

SHROPSHIRE SHROPSHIRE SHROPSHIRE

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Campaign to Protect Rural England

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**An Energy Dream or a Landscape Nightmare?
(one members view—see page)**

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Campaign to Protect
Rural England
SHROPSHIRE

**CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT RURAL
ENGLAND**

EDITORIAL

Every year about this time my Suffolk Herbs seed catalogue arrives, showing me what I could plant in the garden next year, not only herbs, of course, although there are a wide range of these, but also flowers and vegetables. However, in addition there are interesting, and often rather amazing 'extras', such as a 'trip trap mouse catcher', patio grow kits, and a clever protection cover for seeds you have planted in boxes on shelves on the patio. There are onion sets for white or red onions which I plant every year, sometimes planting the white, and other years, the red.. There are various cover-up or gather up sheets, of which I already have a good selection, and use every year. These come in very handy about now, when the leaves begin to fall.

As we live in a town centre we have to, perhaps, be a little more tidy, than one has to in a country garden, along the hedgerows of fields, or along the folds of the hills of Shropshire. These fallen leaves decay gently away, adding to the richness of the earth below. Every year I gather up the leaves from our trees and push them down into one or two plastic rubbish bags, and after piecing the sides with a garden fork, the bags are left for a year, by which time the contents of the tightly packed bag have shrunk considerably, and inside is rich nutritious manure for the fruit bushes and vegetables.

Caring for a garden, or thinking more widely, helping to care for the countryside, is something we should support if we are to preserve our heritage. There are millions of people living on this tightly-packed island, and we all want homes to live in, shops to supply our wants, roads to run our cars along to work, and to enjoy our leisure times. Yet very many people, when you ask them, say they like, or love, our countryside - if this is really true, we should be more careful and not let it disappear bit by bit, under more and more roads and houses.

Sometimes, however, nature catches up with us. Only recently we were driving to Birmingham in a bus along the motorway. The wide banks either side were covered with trees, full of leaf which was just turning gold and brown. Some of the larger trees must have been planted when the motorway was first laid out, others just sprouted up, self-seeded, perhaps from the first trees planted, or perhaps from the odd apple core flung out from a passing car. All this plant life was helping to absorb some of the miasma created by the constant flow of traffic. We cannot now easily imagine life without the car, but there are ways to temper the effects of car use. Travel by bus, train, or walk and cycle when you can - this has been said repeatedly, but is just as true as the first time you heard it; and in addition it helps protect our countryside.

Janet Goose
Co-Editor

NEWS & VIEWS FROM THE BRIGNORTH DISTRICT

Lynn Holdship tells us about...

COAL MINING

The Inspector's decision to allow open cast mining near to the Wrekin is shocking. In spite of assurances by U.K. Coal, the damage the mining will cause to Shropshire Hills ANOB will be irreversible. The issue has been raised in Parliament by Wrekin MP Mr. Mark Pritchard, who is calling on the Borough Chiefs to challenge the Secretary of State's decision. Little Wenlock Parish Council has also expressed anger over the decision. Shropshire AONBs are the envy of the world, everyone of all ages has heard of the Wrekin and to the tourists who visit when they can, it sounds devastating.

TREE PRESERVATION

Apley Hall has been converted into individual apartments. In 2008 the need arose to place a Tree Preservation Order on seventeen trees, one group of trees and four woodland areas. The John Webb landscape woodlands at Apley Park, particularly near to the Hall, contain many very old tree species from all over the world, forming part of the local history. The TPO was placed to the delight of Apley Estate Office and Stockton Parish Council, and it is wonderful to see, almost twelve months later the protected areas covered in the beautiful cloak of Autumn.

The same cannot be said of Fort Pendlestone and its surrounding areas, it looks grimmer by the day

WHEATHILL.

Those of us who love the spectacular views of the AONB from Wheathill, near Bridgnorth, will no doubt have enjoyed the hospitality of the Three Horseshoes whilst taking in what must be one of the most breathtaking views in Shropshire. A fire broke out in the night recently which could have destroyed the building had the landlady not been alerted by her dog. The community have rallied round marvellously in an attempt to get the pub up and running again. In a time when pubs are going to the wall, it is great to see the efforts being made to save a building important to locals and tourists alike, because the Three Horseshoes truly is the heart of the community.

Also in Wheathill there has been strong opposition to two applications to extend the caravan site, both have been withdrawn, but we doubt this will be the end of the matter, so watch this space!

David Voysey and a tricky tourist tempter...

STAR ATTRACTION AT ALVELEY

An intricate planning application was received for the erection of a leisure complex at the Mill Hotel, Alveley, much of which would be underground. Among a number of facilities is a swimming pool, sauna, and fitness suite. The hotel is located within eight acres of landscaped gardens and has 41 en suite rooms. The leisure centre is for the use of patrons of the hotel only, and will accommodate around 75 customers at capacity. The initiative is to seek an improved hotel rating from 4 to 5 Star for greater customer satisfaction and attraction.

Much time, effort and expense has been put into the planning application to convince the Planning Authorities and the local community that the benefits of this commercial development far out weigh any environmental drawbacks. Indeed, the applicant has gone to some lengths to minimise impact on the environment.

Alveley Parish Council spent some time in deliberation over the application but came to the conclusion that the enterprise was not detrimental to the Green Belt in which it is situated, and accepted that it will enhance the local facilities for tourism and welcomed the additional employment it will bring.

Let's hope the Council has got it right!

SHREWSBURY & ATCHAM DISTRICT GROUP

Since last year's report the Shrewsbury Group held their AGM in April followed by a joint meeting with Shropshire Wildlife Trust at which three illustrated talks were given, the subjects were:-

Rapid population growth and its threat to our medieval town.

Shrewsbury's green infrastructure.

Wildlife in and around the town, and the threats that expansion is likely to bring.

The meeting was well attended and enjoyed by all.

The Green Infrastructure Strategy for Shrewsbury & Atcham was completed by TEP Consultants early in the year. We had taken part in the discussions leading up to the publication of the report. We were most encouraged by the final document which we considered to be a very comprehensive and thoughtful piece of analysis. Over the coming years we shall be encouraging the new unitary authority to adopt many of the proposals made.

During the year the five Shropshire District Councils were replaced by a Unitary Authority. This disrupted the flow and availability of planning information, and only now are the last of the problems being resolved. We find that we are becoming more dependent on web access for planning documents.

In August we organised a Social Afternoon during which we walked to Hencott Pool and viewed the proposed route for the North West Relief Road, returning to the home of Mac and

Marion Hoskin on the Berwick Road for an excellent afternoon tea. We were fortunate that the sun shone and made it a most enjoyable outing.

In July Shropshire Council were successful in gaining Government support for the NWRR which had been included in a programme of prioritised transport projects submitted by the West Midlands Regional Assembly. It is now intended to hold a further extensive public consultation in 2010 before submitting a business case to the Department for Transport for funding. CPRE still hold the view that any advantages the road would bring are more than offset by the loss of the beautiful and tranquil countryside to the northwest of the town.

Having responded to the Shropshire Council Core Strategy Issues and Options Draft in the spring we moved on to the next stage of the planning process which was the Shropshire Core Strategy: Policy Directions. Whilst being a county wide policy, much of our response was co-ordinated by the Shrewsbury Group. Whilst the Policy Directions covered a wide range of topics, the key issue was housing growth. During the Phase 2 Revision of the Regional Spatial Strategy the government had gradually imposed higher and higher housing targets on the region. One of the key aims enshrined in the Phase 2 Revision was “a step change in the Government’s approach to sustainable communities”. The fundamental element of this step change was to reverse the movement of people and jobs away from the Major Urban Areas. Nevertheless as the higher targets imposed by the government have been absorbed, the “step change” and regeneration of the major urban areas have lost much of their significance in the proposed housing distribution. We have been critical of the high growth rates being imposed upon the county which we consider will be detrimental to its historic environment. Activity of the River Regeneration Partnership has been muted, and to date the threat of an increase in the number of powered boats using the river has not materialised.

In September a Public Inquiry was held at Theatre Severn to decide a planning application to build five large 5 bedroom houses fronting the river at Pengrove. This proposed development has been in the pipeline for many years, CPRE submitting objections on more than one occasion. Our view that the development was unsuitable was shared by the planning department at the then Shrewsbury & Atcham Council who refused permission. The developer appealed against the decision resulting in a Public Inquiry. To date no decision has been announced.

2009 saw the 60th anniversary of the formation of the Shropshire Branch of CPRE. As a celebration of the event a Garden Party was hosted by Mr & Mrs Lindsay Bury at Millichope Park. The event was well attended and yet again we were fortunate to have a fine sunny day allowing the guests to explore the extensive and well maintained gardens and woodland. Lindsay Bury also gave a brief talk about the problems of maintaining a large estate in current times.

Roger Carlyle

Chairman

Oswestry District

This has been a period of considerable change as the Oswestry Borough Council has now been replaced by a Unitary Authority, based in Shrewsbury. It is still too soon to tell whether this will be an improvement; however, after some initial communication difficulties contacting Planning Officers, the systems now appear to be working.

The Core Strategy

A major effort has been given to the scrutiny of the Draft Core Strategy. The main concern of Oswestry District Branch was that, while the Core Strategy identified different spatial zones within Shropshire, these distinctions were not carried forward into the Shropshire Core Strategy. Much of Shropshire was being treated, for planning purposes, as a single unit; a one-size-fits-all approach. Our Branch described in its response some of the differences found in the Borough of Oswestry, and asked that these differences should be taken into account and embedded into the overall Core Strategy. We do not feel that Oswestry and its hinterland can be considered, for planning reasons, to be in anyway comparable to South Shropshire, Bridgnorth or Shrewsbury.

Oswestry, as the largest market town in Shropshire, second only in size to the County Town of Shrewsbury, has to accept that some development will take place. We argued that housing built in Oswestry and its surrounding villages should be for people who live and work in the area. Previous policies have enabled many "market" houses to be built in places where there are known to be no employment opportunities. These same planning attitudes also failed to address the need for low cost housing, causing a serious shortage of low cost and affordable housing.

The total number of houses allocated for Shropshire is some 25,700, an annual average of 1,285 per annum, of which approximately 200 pa are to be built in Oswestry Borough. Thus, in a 20 year period, 4000 new houses are to be built in Oswestry. The siting of these new houses and the phasing of their development is critically important, and should be tied to local employment opportunities. We agreed that it is important that the occupiers of these new houses live and work in the area so that Oswestry does not become a dormitory town for commuters, a view which is in line with Government policies.

Retail Development

The pressure from Developers to provide Oswestry with a large retail park has continued. In addition to the three out of town retail parks originally proposed, a further proposal to build a large retail development on the town centre car park has been presented. A decision on these four proposals will probably be made in February 2010.

All of these planning applications rely on Consultant's data which is, in some cases, more than three years old, and should be treated with caution; many of their assumptions overestimate the catchment area and underestimate the impact of recent, additional retail development in adjacent towns. While the original estimates for new floor space have been substantially reduced by the Unitary Authority's own Consultants, the Planners still appear determined to proceed.

We will continue to contest the need for these retail parks, as there is plenty of evidence from other market towns that these large out of town developments destroy the town centre economy of small market towns such as Oswestry.

Other activities

Two well attended talks were held during the year at the Memorial Hall in Oswestry. Our annual fund raising event was a summer's evening garden party at Tedsmore Hall, West Felton. Thanks to the great help received from our hosts, The Reverend and Mrs Robert Parker, and from the CPRE Oswestry Committee who provided the food. It was one of our most successful evenings.

Mike Bullen
Chairman

SOUTH SHROPSHIRE DISTRICT GROUP

“Squeeze.... until the Pips Squeak”

So said a Chancellor of the Exchequer in the 1970s to describe an aspect of his fiscal policy. Today, we in CPRE South Shropshire are bracing ourselves to face another squeeze imposed from above, but this time in the shape of the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy. A target of 25,700 new homes by 2026 is in contemplation for Shropshire. Around 20% of those will be in South Shropshire. In a detailed challenge to the proposals, CPRE West Midlands, with the support of CPRE Shropshire, claims that historic Ludlow and Church Stretton could be swamped by excessive housing growth and that the tranquillity of the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) could be ruined by increased traffic noise and air pollution. These proposals have made our pips start squeaking and we are prepared to turn those squeaks into screams should it look likely that our worst fears will be realised.

Wind Energy

Take a walk in the hills and uplands of South Shropshire on most days of the year and you may well find yourself holding on to your hat at some point. No wonder then that the potential of the area for power generation from wind is under scrutiny.

Reconciliation of the contribution that the use of wind can make to CO2 reduction with the protection of our precious South Shropshire landscapes is an issue that continues to exercise the minds of district committee members. We have accepted the presence of the few turbines that the walker will encounter because they are not in clusters, not over 18 metres tall, not sited on peaks and generally serve just one farm or isolated house. But we are determined to resist the appearance of turbines of industrial size as other sources of renewable energy, less damaging to our landscape, are available. We are greatly encouraged that the AONB Management Plan 2009-2014 not only specifically mentions CPRE's view, but to a considerable extent, endorses it. We attribute this largely to the persistent advocacy of Claire Cox, CPRE's representative on the AONB Partnership.

It's “steady as she goes”

Owing to an accelerating hearing problem, our committee chairman has implemented his long standing intention to stand down. For much of this year meetings have continued with members sharing the chair. However, it is good to report that Pam Farquhar, a committee member for several years, has agreed to keep the group on course by becoming Acting Chairman. The former chairman continues to serve in a non-executive capacity as a back room boy.

More good news! Mrs Vivienne Parry, former District and County Councillor, has joined CPRE and accepted co-option on to the South Shropshire District Committee. We consider ourselves very lucky to have Mrs Parry on board. Her great experience and special planning expertise will make an immense contribution to the effectiveness of our work.

Derek Bartlett
Former Chairman

THE WIND POWER ISSUE:

This is an abridged version of a discussion paper submitted to the Executive Committee by Bridgnorth Branch Member, David Shannon.

I consider myself fortunate to have spent much of my adult life in Shropshire - an area of outstanding scenic quality and interest. Over the years, this quality has been threatened by development of various kinds and one of these, wind power, has become a major environmental issue. It is just one of several renewables that can generate electricity, but since its inception the maximum size of turbines has more than doubled, and there is increasing pressure for ever more indiscriminate 'windfarm' development which ignores its drawbacks and exaggerates its ability to reduce CO₂ emissions.

One reason why I joined CPRE was that I considered its attitude towards renewable energy to be eminently balanced and sensible - in particular, to favour small-scale wind power rather than highly-obtrusive windfarms. As a layman regarding the technical and economic aspects, I wanted to test the validity of my point of view by seeking evidence from various sources. In this I have relied principally, but not solely, on the Renewable Energy Foundation (REF), an independent charity commissioning reports from consultancies and scientists to provide authoritative information. (www.ref.org.uk).

It is a revealing exercise to question commonly-held beliefs such as 'renewable energy good, therefore windfarms good' - or even that 'renewable energy means windfarms.' These have been fostered by the uncritical enthusiasm for wind power shown by some environmental pressure groups and by central government. Announcing the Renewable Energy Strategy, climate change minister Ed Miliband told us we must accept thousands more on-shore wind turbines, and that the planning system would be 'reformed' so that we will "come to understand the dangers of climate change to our beautiful countryside." (DAILY TELEGRAPH 16.07.09)

Windfarm enthusiasts maintain that although scenic damage may be regrettable 'we have to make sacrifices' because wind power is a clean, efficient and viable means of reducing carbon emissions. Of course, in a strict chemical sense, it is clean, although there is such a thing as visual pollution. As for viability, this is due primarily to the very generous subsidy wind power enjoys, evidenced by escalating electricity bills and, in the words of the REF, "the complete overselling of this technology at the expense of others."

In 2005 the European Commission produced statistics on onshore wind generation in 15 member states showing that the UK offered the highest level of support with the largest difference between cost and support levels - the margin enjoyed by the developer. (REF: UK Renewables and Subsidies: A Simple Description and Commentary: Sept 2008)

No type of generator can work at maximum output all the time, but for a wind turbine this inability is compounded by the unpredictable variability of its power source.

A generator's effectiveness is best quantified not in terms of Simple 'efficiency' but as 'load (or capacity) factor', defined as the actual electrical output of the generator in a given period of time as a percentage of the total it would generate if it could operate continuously at maximum output during that time.

"Over the period 1994-2004 wind turbine load factors have varied between 24% and 31%* This compares with 36% for naturally-flowing hydropower, 60% for gas turbines and 72% for nuclear power."

(From Digest of UK Energy Statistics DTI 2006; quoted in CPRE FIELDWORK March 2007)
(*Currently a load factor of 30% is commonly assumed when estimating actual output)

The British Wind Energy Association (BWEA) says, quite correctly, that people often confuse efficiency with intermittency. However, since the intermittency is variable and unpredictable I believe we are justified in regarding wind power as unreliable.

"The UK system must always have sufficient reliable generating plant to meet peak load (plus a safety margin). Because of its uncontrollable variability wind can make little or no contribution to this 'firm' generating fleet." (REF: Wind Power and Spot Prices: German and Danish Experience 2006-2008)

The extent of this 'uncontrollable variability' is considerable. Wind speeds in the UK can fluctuate widely over a few hours, and also can remain at or near zero for days, in winter as well as in summer, during the prolonged anti-cyclones that often cover the UK and much of north-western Europe.

"Even if the windmills are built, they will not in themselves plug the generation gap National Grid reckons that compensating for that uncertainty of supply will require a huge amount of over-engineering. 25GW of wind power, it reckons, would be worth only around 5GW of fossil-fired generation." (Dark Days Ahead: The looming electricity crunch: THE ECONOMIST 06.08.09)

The principal argument put forward by wind power protagonists is the alleged ability to reduce CO₂ emissions. However, in response to my enquiry the REF commented:

"The evidence from Germany and Denmark seems to be that the presence of large numbers of wind turbines in an electrical system causes CO₂ emissions to rise, not fall because, firstly, existing conventional power stations are required to ramp up and down to accommodate unpredictable and random fluctuations in wind and thus operate at lower efficiencies, and secondly, as a greater percentage of random wind power is forced in then additional conventional power stations need to be built to provide matching back up the reality is that both Germany and Denmark have had to build more polluting fossil-fuel stations to counterbalance wind, and consequently both emissions and costs have risen."

Based on the government's claims for emissions savings from the whole of its Renewable Energy Strategy (for electricity, heating and transport) from now until 2020, the REF estimate that there would be "annual savings of 7% of UK emissions and just 0.1% of current world emissions at extreme costs and reinforces the point we have often made that renewables are poor emissions reducers, whatever other virtues they may have." (REF: A Briefing Note and Comment on the UK Government's Renewable Energy Strategy)

All renewables have a part to play but they should be applied with due regard for differing local circumstances and with due recognition of their individual merits and defects. It is neither desirable nor necessary to site windfarms in unspoiled countryside. They are, after all, just one particular application of one particular renewable, and there is ample scope for using wind power in less damaging ways, for example in a small-scale supplementary role for the direct benefit of individual households and local communities

“Sustainable in Sloane Square”

by Julia Stephenson

Wormeries, water butts and hens on the roof – Julia Stephenson tells how she went from IT girl to green goddess.

In 2005 I embarked on an ambitious project to extend my top floor flat in Chelsea by knocking into the eaves of the roof and the loft, creating 200 sq ft of carbon-neutral space.

Despite living on a busy road in central London, my plan was to eventually manufacture my own energy, grow fruit and vegetables, and keep chickens – an inner city version of The Good Life. Indeed a good friend once remarked that as a mixture of Margo Leadbetter and Barbara Good from the eponymous BBC series, if anyone could embrace the challenge of sustainable living in Sloane Square, it would be me.

I determined to do this in the thriftiest, most sustainable way. So, instead of ripping everything out and then bringing in brand new materials, as is the way with modern building, I decided to take the slow route, re-using what we had. This would cost more in labour, but less would end up in landfill. Extending my roof area meant I'd have enough space to install solar panels, wind turbines and even a hen house.

I'd already made great efforts to reduce my energy needs as well as cut back on my wasteful habits. Frugal measures like turning off lights, installing a water meter, and cycling may not have the James Bond thrill of seeing turbines whizzing on your roof, but are just as important. Three experimental compost bins and wormeries took care of all my kitchen waste (having run out of space on my roof terrace I had begun to colonise my neighbours, indeed I am the Bernard Matthews of factory worm farming).

Changing my lifestyle was one thing, but I didn't have a clue about how to go about installing renewable energy. It was obvious I needed help – and needed it fast. First up, I called in “ecotect” to the stars, Alex Michaelis, and green guru Donnachadh McCarthy, who successfully negotiated planning permission with the terrifying officials of the Kensington and Chelsea planning department. The three of us practically fainted when we were granted full planning permission for three wind turbines, solar panels, a rainwater harvester and a rainwater flushing loo. Surprisingly there were no objections from our neighbours, but my hunch was that they were all away skiing when the planning signs went up in the street, so our plans slipped in under the radar.

Now I had to find a green builder. This was tricky. Reliable Reg, my usual builder, expressed qualms about my purported green methods. “What?” he spluttered. “You want me to save every slate when we're dismantling the roof?”

Most fortuitously I had just begun dating a builder, Al Reygan, who apart from his penchant for cheap Teletext holidays appeared to share many of my green ideals, happily peeing on one of my three compost heaps to aid decomposition. He insisted he would save me a fortune as all his family are involved in the building game. Despite general insistence that the volatility of our relationship might not survive the stresses of building work, I couldn't resist the prospect of a cheap deal and we began.

Things started off very well. The weather was fine and Al and all the brothers were working in fraternal harmony. He quickly knocked through into the loft and built a new roof over the existing one, saving me the expense of building a tin roof. With eco building advisors, Russell and Barry Smith from Parity Projects, on hand to answer all our eco queries, it was all going well. That is, until brother Ken had a blistering row with Al over my MDF ban and stomped off site. Morale hit an all-time low. It was raining constantly, and the men were covered in mud. Then brother Tel, fed up with having to pull nails out of bits of wood for reuse, soon followed in sympathy.

Fortunately another brother was drafted in and things got back on track. The new roof was finished, the old one was dismantled with the waste wood re-used or stacked for use in our wood-burning stove. A sun pipe, a marvellous way of harnessing and magnifying natural light, was built into the roof, bringing brightness to a dark downstairs.

Parity Projects sourced eight solar panels and, once connected, we were pumping out 1,500 Watts worth of electricity on a sunny day and providing roughly half our electricity needs. We had, however, decided to forgo the wind turbines as the wind speeds on my roof make them fairly useless.

Eco nirvana was reached when we installed a rainwater flushing lavatory. Forest Stewardship Council certified oak flooring from France, low energy light bulbs and several licks of eco-friendly paint were the final touches.

The conversion took seven months, around 40 per cent longer than a normal job, and came in at around £40,000. I now have a light, bright bedroom. Three rescue battery chickens live happily on the roof competing with the worms for our leftovers, along with various tubs and boxes where we grow herbs, fruit and vegetables. The brothers are now on speaking terms again. Al and I survived the traumas and are now engaged. When he's recovered I am hoping he will build me a house.

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CPRE SHROPSHIRE BRANCH

PRESIDENT:	Sarah Bury D.L.
VICE PRESIDENTS:	Selby Martin and Dr. Vivian Hancock
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MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY:	Janet Stone
EDITORS of NEWSLETTER:	Janet Goose Nigel Conner
SECRETARY:	David Challoner

All the above can be contacted at: The Bear Steps Office, St Alkmond's Square, Shrewsbury, SY1 1UH.

Telephone: 01743 356511

E mail: cpreshropshire.org.uk

DISTRICT GROUP REPRESENTATIVES

BRIDGNORTH:	Mr David Voysey 30 Daddlebrook Road Alveley Bridgnorth WV15 6PU	OSWESTRY:	Mr M Bullen (Chairman) Dovaston House Dovaston Kinnerley Oswestry SY10 8DS
NORTH SHROPSHIRE	Vacancy	SOUTH SHROPSHIRE:	Vacancy
TELFORD & WREKIN:	Vacancy	SHREWSBURY & ATCHAM:	Mr Roger Carlyle (Chairman) Bradgate Cardeston Ford Shrewsbury SY5 9NJ

*The Newsletter has been produced at the Bear Steps. The Editor is Janet Goose.. Suggestions for content, style, etcetera, would be welcome.
The views expressed in this Newsletter are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the Executive Committee of the
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