



The countryside charity
Avon and Bristol

Newsletter 2023

Newsletter | Autumn 2023



CPRE Avon and Bristol The Autumn Newsletter

Hello everyone, after a long hiatus our CPRE Avon and Bristol Newsletter is back!

The days growing shorter, the leaves are starting to turn, and there is a nip in the air. The lovely feeling of autumn is settling in, for our Hedgerow Hero team that means the start of hedge laying season for the rest of us it means getting down to work after the long summer.

CPRE Avon and Bristol has undergone a lot of change in the past year. In May we welcomed a new director Mary- Jane Wilshire to the team. Then in June two new staff members were recruited, Louise van der Leeden who will be heading up communications for the charity and Sarah Sawyer who will help Sonia Parsons with our successful Hedgerow Heroes project. The expansion of the CPRE Avon and Bristol charity team means we have more hands working on those projects that are important.

We will be able to more easily recruit new members, attend important local events, create exciting new campaigns, as well as helping members with planning and local issues.

We know we can't do it alone. We believe that everyone can participate in ensuring the countryside continues to provide us with the beautiful landscapes, important biodiversity, ways of life and emotional and physical wellbeing. This next year, we will be developing partnerships with local campaign groups and governing authorities, enabling collaboration, mobilising community support and campaigning for the issues we care about from a rounded perspective.

Meet the new team

We are very happy to present the new team working hard for CPRE Avon and Bristol. We have been fortunate to find office space in the co working space Engine Shed, where we now run operations for the charity.

Sonia Parsons Hedgerow Heroes, Project Coordinator



Sonia grew up in the countryside on a dairy farm in Dorset. She studied Zoology at the University of Reading and has been working in conservation for the past 4 years.

“Hedgerows are an underrated asset of the countryside that make our landscape unique and are the home for so many important and declining species of birds, insects and mammals. Conserving and improving the health of hedgerows we already have is just as important as planting new ones.”

Sarah Sawyer, Hedgerow Heroes Project Coordinator



Sarah has always loved the countryside and she spent her childhood, climbing trees, building dens and immersed in the woodland and farmland growing up in the Forest of Dean. She spent 13 years with the Wye Valley AONB, running a wide range of projects that created landscape enhancement, nature recovery and promoted greater public understanding of the Wye Valley’s unique characteristics. More recently she worked for Natural England as Team leader of Landscape, Heritage and Geodiversity within Strategy and Government Advice.

“In 2023 – 24 we will enable and support landowners to restore and maintain hedgerows, making a positive contribution to Nature Recovery Targets. I am looking forward to playing my part to achieve our shared goals”

Louise van der Leeden, Information and Communications Officer



Louise has a huge passion nature and the environment. She has spent many years travelling and working on conservation projects around the world. She has BSC honours degree in Integrated Wildlife Conservation from UWE in Bristol and has a specialism in Science Communication.

“Communication is a vital part of all effective conservation work, I am so excited to be part of this talented team supporting their work through communication”

Mary Jane Wilshire, Director



Mary-Jane Wilshire has a life long connection to the Countryside having grown up on a hill farm in rural Wales between the towns of Aberystwyth and Machynlleth. Mary-Jane has a passion for supporting people to come together to make positive changes in their community and local environment. She believes that if we are serious about nature recovery, climate resilience and health inclusion, we must start in the places where we live, work and enjoy.

She worked for Natural Resource Wales, Groundwork, Learning Through Landscapes, The Royal Town Planning Institute and Bristol City Council. The common thread across her work is bringing communities and professionals together to advocate for fairer more sustainable outcomes for the places we care about.

“I am very excited about working with the highly skilled volunteer networks in CPRE Avon and Bristol to bring the national CPRE campaign to the local level, while also taking strong action on local issues that are affecting our Countryside in West of England”

Hedgerow Heroes

Hedgerow Heroes: Back for a second year

Hedgerows are vital corridors of the countryside, enabling wildlife to move safely between suitable habitats. They provide shelter for livestock, reduce soil erosion and help sustain pollinator communities. They are important for carbon capture and form a physical barrier to reduce pollution. Hedgerows provide essential refuge and movement corridors for a variety of animals, including declining species of birds, hedgehogs and dormice

CPRE has a proud track-record of campaigning to protect and restore hedgerows. We began our campaign for hedgerow protection in the 1970s and welcomed the introduction of the Hedgerows Regulations in 1997, which protects many countryside hedgerows.

In 2021, CPRE successfully campaigned the government to commit to 40% more hedgerows by 2050. Alongside lobbying, CPRE launched the 'Hedgerow Heroes' project to improve hedgerows over several CPRE branches and raise public awareness of the ecological importance of hedgerows. CPRE Avon and Bristol joined the Hedgerow Heroes project in 2022.

Phase 1

From June 2022-23 CPRE Avon and Bristol ran our first phase of Hedgerow Heroes. We trained up a fantastic team of volunteers, almost all new to hedge laying. They included students/graduates looking to gain skills, retirees, some working and using flexi-leave to take part, and others unable to work but looking to use their time to benefit the environment. The project resulted in over 1km of hedgerow restoration.

We worked closely with South Gloucestershire Council to make wildlife-friendly changes to their current hedgerow management procedure. This has included less frequent and higher trimming of the tops of hedgerows where it is safe to do so, allowing blossom and berries to form on the new growth. The bases will be flailed less where possible to provide coverage for insects and hedgehogs, and hedgerows will be cut as late in winter as possible to provide birds with overwinter feeding.

'The project has ensured this heritage skill is visible and present within the community and valued by the council and partners. We have increased understanding, awareness and won over hearts and minds within the council grounds team. The tractor drivers feel involved.'

-Sally Pattison, South Gloucestershire Council Biodiversity Officer '



Regrowth from last year's hedge laying at Yate Common

Phase 2:

In July this year, we were delighted to be granted a second year of funding to continue our Hedgerow Heroes project. Whilst continuing to improve hedgerows in South Gloucestershire, we have expanded the project into Bath and North East Somerset, looking at both council-owned and private hedgerows for restoration. We will be working closely with local authorities to help them achieve their nature recovery and climate action ambitions.

We aim to plant/restore a further 1.4km hedgerow with local volunteers. We will work with landowners to provide guidance and training on how best to manage hedgerows for wildlife, and influence hedgerow management procedures to achieve best practice. We also want to increase public awareness of the ecological benefits of healthy hedgerows, by providing information through a variety of free events and school engagement activities.

Public Events

Our programme to engage the public with hedgerows is ongoing, we are running bat safari walks, foraging experiences, guided walks and much more. To keep abreast of our upcoming activities, take a look at the Events page on our website.

Sites for Improvement

Following liaison with local authorities and other landowners, sites for improvement have been established in both counties. We have prioritised sites that bring optimum benefit to nature recovery plans, and those with best potential for community engagement.

Bath & North East Somerset

Archery Field- Hedgelaying to support Biodiversity Net Gain scheme.

Alexandra Park- Supplementary planting in collaboration with YourPark and Friends Of group.

Roundhill Park- Extending current hedge in this site of Nature Conservation importance.

Staddlestones- Laying elm hedgerow in collaboration with Somer Valley Rediscovered.

Waterside Valley (Parish council owned)- Laying over-mature hedge.

The Community Farm (Private owned non-profit farm in Chew Valley)- Laying hedgerow bordering farmland, site borders Mendip AONB.

South Gloucestershire

Yate Common- Continuing hedgelaying along cycle path.

Warmley Forest Park- Coppicing and bulb planting to increase biodiversity of woodland borders.

Long Down Avenue, Stoke Gifford- Laying hedgerow in proximity to ancient woodland in Stoke Park.

Wickwar Playing Fields (Community owned)- Laying hedgerow bordering allotments.

Hilary's Field, Hawkesbury (Private rewilded farmland)- Laying over-mature hedgerow, site provides a potential wildlife corridor to Lower Woods (SSSI) where dormice are present.

Outreach is ongoing to locate further hedgerow planting sites.

Rooftop Renewables the future of solar energy generation?

Solar farms continue to hit the headlines, especially in local media. At CPRE we are repeatedly asked for help in challenging a solar proposal that would be an industrial scale intrusion into the landscape. But climate breakdown poses the biggest threat to our countryside, and we need renewable energy. How can the two be reconciled? The answer might have been above us all along.

A major new CPRE report has found that over half the solar panels needed to hit national net zero targets could be fitted on rooftops and in car parks.

As we know, too often developers come into a rural areas to impose a plan that suits their priorities, which are usually profits, resulting in industrial scale renewables on ecologically important Greenfield sites. This can lead to objections to large solar farm applications, local opposition to renewable energy schemes and failures to go ahead, which is ultimately detrimental to net zero targets. But it doesn't have to be this way!

Research, by the [UCL Energy Institute](#), for CPRE, shows that decarbonising the national energy grid requires far less land than feared. Installing solar panels on existing buildings and car parks would enjoy near-universal public support and help minimise objections to large solar farms in the countryside, the research finds. It also reveals that the potential of brownfield sites to generate renewable energy is dramatically underused.

This is why CPRE Avon and Bristol is teaming up with, Bristol Energy COP, The Centre for Sustainable Energy and local authorities to provide a one off Rooftop Renewable energy workshop. With help from ex CPRE ... Andrew Tickle, we will use this workshop to explore the opportunities and barriers to develop renewable energy and the full capacity of the underutilised rooftop. The workshop will include real life knowledge from the combined authority

The Countryside Next door: Enhancing our Green Belt for a fairer greener future

The Green Belt surrounding many of our towns and cities is a vital. It is a living solution to many of the issues we face today. From the food we eat to the homes we live in, the paths we wander to the nature we cherish, this countryside next door provides so many of us with health and happiness, and has the potential to give so much more.

We want the Green Belt – which represents 720 km² around Bristol and Bath– to be seen and valued for what it is: a living network for our rural communities, an essential solution to the climate and nature crises, and an irreplaceable space where thousands of people, can enjoy fresh air and the great outdoors.

We need our planning system to be capable of protecting the GB to ensure the health, housing, nature recovery and climate crisis is considered and addressed.

To ensure that the countryside next door lives up to all that it can be, we are focussing on the following areas :

1. Enabling local communities to have a stronger voice in the reformed planning system, local authority plan-making and development control decisions. Our district groups and volunteers work tirelessly identifying inappropriate development and advocating for fairer planning process and decisions . In the context of increased housing targets and proposed legislation to deregulate the planning process, their burden is getting even greater.

2. Protecting farmland on Greenbelt and supporting increased take-up of the environmental land management grants to meet the woodland creation and wetland habitat conservation targets set out in the West of England nature recovery plan.

3. Increase public access to the Green Belt by working in partnership with public health and social justice groups to campaign for the protection and enhancement of PROW and green space inclusion projects.

4. Require developers to use suitable urban brownfield sites before greenfield sites in the Green Belt and encourage local authorities to set policies prioritising urban regeneration

5. Support rural communities within the Green Belt where they wish to use small ‘rural exception sites’ to deliver affordable and social housing on the edge of their villages, in order to meet local needs.

The time to act on this is now as the levelling Up Bill is with the House of Lords at Report Stage. The proposed legislation contained in the bill is subject to significant criticism and controversy as it undermines democracy and local control in the Planning System which will expose our precious Green Belt to increased development pressure.

Further we are gearing up for a general election in 2024, it is vital that we get ready to influence the political manifesto by using sound research evidence, building alliances, mobilising grass root support and exerting influence on key decision makers.

Get Involved

We would love to hear from you. We never want to feel that we are not giving the right support to our members. As part of our changes to our communications work we want to create a central hub for district groups, members and supporters to collaborate and share the work they have been doing.

Have you been working on a project, campaign or planning bid that you would like to share with rest of us?

Do you have ideas for an article for us to publish on the website?

Are there specific issues you think we should be focusing on?

Get in touch:
louise.vanderleeden@cpreavonandbristol.org.uk

Want to volunteer with Hedgerow Heroes?

We always welcome new volunteers. As a volunteer you will learn practical hedge laying and hedgerow management skills, get outdoors and have some fun!

Email: Sonia@cpreavonandbristol.org.uk for more information.

Upcoming Events:

This year we have the CEO of CPRE National Roger Mortlock as guest speaker at our AGM. Do you want to learn more about CPRE as a charity? It is a great opportunity to ask any questions you may have. It is also a chance to meet the knew team and show your support to CPRE Avon and Bristol.

The AGM will be held on 20th of October 2023. 12-2pm Engine Shed, Station Approach, Bristol, BS1 6QH

To secure your place please visit:
<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/cpre-avon-and-bristol-2023-agm-tickets-715980857017?aff=ebdsoporgprofile>

or search “Eventbrite CPRE Avon and Bristol AGM 2023”

For more CPRE Avon and Bristol events such as foraging walks, nature festivals and educational workshops visit our events page at [CPREavonandbristol/events](https://www.cpreavonandbristol.org.uk/events).



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