

# CPRE Essex AGM: Chairman's Report

October 2023

## Introduction

Before I talk about the things that have been happening at CPRE Essex, it is worth a word about last year's AGM. It was chaired by our President Mrs Jennifer Tolhurst and included a photographic competition for all ages with the subject being the 50th anniversary of the Essex Way as well as a tree-planting. What a memorable day.

Now onwards to this year. During this year we have:

### ***Run a talk on Zoom***

During a dark winter night early this year we all enjoyed a fascinating talk on Zoom by distinguished speaker Dr Andrew Impey, who is the Chief Executive of Essex Wildlife Trust.

Andrew is a most inspiring speaker who outlined the role of the trust and its aims, which include:

- Fighting to protect our natural habitat
- Restore habitats and species
- Deliver ecological monitoring
- Have input into planning applications
- Challenge people to take responsibility for where our food comes from.

It was a most stimulating evening for all – members and all those who joined us.

### ***Been involved in a multitude of planning issues, including:***

- East Anglia pylons. The extension to the National Grid that will enable offshore-generated electricity to be coupled to the grid. This has now become a major issue, with all local MPs being involved across Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk, but I suspect it will quickly expand across the UK.
- Wethersfield prison consultation: the use of the present infrastructure changed throughout the year to become one of the proposed sites for immigrants to the UK while they seek asylum.
- Solar farms. CPRE Essex continues to support the 'rooftop' project that is being run by National to get more roofs used for solar panels. But in the meantime we have been helping other action groups across the county fighting applications for solar farms on high-grade able land. With some success.
- Thames estuary. We have maintained a working brief on this proposal, using our professional planner in conjunction with Kent CPRE to highlight our concerns.

- Colchester Garden Village. We are taking a pragmatic approach to this proposal, but we are fortunate to have as part of our team David Mead, who is local to this part of the county, to represent us.
- Other planning applications include:
  - Dengie peninsula – massive extension of houses
  - Coggeshall quarry
  - Finchingfield bridge
  - A12 widening
  - Greensted Road housing estate
  - In addition, many more!

### ***Housing development***

We have been consistent at both county and national level for the need to build more homes to buy or rent for local people. In Essex there are approximately 1,500 applicants for rented homes – very few will be provided by the housing estates that are under consideration.

### ***Developed our website***

It would be easy to become complacent now that our website has settled into a ‘hit’ rate of 2,000 hits per 90 days rolling average. However, we want to grow it further and this year we have used social media more extensively as a means to attract further views (the technical term being ‘hooks’). We continue to use the site as a conduit for other excellent organisations, such as:

Essex Garden Trust  
 Rural Communities Council Essex (RCCE)  
 Dedham Vale and Stour Valley Society  
 Essex Rural Partnership  
 Eastern Lodge  
 Other CPRE county and regional branches  
 Essex Wildlife Trust  
 Woodland Trust  
 RSBP

We also highlight major country issues.

### ***Kept involved with National Office***

After what was a very hard previous year, National Office is now in a much better position. It has a new chief executive officer in Roger Mortlock, who appears to be, with his team, communicating the plight of the countryside well at Parliamentary level. There is also a national assembly, its purpose being to bring the county branches together maximise, with limited resources, our efforts in key areas.

Current national priorities are:

- Planning: CPRE is seen as the charity of choice for Parliament when it comes to planning issues.

- Housing targets and land banks – should land banks stay in place indefinitely with property developers?
- Rooftop renewables – solar panel placement
- Hedgerows – this now has 80-odd MPs on board.

### ***Actively been involved in recruitment***

At the time of writing, it has been another frustrating year regarding recruitment using the national system. However, September should see the launch of our own recruitment campaign in the local press. I hope that we will be more successful with this approach.

### ***Membership,***

Membership decreased this year in Essex. We think, but without doing a detailed analysis, this is for a number of reasons: the cost-of-living crisis, households taking up family memberships to reduce costs and, sadly, people 'passing on'.

### ***Finally...***

CPRE Essex, with limited resource, continues to voice a sensible opinion to planning applications and many issues that affect the well-being of the countryside. Nevertheless, with more help we could do much more.

David N Knight