

CPRE Kent AGM 2019

Talk by John Wotton, Chairman

Hilary has given you an idea of the campaigns we've run over the past year and the issues we've had to face. She's had to leave a lot out, as many of you will be aware! Our work is carried out by a relatively small band of people and I want to pay tribute to all of you for your dedication over the past year to the cause of protecting the landscape, character and built heritage of the Kent countryside. We achieve what we do through a dynamic and creative partnership between Hilary and the team in Charing: Paul, Julie, David and Vicky, and the members spread across the County. You all work immensely hard at trying to protect the Kent countryside, which we value so highly, whether by serving on the Board or committees, or helping with recruiting new members at shows, organising litter picks, arranging trips and liaising with other organisations. I'm immensely grateful to you for all that you do.

I've recently helped with the response to the Tunbridge Wells draft local plan. This has shown me both what we can achieve and the limits to our achievements. The district committee's discussions over the past two years gave us a good idea of the broad themes we wanted to major on. From the moment of publication of the draft, we were able to engage in public on the key issues and engage with the local community in Capel, who were unexpectedly faced with the prospect of a new town in their rural parish. Liz Akenhead, our district chair and Julie Davis worked out the most efficient division of labour and I must express a special word of admiration for them both for orchestrating the timely submission of a very impressive and comprehensive set of comments, most of which they wrote. The rest of the district committee, of course, contributed fully on their own areas and interests and, like our response to every other local plan, it was a major exercise

I am left, though, with the clear feeling that, we could have achieved more if we had greater resources. At least half the parishes in the borough, including Paddock Wood and Capel, the two bearing the brunt of development outside the urban area, are not represented on the district committee. We had no time to undertake any surveys or commission any expert evidence to support our comments. We had little time to publicise our work, or engage with concerned community groups, or with parish councils (though we did liaise closely with some of them). While we put forward positive ideas, for example on environmental impact and cleaner and more integrated transport, we weren't able to articulate a vision for how Tunbridge Wells could provide for genuine local housing need, let alone the artificially calculated Objectively Assessed Housing Need, with minimal harm to the countryside.

It's this relentless pressure of dealing with local plans and major proposed developments, trying to prevent bad things from happening, or moderating their impact, that prevents us looking at the wider picture. We would be ill-advised to row back on our campaigning against harmful development. If we stepped back, I believe that our core of support from members, supporters and anxious residents would start to crumble. What use or relevance are we, they would be entitled to ask? What's more, some of our most striking achievements, like Western Heights and Farthingloe and the Newington Air Quality appeal, have come from fighting bad developments. But, we should also be thinking about how we could make a wider contribution to the future of the Kent countryside.

To avoid being bound to a treadmill, making a lot of effort and getting nowhere, we've been thinking hard, since March, about what we want to achieve over the next three years. The result is the Forward Plan for CPRE Kent 2019-22, which was adopted by the Board last month. It's with the papers you've been given this morning and is the product of a series of open meetings, which provoked very stimulating and wide-ranging discussion among members. I'm very

grateful to all of you who participated, as well as to Christine Drury, for initiating the project and Hilary for driving it to this point.

You have told us that you want the Branch to:

1. Promote a positive vision for Kent;
2. Prevent harmful development;
3. Combat the climate emergency;
4. Promote environmentally sustainable land use; and
5. Promote sustainability and excellence in the design of new developments.

Now it's our task to achieve the aims we've set ourselves. *[Aim 1]* As a first step, we're going to prepare a checklist of minimum sustainability criteria for new development, bringing together best local practice. We're starting on that now and it will be a key building block in our Vision for Kent. We've discussed fighting harmful development *[Aim 2]* and we will talk later on about the climate emergency and how it must feature in our work *[Aim 3]*. Promoting environmentally sustainable land use *[Aim 4]* and promoting sustainability and excellence in design *[Aim 5]* will be informed by climate emergency considerations and form part of our Vision for Kent.

We'll work harder on building up our media presence and network of supporters and partner organisations and we'll try our hardest to have the staff and volunteer resources and funding we need to make all this possible. There is much more that I could say about the Forward Plan, but time is short and you'll be hearing from Crispin Truman shortly about National CPRE's new strategy for the coming years. As you would hope, the two documents complement each other well and I am sure we will be able to feed off each other's ideas.

We can be proud of what we've achieved this year and can look forward to the future with confidence, despite the remorseless assaults on the Kent countryside, which we see all around us. Thank you.