

Newsletter

The South Wilts Group is, with West Wilts, North Wilts and Kennet, one of the four groups that constitute the Wiltshire Branch – an independent registered charity and part of a country wide association of branches assisted by a separately registered national office in London

The newsletter is published twice each year in Spring and Autumn



Chairman's Report

This is my last report as Group Chairman as, regrettably, I have to stand away from this and other bodies for a variety of reasons. However, I will continue to check matters pertaining to planning and transport

Planning - Several South Wiltshire Group members continue to check planning applications from the weekly lists generated by Wiltshire Council. Where appropriate, objections are registered, or sometimes comments. At an individual level, advice has been given to several concerned residents on planning issues in particular situations.

However, we continue to have difficulty covering the whole of the Group area, so more volunteers are needed – to maximise coverage and to spread the load.

Core Strategy - The South Wiltshire Core Strategy (CS) was adopted, and now forms the basis of planning policy in the old

Salisbury District area. The circus has moved on to the CS for the whole of Wiltshire; CPRE Branch and similar interested parties are preparing to contribute to the Examination in Public (EIP). As the South Wiltshire CS is being subsumed into the Wiltshire CS, there have been knock-on effects resulting in opportunities this spring and summer to have a second bite at the cherry; South Wiltshire Group members have made representations and will be attending some of the EIP meetings.

As part of this campaign, Group wrote to all Parish Councils in the Group area, suggesting that the CS is unsound – for a variety of reasons (numbers, jobs, transport, other infrastructure) set out in our paper “Salisbury, and South Wiltshire, in Danger” that went out with the email. We had 4 responses, all of which were supportive. This was followed up by a further email asking Parish Councils to monitor any development in south Wiltshire and contact us if they had any concerns.

What's in a view?

Who cares about a view? CPRE members do, but sometimes it's hard to see that the value of landscape and views carry any weight with planners.

The value of landscape somehow feels like a weak argument when opposing developments claimed to lead to jobs, more houses or to avoid the possibly calamitous consequences of global warming – which may well include unwelcome effects on the natural biology and appearance of the countryside.

There is, in fact, a wealth of legislation, government reports and academic research on landscape values – not to mention the literature, poetry, art and music that have celebrated the natural beauty of our landscapes through the centuries.

Legislation and planning

National Parks, and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), receive the strongest protection, in the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 – updated in the Environment Act 1995. and strengthened in the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act, 2000.

Interestingly, the primary purpose of AONBs is to *conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape* (which includes landform and geology, plants and animals, landscape features and the rich history of human settlement over the ages). For National Parks, promoting understanding

and enjoyment by the public is equal with conserving natural beauty.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) famously replaced 1000+ pages, but these pages were the very detailed **guidelines** for assessing planning applications, not the actual planning **legislation** which the NPPF represents. It should be noted that the NPPF does maintain protection for countryside and “heritage assets” such as listed buildings and conservation areas.

For example, in one of its defining Paragraphs (Paragraph 7): *Economic, social and environmental* roles must be in balance.

Among its core land-use planning principles (Paragraph 17) are:

- *recognizing the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving rural communities within it*
- *contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural environment...*
- *conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of this and future generations...*

The ideas are all there but there is too much subjectivity in words such as “should”, “could”, “acceptable” leaving the outcome very uncertain.

By some miracle the European Landscape Convention (ELC) was ratified by the UK Government and became binding from March 2007, committing it to recognise the importance of landscapes to people; to protect

landscapes, especially in planning, and to encourage participation. If properly applied this should be good news.

<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/landscape/protection/europeanconvention/>

Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) is an important part of UK compliance with the European Landscape Convention. LCAs have much less protection than National Parks or AONBs, but it is clear from a growing body of government reports that they are considered increasingly important.

For instance, Landscapes of the future states: *Strategic planning policy should include consideration of green infrastructure, landscape character and provision of multiple ecosystem services.* (This is a Commons Briefing Note – these are very useful, and presumably accurate.)

But, LCAs are tricky to use, as there is a cascading hierarchy of them from national down to specific and local.

www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/landscape/englands/character/

www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/post-notes/energy-and-environment/

Monitoring

Natural England with DEFRA and English Heritage undertook a project to research change in countryside quality, using attributes such as biodiversity, tranquillity, heritage and landscape character. See their report Countryside Quality Counts (2003)

www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/landscape/englands/character/cqc/

Cornwall AONBs have developed a complex but precise grid system for detecting adverse change, using factors such as Quality; Scenic quality; Rarity; Representativeness; Conservation interest; Wildness; Cultural associations; Consensus of opinion.

The beginnings are there but the extent and quality of the monitoring of how landscape value legislation and research findings are applied is key to the protection of our landscape.

The values of landscape

There is lots of academic and government research on landscape values, including a particularly interesting piece of work from Germany on who values landscapes for what: older citizens and country dwellers are more likely to value agricultural 'managed' landscapes; younger ones and town dwellers, 'wild' landscapes.

In the present culture, where it seems that economics trump any other argument, some government departments have felt it necessary to pin down the values of landscape. The UK National Ecosystem Assessment (NEA): Understanding nature's value to society was commissioned by DEFRA with the collaboration of some of the Research Councils. This absolutely vast and comprehensive report was launched by the Environment Secretary in June 2011. It records that a significant proportion of the country's ecosystems (including countryside) are in a reduced or degraded state, and because of their critical economic and social importance, account needs to be taken in

planning decisions of the value they hold for society. The NEA brought us the term, *ecosystem services*, the benefits bestowed on us from the natural world. Rumour says the current Secretary of State, Owen Patterson, has banned this term but it would be too much to hope that he agrees with The Guardian's gloomy environmental commentator George Monbiot that Putting a price on the rivers and rain diminishes us all.

<http://uknea.unep-wcmc.org/>
www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/aug/06/price-rivers-rain-greatest-privatisation

Another useful Commons Briefing Paper, Natural capital accounting, describes *natural capital*, the public values of nature that we should take care not to diminish.

If you find all this legislation and research dull stuff, the CPRE published in 2003 The lie of the land, an impassioned celebration and defence of landscape, although unfortunately planning inspectors are inoculated against such vaporous considerations.

<http://www.cpre.org.uk/resources/countryside/landscapes/item/1931-lie-of-the-land>

Finally, a White Paper in June 2011 agrees that *nature in England is highly fragmented and unable to respond effectively to new pressures such as climate and demographic change*. Among the aspirations is that *The Government wants this to be the first generation to leave the natural environment of England in a better state than it inherited. We hope!*

Suzanne Keene

Grants

We have made 4 grants in the financial year 2012/2013:

- Network Against Wiltshire Sprawl (NAWS), £500 to help this consortium of environmental groups (in which CPRE was a key component) fighting against the imposition of excessive new house build in the west Wiltshire area. Stretching from Warminster to Chippenham this "growth corridor" is expected to accept the building of over 21,000 new homes along with around 120 hectares of land for new employment.
- University Thesis, £500 towards expenses for the production of a degree thesis on alternative energy with particular reference to large scale arrays which are beginning to appear in our countryside. One has recently been completed in Redlynch parish and there is a new application for one near Wylye. Along with wind farms, the outright rejection of which by Wiltshire Council in its Wiltshire Core Strategy has been successfully challenged by wind farm campaigners, solar farms would appear to be the government's key weapons in attempting to combat global warming. As they can be very intrusive on a landscape you should keep an eye out for such planning applications and let one of our committee know.