



CPRE Avon and Bristol Newsletter

20th March, 2024

Hello from the Director

I am delighted to introduce our CPRE Avon and Bristol newsletter for December to March. In the last few months, volunteers and staff alike have been busy running campaigns, connecting with communities and carrying out practical action on the ground. The next few pages are packed full of how CPRE Avon and Bristol use our passion, resources and networks to protect the countryside, now and for future generations.

We kick off with an update on how our hedgerow restoration project is going. Hedgerows Heroes is bringing life back to incredibly important habitat networks. The Archery Field case study is just one window into how reviving the traditional craft of hedgelaying is ensuring these iconic farmland features support wildlife and people going forward.

At CPRE, we understand the vital role the planning system plays in determining the future of the countryside. Our volunteer district groups have been working harder than ever following the developments of the emerging Local Plans in North Somerset, BANES, Bristol, and South Gloucestershire. Our experienced and

knowledgeable group of volunteers have scrutinised these plans that set out policy for land use and development, and used the consultation opportunity to ensure the CPRE values and position is heard. I hope you too support the points we made. Read on for a summary on page [6](#).

This newsletter also features an overview of the fantastic Rooftop Renewable and Community Energy Visioning workshop we held in February at the Engine Shed in Bristol. Community representatives, CPRE members, community energy projects as well as Combined and Local Authority energy advisors all got together to discuss collective action for energy transitioning. Read all about it on page [5](#). The thing I was most struck by was the drive and enthusiasm of communities across the West of England, who are passionate about grassroots action for carbon zero. But don't worry if you missed it, a full transcript is available [here](#).

Thanks as ever for your support. Without you none of this would be possible. Stay in touch!

Mary-Jane Wilshire
Director, CPRE Avon and Bristol

Hedgerow Heroes

In July last year, we were delighted to be granted a second year of funding to continue our Hedgerow Heroes project. Whilst continuing our work 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.

This year we will be working closely with local authorities to help them achieve their nature recovery and climate action ambitions through our hedgerow restoration projects and training courses.

Archery Field Project

Restoring 200 metres of hedgerow

One of our biggest commitments for Hedgerow Heroes in Bath this Winter was the hedge restoration work at Archery Field in Weston Village, owned and managed by Bath and North East Somerset Council (BANES). After agreeing and identifying an action plan with the Council Team, we set about informing the local community about the importance of the restoration and recruiting a willing team to help.

The hedge was in need of some serious restoration. Vigorous bramble and ivy coupled with poor growth had created a decline in hedge health and biodiversity value. The Council had earmarked the hedge for laying, and after surveying the hedge, the Hedgerow Heroes team agreed to undertake the work and began recruiting a team of volunteers to help. We held hedgerow awareness days in October, including a walk led by local wildlife expert Steve England, and a tool sharpening course led by Beth Tilston. Both took place on location.

The restoration commenced in late October with a hedgelaying training day - led by Somerset based hedgelaying expert Mike Reed.

The local volunteers learned to use traditional tools- billhook and axe, implementing newly acquired skills to cut into the living wood at the base of the hedge until they could lay the stem at a 45-degree angle. Once a stem is 'laid' it is termed a 'plasher'- a local Somerset hedgelaying term. Each region of the country has a unique style of hedgelaying and associated terminology.



Mike Reed demonstrating how to put points on hazel stakes, used to support a laid hedge

Hedgelaying is part of a rich vein of the British countryside cultural heritage which Hedgerow Heroes aims to share and promote with new audiences. Working in this way, the volunteers were able to lay each stem and pin it in position with hazel stakes cut from a nearby coppice. Forming a sturdy boundary of equal height and matching angle of 'plasher', we created a pleasing hedgerow pattern. Hedgelaying has great value for wildlife as it encourages dense regrowth and improved connectivity of habitat.

As this hedge showed signs of ash die back and diseased wood, we needed to remove wood and introduce new native hedge species as 'whips' -1-year-old plants, to fill out the hedge. In time this restoration will improve the biodiversity value of the hedge, supporting invertebrates, mammals and birds, with food, shelter and homes, while connecting the park with the wider landscape. Thus, providing an integrated corridor for wildlife movement.

We would like to give a special thank you to the 57 volunteers who joined us across the 9 days of activity at Archery Field. Thank you also to local Councillors and BANES Council team who visited and supported the project and promoted volunteer opportunities. In total we were able to deliver two hedgelaying courses, one tool sharpening course, and managed to lay 200 metres of hedge, with a further 114 metres of hedge gapped up.

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

Sites for Improvement

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



CPRE Volunteers Hedgelaying
at Archery Field, South Gloucestershire

Public Events

Our programme to engage the public with hedgerows is ongoing, including hedgerow foraging walks, guided bat walks, hedge laying workshops and much more.

To keep up to date with our upcoming activities, take a look at the [Events page on our website](#).

Upcoming:

- Hedgerow Plug Planting at Church Road, Yate, BS37 5BH

Find tickets [here](#)

A Brief History of Hedgerows

The Chair of Avon and Bristol is a passionate advocate on behalf of hedgerows and the vital part they play in our countryside. Here she celebrates the culture of hedgerows.

It could be said that the heritage of our countryside is held in our hedgerows.

Evidence of hedgerow boundaries has been found from the Bronze Age but as far back as the Middle Ages (AD 1250-1450) strips of land were cleared for farming and enclosed by earthen banks; shrubs and trees; stone walls or a combination of all.

Parliamentary Enclosure Acts further transformed huge swathes of rural Britain between 1750 and 1850 and this continued up until the First World War.

When cut or browsed by livestock the trees surrounding the enclosures became dense and vigorous, providing effective barriers around fields and offering shelter, food and nesting sites for birds, insects and small mammals; they became hedgerows.

Hedgerows are culturally, socially and economically valuable and well managed hedgerows are ecologically important. However, too many of these precious rural assets are in poor condition. Hedgerows that could support wildlife; provide an income for land-workers and mitigate against climate change, are at risk. CPRE Avon and Bristol is playing its part in restoring the West Country hedgerow network and protecting these farmland icons for future generations of people and wildlife. Too many landowners, influenced by past farming policy, cut their hedgerows annually. This is poor management and if it persists, such hedges will ultimately perish, with all the loss of biodiversity that they can provide.

“CPRE Avon and Bristol works to support landowners to regenerate their land by managing hedgerows in poor condition and planting new ones.”

If, on the other hand, hedgerows are sympathetically managed and cut only every second or third year this makes a huge difference. Hawthorn, for instance, a common woody shrub of the hedgerow, flowers only on second year growth so if it is cut annually no flowers will appear.

If flowers are allowed to grow, bees and other pollinators will do their work and berries will appear in the Autumn, a great harvest for birds and small mammals. Hazel is also a tree that grows well in a hedgerow and produces nuts for wildlife each year.

CPRE Avon and Bristol works to support landowners to regenerate their land by managing hedgerows in poor condition and planting new ones.



Volunteers learning how to build a hedgerow

Healthy, abundant hedgerows that are well managed will fruit and flower. They will be more than 2 metres tall at least 2-3 metres wide. They are often one of few places on farmland where birds can find nesting sites, shelter from storms and shade themselves in hot, dry periods. Larger hedges provide more complex habitat and more animals can make use of them. Birds will find their place in a thick, taller and wider hedgerow - goldfinches tend to nest at the top of hedgerows whilst dunnocks seek the dense middle areas where they can hide away from predators. Robins and blackbirds use hedgerows for food, shelter and nesting too.

So, let's celebrate these marvels of our countryside and nurture them for the benefit of future generations of people and wildlife.

Sarah Pitt March 2024
Chair, CPRE Avon and Bristol



Goldfinch on hedgerow branch

Powering Communities with Renewables

CPRE Rooftop Solar Campaign

At CPRE Avon and Bristol we are passionate about securing our energy needs for the future, in a way that works for communities and ensures the protection of our treasured green spaces.

CPRE are calling for more solar energy to be generated from solar panels on the rooftops of industrial buildings, car parks, and new build homes

A report from the UCL Energy Institute found that over half the solar panels needed to hit national net zero targets could be on rooftops. This would cut carbon emissions and slash household energy bills, whilst protecting our countryside.

Read more about the UCL Energy Institute report [here](#).



Solar panels on roof

CPRE are working with Planning Consultant, Andy Tickle, to develop a programme for local communities to implement renewables in their area, on their terms. It's called the Community Energy Visioning (CEV) process.

Having piloted the scheme in North Yorkshire, we are excited to announce that CPRE Avon and Bristol will be looking to deliver this programme to communities in the West of England, and a bid is in the pipeline to the National Lottery Climate Action Fund to facilitate this.

Our Workshop

In February, we delivered a workshop to community groups, councillors, and CPRE members in the West of England to explain the CEV process and offer guidance to those in the process of developing a community energy scheme.

Andy Tickle facilitated the event, and our guest speakers were:

- Paul Miner, CPRE's Head of Policy and Planning
- Marion Britton, Regional Low Carbon Delivery Manager for The West of England Combined Authority (WECA)
- Will Houghton and Marianne Brown from Bristol Energy Cooperative

The workshop included presentations from speakers around the importance of transitioning to renewables, grant and funding opportunities, and the story of Bristol Energy Cooperative



Our workshop on Community Energy; February, 22nd

“As a councillor the amount of information you need to process and make sense of can be overwhelming. This event has really helped clear the fog on the opportunities out there for supporting community energy and rooftop solar”

-Councillor for Keynsham Town Council



Marion Britton, WECA

We would like to thank all those that were able to join us at the workshop. If you weren't able to attend but are interested in what we discussed, please see our report complete with a transcript of the presentations and summaries of the breakout groups [here](#).

The second half of the session was dedicated to allowing participants to work with the speakers in breakout groups to discuss their personal experience in community energy and any questions or concerns they needed answering.

This is just the beginning of our work with community-led renewable energy, and we are so excited to bring you more support in the coming year.

“I feel incredibly energised and inspired to go back to my community and get started in planning a community energy project. So glad I came.”

-South Bristol Climate Hub Member

Thank you to Quartet Community foundation who awarded us funds and made this project possible.



Bristol Local Plan Response

Local Plans

Local Plans, drawn up by Local Authorities, are complex documents that state a vision and objectives of the Authority up to 2040 and beyond on future land use; building development; transport, energy and green spaces. Local Plans go through a public consultation process. CPRE have responded to these plans in North Somerset; Bristol; Bath and North East Somerset and South Gloucestershire. Here are some key responses to the Bristol City Council Local Plan.

One of the primary concerns raised by us revolves around the housing targets outlined in the Plan. We are concerned that the desire to boost housing supply and to meet housing targets could result in excessively high densities to the detriment of new and existing residents, the overall character of the city and to the environment.

While acknowledging the importance of affordable housing, we felt it important to highlight the lack of emphasis on sustainable development and the overemphasis on housing over protection of our green spaces.

CPRE Avon and Bristol advocates for a sequential approach to development, prioritizing 'sustainable sites over green spaces within the city and the Green Belt surrounding its boundary. We stress the need for a broader vision beyond mere housing targets, considering the city's climate and ecological emergencies as declared by Bristol City Council. While supporting urban living and brownfield development, we want to emphasize the importance of preserving the character of the city and protecting green spaces, which play a crucial role in mitigating environmental impacts and fostering community well-being.

Regarding green spaces and wildlife conservation, CPRE Avon and Bristol welcomes initiatives to integrate green infrastructure features into new developments but calls for further discussion on mitigation policies to safeguard all aspects of the natural world.

CPRE Avon and Bristol believe the Green Belt and the city's green spaces are highly valued by local people as places for recreation and access to nature 'on the doorstep' both of which contribute to health and well-being and contribute to biodiversity.

The emphasis on urban living appears to be at odds with Policy DS10: The Green Belt which proposes the removal of two areas of Green Belt. CPRE Avon and Bristol objects to this removal. The Green Belt extends beyond the boundaries of Bristol City Council into neighbouring authorities. We believe it is of paramount importance that a wider co-ordinated approach to the maintenance of the Green Belt boundary is adopted with these authorities.

We urge Bristol's Local Plan to prioritize the preservation of green spaces, and address the city's climate and ecological emergencies more comprehensively. Consideration of the natural environment is essential to ensure that Bristol's development aligns with the long-term well-being of both residents and the environment.



Wrington, North Somerset

Bristol Local Plan

The consultation on the publication version of the Bristol local plan has now closed. The full report can be found online [here](#).

BANES Local Plan

This report consultation is open until 5pm, 8 April 2024. Find out more and submit your reviews [here](#).

North Somerset Local Plan

This Local Plan submitted its final version for review by the Secretary of State in August 2023. You can read the pre-submission plan [here](#).

South Gloucestershire Local Plan

The consultation for this plan closed on the 16th February 2024. You can check the plan's progress online [here](#).

Get Involved

We would love to hear from you.

Get in contact if you have concerns about the countryside in your area. We invite members to share their thoughts and comments on the Local Plans in Bristol; South Gloucestershire; North Somerset and BANES.

Volunteer with us

If you are interested in volunteering with us please register your interest at info@cpreavonandbristol.org.uk

For Hedgerow Heroes enquiries email Sonia at Sonia@cpreavonandbristol.org.uk

Community Energy

If you're interested in our Community Energy Visioning process, please find out more [here](#).

If you want to pursue the Community Energy Visioning process, and get our support with your community energy project, please get in touch at info@cpreavonandbristol.org.uk

Campaigns

CPRE has launched a petition calling on the government to unleash the potential of rooftop solar. [Sign the Rooftop Solar Petition](#)

Events

We are interested in talking to CPRE Members who would consider volunteering to help us stage events in the local area.

It's likely we will be attending a Nature Recovery Day at Chew Valley School on June 30th and we are currently looking to take part in a 'Countryside Day' in September on Mendip. If you would like to offer your help we would be very grateful and can ensure it will be a lot of fun!



For more CPRE Avon and Bristol events visit our events page at www.CPREavonandbristol/events.

Thank you for supporting us at CPRE Avon and Bristol, we are excited to continue our work in 2024.



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