kinds of development corporation (which can have the planning powers of a district council). There is also detailed provision for devolution with county mayors (who may have other titles) having some power in strategic planning and infrastructure funding.

I would comment that last time there was a major change (under John Prescott in about 2005) much of the strategic planning work ground to a halt, while everyone waiting for the new Act to complete its passage through Parliament. Some of the aspects of what the bill proposes are welcome, as removing unnecessary bureaucracy. In other cases, it is too soon to tell whether it will be good or bad, as it will depend on how the reforms are implemented in practice.

FRENCH ROYAL FAMILIES IN WORCESTERSHIRE

Look up a list of pretenders to the thrones of Europe and you will find that France has three: from the Bourbon; Orléanist; and Bonapartist lines of succession. Each of these royal houses ruled France at different times in the 19 Century. When not in power, the senior members of each house would go into exile, often in England and, in a few cases, in Worcestershire.



The first royal exile to reach our county was Lucien Bonaparte, Prince Français. He was a younger brother of Napoleon and played a key part in the latter's rise to power. But he lost out in palace intrigue, and was exiled to Italy. In 1809, he decided to flee to the USA, but his ship was intercepted by the Royal Navy. Once in England, Lucien seems to have been treated with great civility, and was allowed to buy a house in Worcestershire, although he was kept under close surveillance and his mail was intercepted. The house, called 'Thorngrove', is in a secluded part of Grimley Parish not far from the River Severn, and was built in the 18 Century. It has large landscaped gardens and is Grade 2 listed. th Lucien eventually left Thorngrove in 1814, although not before one his sons, Louis Lucien Bonaparte, was born in the house. Thorngrove House is not open to the public.

After the fall of the Second Empire in 1870, France became a republic almost by default. Although monarchists won the elections for the National Assembly, the three competing royal houses could not agree on an acceptable candidate for the throne.

The next royal exile in Worcestershire was the Duc d'Aumale, one of the sons of King Louis-Philippe, who ruled France between the two revolutions of 1830 and 1848. The Duc bought Wood Norton Hall near Evesham in 1872 as a hunting lodge. On his death in 1897, the property passed to Prince Philippe, Duc d'Orléans, who was the official pretender for the throne on behalf of both the Bourbon and Orléanist royal houses. Philippe rebuilt Wood Norton Hall as a splendid stately home in a wooded setting overlooking the River Avon. The house became an important social centre, with a royal wedding for the Bourbon family in 1907 (the bride was the grandmother of the current King of Spain). Philippe had an active social life too, being cited as a co-respondent in a divorce case and having an affaire with Dame Nellie Melba.

Philippe died in 1926 and the house eventually passed to the BBC for use as an emergency broadcasting centre in the Second World War and in the Cold War (with a nuclear bunker added), a staff training centre, and the location for some early Doctor Who episodes. The building is now a luxury hotel and well worth visiting for its food, its setting and its history.

The next important French exile in Worcestershire was a future president rather than a would-be king or emperor. After the defeat of France in 1940, General de Gaulle created the Free French Army. In 1942, he set up training school for officer cadets in Ribbesford House near the beautiful riverside town of Bewdley. The House probably dates from the 16 Century but has been much enlarged, partially demolished and is currently being th restored. It is not open to the public, but can be seen from the nearby parish church. For de Gaulle and his officer trainees, it would have been painfully reminiscent of a French country chateau, standing in front of a wooded hill, facing fields leading to a long winding river. Although not based there, de Gaulle visited the House and the town before the School closed in 1944 and its newly-trained officers joined in the liberation of France. Half of them were dead before the end of the War.

Get Involved!

The Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) is a National Charity with a small permanent staff and a network of Volunteers which are its 'eyes and ears.

<https://www.cpre.org.uk/get-involved/volunteering/>

Like many of its counterparts elsewhere, CPRE Worcestershire is only as effective as those who are prepared to play an active part in opposing development excesses.

CPRE Worcestershire would like to build up its data base of Volunteers, particularly planning coordinators for Wychavon. This might suit a Parish Council committee chairman who wants to be involved with an area wider than his or her own parish.

VOLUNTEER



If you would like to volunteer with us in any capacity, please contact our Secretary Terra Morris at:

secretary@cpeworcestershire.org.uk with some information about yourself and what you are hoping to help us with and we will aim to get you involved.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2022

Invite on reverse -- >



The countryside charity
Worcestershire

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2022

Thursday 29th September 2022
Tea, coffee & a selection of buffet food from 5:45pm
AGM starts promptly at 6:15pm

to be held at:
Shires Farm, Hawford, Worcester, WR3 7SG

We are pleased to announce that **Simon Murray, CPRE Chair of the Board**
will be the guest speaker

Please confirm your attendance by email or phone to
Terra Morris (secretary@cpreworcestershire.org.uk or
07947 634545)

A detailed agenda will be handed out at the meeting

BRANCH CONTACTS

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