



# Minutes of the Annual General Meeting 2019

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE KENT BRANCH OF THE CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT RURAL ENGLAND (CHARITY NUMBER 1092012, COMPANY NUMBER 04335730) AND THE KENT BRANCH OF THE COUNCIL FOR THE PROTECTION OF RURAL ENGLAND (CHARITY NUMBER 286183) HELD ON NOVEMBER 22 2019 AT LENHAM COMMUNITY CENTRE**

## **1. Apologies for absence**

Both organisations were considered together. Sixty-seven members were present and seven members sent apologies.

## **2. Minutes of 2018 AGM**

The minutes of the annual general meeting held on November 9 2018 were presented and accepted unanimously.

## **3. Chairman's Welcome**

John Wotton, Chairman, welcomed all present, with particular mention of new CPRE Kent Patron Sir Robert Worcester and national chief executive Crispin Truman. Sadly, however, President Graham Clarke could not attend.

## **4. Annual report**

Hilary Newport, Director, told the meeting how humbling an experience it had been looking over the past year, CPRE Kent's 90th anniversary.

There had been a plethora of challenges, with the four principal themes of the planning system, energy, infrastructure and climate change.

Starting with Local Plans and localism, she presented 'Exhibit A', or the National Planning Policy Framework, which neither provided the homes the country needed nor protected our natural environment.

With local authorities being set impossibly high five-year housing targets, CPRE Kent planners faced an enormous workload through the constant updating of Local Plans.

Increasingly, standalone 'garden towns' were being identified as the way to deliver housing.

In north Kent, Ebbsfleet Garden City had seen almost nothing built during the first 10 years of the project, although housing was now going up. This was a well-connected brownfield development with good transport links.

In the south of the county, however, a less attractive scheme was Otterpool Park,

where 10,000 homes (over and above the district's Objectively Assessed Need) were targeted for a greenfield site in an area with poor water availability. Elsewhere in Kent, Swale Borough Council was looking for potential garden-town sites; Maidstone Borough Council was promoting Lenham Heath, complete with a new motorway link and train station; Tunbridge Wells Borough Council was targeting Tudeley and East Capel for thousands of houses; and in Canterbury Mountfield Park would add further congestion to an already stressed area. Back in Maidstone, things seemed to have gone quiet in relation to Binberry Park, which, although on the plus side included a park-and-ride, was off-Local Plan and speculative.

Concerning energy, the proposed Cleve Hill solar farm was the main issue. CPRE Kent supports renewables, but this is vast industrialisation on a green, open site. It is stated to have no subsidies and to be reliant on 'Innovate' [CHECK] energy storage.

The panels would be on an east-west axis and 3.9 metres high, about four times the traditional height.

Elsewhere, there was a victory over the idiocy of attempting to fast-track planning in relation to fracking applications through Permitted Development Rights, which had been intended more for such things as conservatories. Thanks were due to National Office in this matter.

Turning to transport, it was accepted that something needed to be done at the Dartford Crossing, where there was traffic congestion and local people had relatively short life expectancy.

However, the fact that the Department for Transport was pushing for a Lower Thames Crossing carrying only road-borne traffic with no rail link was shocking. The crossing was not now about tackling congestion, which would only see a 20 per cent reduction anyway. Rather, it was seen as the key to unlocking growth potential in the Thames corridor, which was being targeted for an additional million homes over and above current levels.

In Canterbury, meanwhile, the proposed extension to the Wincheap Park & Ride would still need a vehicle to get to it.

A significant victory had been achieved in the Court of Appeal in relation to Pond Farm, Newington, stressing the importance of air quality in planning decisions. Thanks were due to the efforts of Richard Knox-Johnston in this case, which had seen the rejection of the bid by Gladman Developments to overturn the refusal of permission to build up to 330 homes and an 'Extra Care' facility at the site.

Turning to air transport, Heathrow was grumbling along, while Gatwick was pushing ahead with its own, slightly disingenuous, plans.

The Director concluded by saying that, while there were some things to which we had to object, we accepted that change had to happen. However, planning and development could not simply be a race to greater profits.

The Chairman thanked the Director and spoke of the creative and dynamic partnership between CPRE Kent staff and members, who were immensely grateful for all that was done by the staff.

The Chairman then referred to some broad themes.

A comprehensive set of comments had been made to the Tunbridge Wells Local Plan submission – thanks were due to Julie Davis and Liz Akenhead. The two main parishes were not represented on the committee – we could have done with greater resource. We were unable to provide a vision for Tunbridge Wells's future.

Some of our best moments, such as Farthingloe and Pond Farm, had come from fighting bad development, but we needed to do more.

CPRE Kent's Forward Plan had been adopted in October and reflected what members wanted: promoting a positive vision for Kent; preventing harmful development; combating the climate emergency; promoting environmentally sustainable land use; and promoting sustainability and excellence in the design of new developments.

## **5. Treasurer's Report**

Treasurer Michael Moore explained the accounts [see attached document].

The sale of Denton Wood at Hawkinge had produced a profit of £58,835. The site was highly covenanted and some land had been kept to ensure those covenants were upheld.

The sale meant that a £50,000 capital transfer for running costs was not made this year from the Ivor Read designated fund.

Graham Horner asked why there had been a drop in charitable expenditure.

The Treasurer replied that this was due to the legal costs in 2018 in relation to Farthingloe.

He said that last year, quite rightly, the level of cash reserves had been questioned.

The decision had been made to move a further £250,000 into the investment portfolio.

Another questioner from the floor asked whether, given the revaluation and the £58,835 from the Denton Wood sale, could CPRE Kent increase expenditure on professional planning advice.

Member Peter Whitestone asked whether we could settle on one name (Council or Campaign?).

The Treasurer replied that we had been a charitable trust and had been advised, to protect legacies, to keep the old charity, although it was dormant. We therefore needed to record an AGM.

Susan Pittman proposed, and Amanda Cottrell seconded, that the annual report and accounts be accepted. This was agreed unanimously.

## **6. Election of Honorary Officers**

The Chairman took the election of nominations.

**6.1 President:** Graham Clarke was approved unanimously on a show of hands.

**6.2 Vice Presidents:** Amanda Cottrell, Tracey Crouch, Damian Green, Richard Knox-Johnston and Sir Robert Worcester were approved unanimously on a show of hands following a proposal by Nigel Britten and seconding by Paul Smallwood. Helen Whately could not continue as a vice president due to her ministerial appointment in government.

## **7. Election of Members of the Board**

**7.1 Chairman:** John Wotton stood down as chairman. With no one else standing, Paul Smallwood proposed, and Bob Baxter seconded, that John Wotton be elected for the year ahead. This was approved unanimously.

**7.2 Vice Chairman:** Derek Wanstall was standing down as vice chairman. It was hoped this role would be filled next year.

**7.3 Treasurer:** Graham Horner proposed, and Gary Thomas seconded, that Michael Moore be re-elected as treasurer. This was approved unanimously.

**7.4 Treasurer:** Susan Pittman proposed, and Amanda Cottrell seconded, the following as district committee and specialist group members: Peter Bandon, Val Loseby, David Morrish, Henny Shotter, Gary Thomas and Graham Warren. All were approved unanimously.

Paul Small proposed, and Nigel Britten seconded, the following as general members: Richard King and David Wood. Both were approved unanimously.

Bob Baxter proposed, and Christine Drury seconded, that Nigel Britten return to the board. This was approved unanimously.

**7.5: New nominations:** Sir Robert Worcester was approved as patron unanimously on a show of hands. Christine Drury proposed, and Paul Smallwood seconded, that Derek Wanstall be elected as a vice president. This was accepted unanimously.

**8. Auditors:** Bob Baxter proposed, and Paul Smallwood seconded, the appointment of MHA Macintyre Hudson as auditors. This was approved unanimously.

## **9. Questions from the floor**

Susan Pittman asked why such as things as a horrendous Sevenoaks Local Plan had not been reflected in membership growth.

The Chairman replied that Kent was still doing well in comparison with other branches but that it was now harder to get commitment from people and we needed to come to terms with that.

Felicity Simpson suggested that group membership could be a way forward, with more organisations joining up. Further, perhaps we should put climate change further up the agenda as this would help cover urban and suburban areas.

The Director replied that group membership did exist but needed revisiting as it cost an individual as much to join CPRE as it did a parish.

Crispin Truman would deal with the issue of urban membership later.

## **10. CPRE chief executive Crispin Truman: CPRE and the Future for our Countryside**

CT opened by saying CPRE was the cutting edge of the countryside debate, with Kent being the largest and heaviest hitter.

Key was the local network working with National Office, which added legitimacy and credibility to our case.

Living in Hackney, he was glad urban dwellers had been mentioned. Reconnecting people with the countryside was part of what we did. For him, a special treat, for example on his birthday, was a visit to the Green Belt in Kent, while he would be holidaying in Broadstairs at Christmas.

Travelling through the county by high-speed rail, it could quickly be seen how much brownfield land was under-utilised as well as the amazing rural idyll that Kent still was. There was so much to celebrate.

As for CPRE, after more than 90 years since its inception, when there was already an increasing fear of urban sprawl, it was clear the organisation needed reviewing.

CPRE was not about stopping development but promoting the right development. It had a track record of success, such as its involvement in the Town and Country Planning Act 1947, the Best Kept Village competition (1953) and the establishment of Green Belts (1955).

However, there was a long-term decline in membership, coupled with a more overall sense of losing control, with people deprived of having a say in what amounted to a democratic deficit.

CPRE was too often perceived as a negative organisation and of course 'nobody wants to be in the room with an angry person'. We were, though, needed now more than ever.

The CPRE review, entitled the Purpose Project, was a very thorough, very consultative process. CPRE was a broad church but strong with a shared view holding us together.

The Purpose Project revealed the need for us to be viewed as more positive, solution-based and people-centred. We were diffuse so needed to be more holistic and partnership-based.

The vision (what we wanted to achieve) was a beautiful and thriving countryside that enriched all our lives.

The mission was to promote, enhance and protect a thriving countryside (a slight tweak had moved 'protect' to third position in that list).

The new strategic plan would cover the period 2020-26 and be reviewed halfway through.

**Important themes were:**

**Connect people and countryside:** not enough were coming over to CPRE despite seeing the threats.

**Promote rural life:** there was not a shared positive vision for rural life in the 21st century.

**Empower communities:** could we build more partnerships locally?

**Grow our own capacity:** diversify ways people could get involved with us, with particular focus on the young. If we were seen more positively and as offering solutions, we were strengthened.

**Increase support to network:** this was about strengthening local branches. There would be a new volunteering team, policies, procedures and training, along with a new intranet, website and contact database. Collaboration and shared services would be developed, with an emphasis on supporting vulnerable branches. Project partnerships and a strategic collaboration fund would be set up.

Key points regarding fundraising and membership were:

- i. There had been over-reliance on legacies – we now needed to invest wisely
- ii. The new brand would provide the foundation for what we did
- iii. There would be increased giving to all levels of CPRE
- iv. Membership would be at the heart of everything
- v. Increased sharing of costs and income

The brand would be rolled out in 2020, along with the new website, which would be more integrated and live from Q1. Such things as brand guidelines and templates were now available and there was a resource space for images. Brand training would be available.

The review has been completed, but campaigning has still been going on. At the heart of the Purpose Project has been the equipping of CPRE to ensure the countryside is not forgotten from the agenda – we can build a much bigger voice for our cause.

Speakers from the floor then made contributions. One asked how CPRE could engage more with schools. CT replied that this issue was complicated but important and we would indeed do that. We would try to get rural matters on to the National Curriculum.

Another member suggested target colleges and universities for potential support, especially the early part of term when there was an open forum. Within a local context, there were groups such as Rotary and Round Table.

CT said a new volunteer management system was being developed, while JW added that we did in fact work with the University of Kent.

Patron Sir Robert Worcester then said we needed to work with partners, an example being the Kent Environment Strategy Champions project (we were the first county to do this).

There was a new leader at County Hall, he said, and we should do all we could to engage with the authority.

Finally, Sir Robert said he would do his best as Patron to help protect the countryside. He was warmly applauded.

Returning to attracting young people to CPRE, a member told of having spoken at a school on the problem of littering and being encouraged by the children being so engaged. We needed more training for volunteers, the speaker said.

Barrie Gore, former Canterbury chairman, warned how Boundary Commission changes sometimes resulted in new sites becoming vulnerable to the threat of development through alterations in rural parish wards where they were reduced in size or lost altogether as they were merged with more urban wards.

He added that he believed that the NPFF should offer greater protection to cathedral cities and historic towns. In that regard, he wondered if CPRE magazine *Countryside Voice* would like a piece on the threats to Canterbury.

CT suggested BG emailed national office about Canterbury while confirming that CPRE did view heritage as important and he would feed back his observations.

JW pointed out that CPRE Kent had a heritage section, the Historic Buildings Committee, and that we would happily share our expertise with other branches.

## **11. CPRE Kent Vice President Richard Knox-Johnston: The Climate Change Challenge**

RK-J told how a climate change forum had been set up in Kent in 2008, with a conference held subsequently. In December of that year, the branch published *Tomorrow's Kent: The impacts of climate change on Kent and its countryside*.

The subject had gone off the county council's agenda but, with climate change happening faster now than ever before, it was back on it.

This year had seen the establishment of a CPRE working group on climate change, and RK-J detailed the current situation in terms of issues, solutions and policies [see attached document].

Referring specifically to Kent, he noted that a big chunk of the Hoo peninsula was likely to disappear under water, along with half of Sheppey, if current rates of sea-level rise continued. This raised the question of whether Thames corridor growth proposals would ever get off the ground.

In addition, the site of the proposed Cleve Hill solar farm would be also be liable to flooding – with the damaging effect of water on batteries.

Sadly, there was not time for discussion from the floor, but all looked forward to talking over lunch.

## **12. Close followed by lunch**