

### Editorial

The effects of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) on the planning system continue to reverberate. The unintended, but entirely predictable, consequences of the reforms which were designed to dispense with unwarranted ‘red tape’ and put decision making back where it belongs – with the local community – are shown for what they are: relatively a development free-for-all and a backward step for planning.

CPRE played a vital role in framing the nation’s planning system in the mid twentieth century, a system which is now under attack at every level. The NPPF requires local authorities (LAs) to demonstrate a five year land supply, but the methodology of the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessments (SHLAA) which LAs are required to produce is extremely questionable, and does not appear to be based on any planning criteria whatever. Shropshire’s Site Allocations and Management of Development (SAMDev) and Telford and Wrekin’s SHLAA include sites, regardless of landscape value, amenity value, or access difficulties and ‘deliverability’, merely because an individual or enterprise (and not necessarily the owner) considers it potential housing development land. The sites are then numbered, ‘assessed’ for allocation potential, and mapped on to the relevant area.

The resulting plan is a patchwork of sites, including potential ‘ribbon development’, visually intrusive, prominent and elevated sites, intrusive scarring of village boundaries and sites unrelated to existing settlements or suitable transport infrastructure, many of which would be dismissed as inappropriate according to generally accepted planning principles. This is already causing alarm in some areas of Telford and Wrekin where the SHLAA will soon be incorporated in the local development framework, ‘Shaping Places’. Shropshire Council have just approved their SAMDev document for submission to the planning inspectorate for examination in spite of some technical flaws.

Planning inevitably involves uncomfortable changes, but at its best will consider widely all the relevant issues, ie. from transport to provision of employment, social facilities, rather than treating the provision of future housing in

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View from Ironbridge ©Fred Howard

### “It’s Our Shropshire!”

#### CPRE Shropshire’s Big Draw



CPRE Shropshire has secured Big Lottery Awards for All grant funding to run four free community **Big Draw** events in different parts of Shropshire this Autumn. **The Big Draw** is a

nationwide event held every year and aims to promote drawing as a tool and means of expression. **The Big Draw** is the UK’s biggest free visual art programme, annually involving over 300,000 participants.



This year’s theme “**It’s Our World, a celebration of the environment and sustainability**” particularly fits our CPRE work here in Shropshire and we have teamed up with four major Shropshire venues who will be our hosts for our “**It’s our Shropshire!**” events. All will run from 10am until 4pm:

- Saturday Oct 11<sup>th</sup> – Piggs Playbarn, Apley Farm Shop, Shifnal**
- Saturday Oct 18<sup>th</sup> – Shropshire Wildlife Trust, Shrewsbury**
- Saturday Oct 25<sup>th</sup> – Acton Scott Historic Working Farm\*, Church Stretton**
- Sunday Nov 2<sup>nd</sup> – Fordhall Farm, Market Drayton**

*\*(normal entrance charges will apply)*

“**It’s Our Shropshire!**” will be led by two Shropshire artists, Angela Martin and Heather Prescott, and will be open to all—children and adults of all ages. Participants will be encouraged to visualise and express in varied art form including drawing with a variety of media and using collage, elements such as colour, mood, texture and shapes of the varied and unique landscape of Shropshire that are special to them.

Please help us promote these events by pinning the enclosed poster on your local noticeboard. **More info: Sarah Jameson/Judy Crabb (see back page for contacts).**

# The Brown versus the Green

Photo: Roger Carlyle



*Development on brownfield land on Abbey Foregate in Shrewsbury*

In planning terms a brownfield site (or simply brownfield land) is land previously used for industrial purposes or some commercial uses. The land may be contaminated by low concentrations of hazardous waste or pollution, but has the potential to be reused once it is cleaned up. Once this has happened such an area can become host to either business or retail use or alternatively residential development.

In the UK centuries of industrial use of lands which once formed the birthplace of the industrial revolution have left entire regions in a brownfield state. Of greater concern is that after 25 years of effort and billions of pounds expenditure surveys suggest only a small proportion of this land has been successfully cleaned up and reused. In rural counties such as Shropshire the problem is less severe.

With the pressure applied by central government to increase the rate of house building there is increased pressure to build on greenfield land. In general terms it is more profitable for developers to build on greenfield, or land which has not been previously developed; this is because development of brownfield land often involves more clearing and preparation work and may also involve costly processes to remove chemical pollution.

Planning policy is now defined by the NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework). Campaigners warned that the draft NPPF had appeared to propose removing the "brownfield first" policy which requires housing developers to use previously developed



*A typical brownfield site.*

sites before greenfield land. The draft NPPF had omitted the term "brownfield". However the draft NPPF was revised so that in the words of the planning minister Greg Clark, it "makes clear what was always implicit: that councils' policies must encourage brownfield sites to be brought back into use."

Until June 2010 garden land had been designated as 'previously developed' and therefore 'brownfield', this had led to an increase in the number of dwellings built on gardens in towns and cities. However, this decision was reversed and gardens are now designated as greenfield sites – meaning that the presumption is now against their development rather than in favour. Shropshire Core Strategy Policy CS10 aims to achieve 60% of new house building on brownfield land, in recent years this target has been achieved.

- In 2012-13, 68% of housing completions were on brownfield land.

- In 2011-12, 61% of housing completions were on brownfield land.

Over the period 2006-11, 72% of housing completions were on brownfield land.

**Roger Carlyle**  
**CPRE Shropshire, Shrewsbury District**

CPRE National Office is attempting to highlight brownfield sites around the country suitable for development. The new digital campaign called **#WasteOfSpace**, launched in July and will run for six months. To take part, people are asked to nominate a brownfield site in their local area - for example an empty shop, disused post office, or abandoned factory - by tweeting or emailing photos which will be added to an interactive map online.

If you are aware of such a site locally, please send in a photograph of the site to Sarah Jameson, our Administrator, together with information on its location so that we can pass the information on to National Office (see back page for address details).

# Some personal observations on current local solar farm applications

Nationally by the end of 2013 there were 184 major solar PV operational sites in the UK. An additional 242 were, or are, under construction in 2014 and there are 98 more in the planning stage.

Developers seem to be rushing to complete new projects before the current subsidy reduction, planned for March 2015. In the few months I've been involved with planning applications in South Shropshire, I have objected to three plans for solar farms; two on adjoining hill tops near Neen Sollars (one of which has been withdrawn), leaving a 25 acre site with plans for over 16k panels on grade 3 arable land. Another larger one at Henley Farm, Caynham, involving 43 acres on four good pasture fields & 35k panels and the last at Acton Scott that will cover 55 acres of pasture on two fields and consist of over 33k panels.

In every case the villages affected are very small, all are in green, rolling & tranquil countryside, all consist of used agricultural hedged fields, two are close to the Shropshire Hills AONB and one is firmly inside the AONB boundary. In all three settlements villagers have complained of poor planning information, of not being told about the plans or of being misled by the landowners – or their agents.

I went to the public parish council meetings at Caynham and Acton Scott and spoke at both of them on behalf of CPRE. Agents were there to present the facts – as they saw them - and were often challenged as for accuracy and veracity. They are professionals and have the time, the money and the expertise to put their cases in a convincing manner. Sadly, this was seldom the case with villagers whose knowledge of planning was generally small and they rarely knew the means of objecting to these applications, other than by attending meetings and being passionate about localism and preserving their green landscapes.

These are all major development plans that for a minimum of 25 years will alter the land use from an agricultural to an industrial one. Apart from the industrial-sized panels (7' long) being positioned on ground-mounted long rows, there will be inverter cabins, sub-station buildings, CCTV and security fencing encircling the site. Access is invariably contentious as large HGVs and narrow country lanes make for problems during construction. And the whole appearance of solar farms does nothing for tourism.

The black panels will produce some glint and glare and will be a visible eyesore for many miles distance as all of them are on

land that slopes to the south, all of them have footpaths & bridleways on, or close to, the solar sites, and all of them have worried and angry residents who feel that localism will play no part in planning decisions.

The frustrating thing is that they may be right. The excellent CPRE policy guidance notes on solar energy have been shared with leading opponents of these three sites and give readers useful pointers for objections. Nevertheless, it takes a good deal of research and courage to be able to use the NPPF, Core Strategy, DPD planning principles and local plans effectively to counter the developers' arguments.

CPRE South Shropshire has made rural 'landscape' our main line of defence and I can think of little else that threatens our precious landscapes so dramatically and over such large areas. We ought to be able to draw some comfort from recent governmental changes of attitude and opinion: Eric Pickles stating that green energy need must not override local opinion; the new guideline on brownfield sites taking preference over greenfields; the House of Commons debate siding against the industrialisation of the countryside and the 'industrialised deserts' produced by huge solar farms, but the current crop of venture capitalists have linked up with greedy landowners and farmers' subsidies and they seem intent on continuing with these big money applications while these generous subsidies exist.

The biggest worry that I have is that we seem almost powerless to prevent this from happening in Shropshire. We have too few planning officers, too little County Council finance to risk challenging rich developers in the high court, too little *real* power given to the AONBs and their non-independent planning committees, and a government that has no long term energy policy but gets by with knee-jerk reactions and a limited knowledge of what makes our rural countryside tick.

The most encouraging thing I have noticed in trying to help villagers threatened by solar farms is their relief that someone from outside their village has taken the time and trouble to come to their meeting to offer them some planning advice. They seem to appreciate the CPRE, but I only wish we could do more!

**John Woolmer**  
**CPRE Shropshire**  
**South Shropshire District**



# A warm welcome to our new CPRE Shropshire Branch Treasurer, David Gwilliams!

We would like to introduce our new Treasurer, David Gwilliams. David officially took over from Phil Hibberd in the post of Treasurer for CPRE Shropshire at our AGM in March this year. David lives in Shrewsbury.

"I was born and bred in Madeley, Shropshire, and educated at Coalbrookdale High School and Wolverhampton Polytechnic. I moved around the country when I was an Accountant with A.R.C but I returned to settle in Shropshire 20 years ago. My wife and I are both keen walkers and enjoy the Shropshire country side in all seasons. Having recently retired I thought it a good time to help maintain our lovely County by joining CPRE Shropshire. Two areas I am keen to help preserve are our school playing fields and our hedgerows, both of which are important to our children's education. Apart from walking, I am a keen table tennis player and enjoy a game of golf and watching football."



CPRE Shropshire would like to thank Phil Hibberd very much indeed for looking after our accounts in recent years.



Late summer view from the Way for the Millennium towards Newport, Shropshire (Nigel Conner)

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isolation from the rest. The value of open land, green networks and other aspects of the landscape which have been reflected in distinct planning policies over many years, appear to be threatened by the indiscriminate nature of the SHLAA process, which has very little to do with planning, and a lot to do with opportunism.

**Nigel Conner**  
Newsletter Editor

## CPRE Shropshire: Contacts

### Officers

**President: Robin Thompson, CBE, DL**

#### Vice President

Selby Martin

01743 343784 / [selbymartin@btinternet.com](mailto:selbymartin@btinternet.com)

#### Chair

Sarah Bury DL / [sarah@millichope.com](mailto:sarah@millichope.com)

#### Co Vice Chairs

Keith Ridland / [keithridland@hotmail.com](mailto:keithridland@hotmail.com)

Judy Crabb / [Judy@bjf.org.uk](mailto:Judy@bjf.org.uk)

#### Membership Secretary/Administrator

Sarah Jameson

01547 528546 / [admin@cpreshropshire.org.uk](mailto:admin@cpreshropshire.org.uk)

#### Honorary Treasurer

David Gwilliams / [davidgwil@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:davidgwil@tiscali.co.uk)

**Web address:** [www.cpreshropshire.org.uk](http://www.cpreshropshire.org.uk)

#### National Office

The Campaign to Protect Rural England

Registered Office,

5-11 Lavington Street, London, SE1 0NZ

Tel: 020 7981 2800 / Fax: 020 7981 2899

Email: [info@cpre.org.uk](mailto:info@cpre.org.uk) / [www.cpre.org.uk](http://www.cpre.org.uk)

## CPRE Shropshire Districts

### Bridgnorth

Stella & David Voysey

01746 780356 / [david.voysey@jacd.co.uk](mailto:david.voysey@jacd.co.uk)

### North Shropshire (Vacancy)

### Oswestry

Mike Bullen / [hilarybullen1@gmail.com](mailto:hilarybullen1@gmail.com)

### Shrewsbury and Atcham

Judy Crabb / [Judy@bjf.org.uk](mailto:Judy@bjf.org.uk)

### South Shropshire

John Woolmer

01694 751245 / [johnwoolmer@fsmail.net](mailto:johnwoolmer@fsmail.net)

### Telford & Wrekin (& Newsletter Editor)

Nigel Conner / 01952 592224

[nigel.conner@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:nigel.conner@tiscali.co.uk)

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