

Cornwall Matters August 2023

CPRE Cornwall newsletter

Issue 6, August 2023

This summer, two interrelated issues – one national and one local – have been centre stage for people who live and work in the countryside: first the development of new targeted funding streams for farmers & growers and second, Natural England's designation of large swathes of West Penwith land into a new SSSI: Site of Special Scientific Interest. The consultation on the Penwith SSSI came to a head at the meeting held in St Ives on June 28th: see below Stephen Horscroft's clear and thorough account of how it went and where it left us.

We note sources for support and advice by which the new schemes, aimed at sustainable and wildlife-friendly agriculture, can best be navigated. Almost everybody supports biodiversity and the principles of organic local food production but farmers and growers are the people who have to achieve it for the benefit of all while running a sustainable operation: see Martin Howlett's caustic 'Down on the Farm'.

In January 2023 CPRE joined a strong coalition to develop a consensus on Food, Farming and Nature that will shape the forthcoming campaign at national level. Jane Michell outlines the first consultation on this important draft policy document for us.

One very encouraging feature of country life in Cornwall has been the growth in the number of community projects – some from a desire to mark the late Queen Elizabeth's Platinum Jubilee but many simply as a result of more meaningful engagement with the natural world. People have planted trees – or whole woods or orchards, restored hedgerows or tackled polluted and overgrown streams. As a shining example of what can be done when people work together, we feature Bosavern Community Farm near St Just in West Penwith: It continues to be a great success story.

Devon & Cornwall Police, in collaboration with Devon & Cornwall Community Watch and Historic England, have launched a new scheme to protect local heritage sites. Duncan Wilson of Historic England writes: *"By working together with communities and partners across the law enforcement and heritage sectors we can help protect our historic buildings and archaeological sites from the threat of crime and anti-social behaviour and ensure their preservation for future generations to enjoy."*

For more information, including a list of sites, visit <https://alerts.dc.police.uk>

We are delighted to announce that we have a new volunteer, Caitlin Baker, who will help us manage our social media platforms, website, and membership contact. Born and raised

in Cornwall, Caitlin is passionate about making the countryside of Cornwall a better place for everyone to enjoy.

And just a small note about a great opportunity missed: **Treveth**, a Cornwall Council partnership, have a substantial development of affordable homes and commercial premises in Bodmin: PA 23/00972 and although they say: '*Treveth homes will be as environmentally friendly as possible to help residents to optimise utility costs. Treveth will lead on local "decarbonisation" of the build and the running of homes*' – **they are failing to fit rooftop solar panels on houses or on their 'new and modern workspaces'**.

♥ And a big THANK YOU for your support – we very much appreciate the ongoing commitment of our members as we seek to protect rural Cornwall and support sustainable development to meet local needs.



NATURAL ENGLAND's SSSI DESIGNATION

by Stephen Horscroft

As expected, Natural England has designated parts of the Penwith moors as an SSSI following an at times stormy meeting in St. Ives on June 28th. The reasoning is tagged as '30 by 30': for the UK to make an international contribution to the protection of at least 30% of its land for nature by 2030. Officers explained at the meeting that this can then support nature recovery to spread beyond designation.

The problem, though, made clear in the introduction to the day by NE officers is that SSSI designation does not currently attract a payment to farmers and landowners and that they were currently giving advice to DEFRA to ensure that people were 'properly rewarded'.

The Board made clear that they were not present for a rubber-stamping exercise and listened to objectors and supporters of the proposed designation during the day. This resulted in some challenging questions from the Board for their own officers.

The officer response to objection submissions (and reiterated on the day by the Board) was that socio-economic considerations were not within their remit for consideration when deciding on the designation. This is despite the fact that social, economic, and environmental are the triple heads of what is 'sustainability' and that the impact on productive farming was acknowledged and that future paid schemes were 'unclear' but that a gap before implementation was not 'anticipated'.

Based on the response to the consultation, officers confirmed that if designated the area would be known as 'West Penwith Moors, Downs and SSSI' and that around 100ha of the originally planned designation would be reduced.

Objectors from the floor were concerned about the age and methodology of survey data. Some habitat and condition survey data were over a decade old and there were refuted claims that officers had surveyed parcels of land only from their car. There was also unresolved disagreement about the hydrology survey work versus other informed data claims from the floor.

While no evaluation of the consultation was undertaken there were clearly 'lessons learned' from a Board and officer perspective. There were unresolved claims of objector submissions going missing and landowners not receiving letters but also in terms of the language used to communicate.

CLA verbal evidence made the point that farmers cannot afford to employ people or have the time to look at and translate complex, voluble material and that challenging NE's scientifically led analysis could only be 'made' if farmers could afford a £3,500 survey which (when done) had sometimes challenged officer conclusions. Brexit required a premium payment linked to SSSI designation to be an imperative. Bolitho Estates also offered objection evidence. Again (like CPRE Cornwall's) that socio economic evidence and impact was not considered but also that longer term partnership support (such as farmers and the Cornwall Wildlife Trust working together) may not be funded for another year.

I gave verbal evidence for CPRE Cornwall, building on our written submission, which acknowledged the beauty and environment of the moors which had been shaped by agricultural activity for thousands of years and generations of Cornish family farmers. On the ground support for farmers to continue to make a living and, indeed, supply affordable and local food was essential and how partnerships are nurtured, and financially supported is now the imperative to be able to develop incomes. Phrasing is important: there 'may' be an impact on incomes, we have 'no plans' to CPO. This sort of language can alarm.

There was certainly a grey area with supports for designation. One contributor noted that there was a need to continue to engage communities and businesses, Andrew George (local Cornwall Councillor and Parliamentary Candidate) that the full five years need to be taken for implementation and that methods of communication need to be improved. Nick Bruce Wright

(RSPB) gave preamble to his evidence that their support should not be mistaken for lack of understanding or sympathy with the farming community. Grazing was needed, for example, to support the Dartford Warbler: a bird species now doing well compared to be almost extinct over 50 years ago. While the concern that five years was not enough time for farmers to be able to adapt, the RSPB voiced their concern that pesticides will continue to be used in the meantime.

Clearly many in the farming community of west Cornwall are angry and upset with the designation and the overall approach taken to get to this point. We need to understand what their next steps might be and be supportive to both them and Natural England in the difficult position it finds itself. With Brexit, a government that has a list of other problems and issues and a potential change of Government in the next eighteen months the five-year transition period looks likely to be eaten into. In addition, squeezed budgets under any Government may mean that payments to farmers for environmental management schemes may not be at the top of the political agenda and there does not seem to be adequate or long-term gap funding available.

On the other hand, planning and development continues to put the Cornish countryside under pressure so the designation offers protection in terms of setting and encroachment; especially as we move toward the next Local Plan post 2030.

CPRE Cornwall's role is to keep a watching brief, work with others and support all of those interested in a living, working and truly sustainable environment as we move toward implementation of the designation.



Photo credit: Rowena Swallow

'Down on the Farm', July-August 2023

Farmers deliver thrice daily!

by Martin Howlett

Blame the recent prolonged hot spell of weather, of which most probably and for many of us as much in desperation, will have broken with rainfall in time for Glastonbury '23, we in farming continue to receive mixed messages to accompany the hot air coming from both Government and Supermarkets alike, as promises last as long as an ice cream at the seaside in this glorious summer sun.

Fresh from the inaugural No 10 'Farm to Fork' Summit, which promised to address the dual issues of the imbalance in the food production chain by means of strengthening the powers of the Grocery Code Adjudicator/Ombudsman as well as producing an annual 'UK Food Security Report' to meet a minimum 60% self-sufficiency target. The spectacle - and the importance - of all key players coming together with the Prime Minister was, ironically, further highlighted by TV Celebrity Farmworker Caleb Cooper (of 'Clarkson's Farm' fame) whose most timely reminder that *...you may only need a Solicitor once in your lifetime and see a doctor once a year, but everyone depends upon a farmer three times a day for food* clearly hit the nail on the head.

So, it seems somewhat bizarre that just a few weeks later plans emerged for a price fixing cap on essential foods. This was met with industry-wide condemnation and outright rejection from the major supermarket retailers, despite food inflation topping 20%. Such intervention in the market has not been proposed since the early 1970's Economic Crisis, before the UK's entry into the then EC Common Market. Today UK farm businesses - now post-Brexit - are in a far different situation and are increasingly at the mercy of a global free market as well as partway through the transition from the Basic Payment Funded Farm Support. They are being encouraged to restructure and improve productivity, not be price-capped by intervention control measures.

However, welcome news for our local hard-working family farms comes from the full support of our own Cornwall Council, through their endorsement of Cornish Agriculture by rejecting calls for an anti-meat/pro-plant-based policy that has been adopted by several up-country local authorities. A motion to promote seasonal & local produce, explicitly including meat & dairy products, at council events, plus urging local residents to shop locally and take advantage of home-grown, affordable, nutritious food (irrespective of dietary preferences), was passed with full support. A most welcome dose of local common sense despite the seasonal heat and hot air from some in authority, with a clear message to enjoy the 'Best of British' this summertime and a timely intervention to back young Caleb in his reminder that all farmers continue to deliver thrice daily 'Down on the Farm'.



Photo credit: Rowena Swallow

Help and advice for farmers and growers

There is plenty of information and advice on the new funding schemes, including:

Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, South West region: fwagsw.org.uk

DEFRA: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs

The Organic Farmers Association: <https://organicfarmersassociation.org/farm-bill/>

CPRE consults on Farming policy for the future



At a recent meeting of the Farming & Environmental Land Management topic group to discuss the draft CPRE farming policy paper there were representatives from five other CPRE groups including myself for CPRE Cornwall.

Graeme Willis, CPRE Farming specialist, opened the meeting by describing what this draft policy is to address. It is meant for CPRE and a wider coalition of partners, including DEFRA, the Soil Association, RSPB and Wildlife Trusts among others, and is intended to be a guide as to what CPRE would like to focus on at national level. He felt that it was important to understand the wider context - hence the amount of detail included in the paper, which some people had commented upon. It also gives credibility to the document by making it clear that they know what they are talking about.

This meeting was to enable the regional groups to comment and make suggestions, which Graeme would then incorporate if possible.

Points raised and discussed in some depth included:

- The use of the word 'optimise' in relation to the carrying capacity of the land. Some people felt that 'working with' the carrying capacity might be better as optimising it was paving the way for carrying on as usual, i.e., overstocking and then compensating by adding artificial fertilizers, herbicides, etc.
- The need for a glossary to include words like 'sustainable' and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)
- The need for coordination of development planning,
- The need for agricultural out-buildings to be converted into better planned and affordable homes rather than holiday lets,
- Inclusion of agroforestry management as a desirable farming method.
- Undercover horticulture and diversification.
- There should be a vision of how landscape will change and how to resolve that at local level. Graeme was not sure whether the present CPRE document can provide that vision but a mechanism about how it changes might be possible.

Feedback from Cornwall CPRE indicated that support for farmers was felt to be important as well as animal welfare and putting policy ahead of strategy.

Bosavern Community Farm: a success story

by Elizabeth Knowles



On land overlooking the sea in the far west of Penwith, Bosavern Farm has been developed over the past fourteen years entirely by and for the local community. There are 36 acres in all, with

vegetables, fruit, hay meadow, chickens, bees, and 28 allotments. There are wildflower meadows, hedgerows, and woodland, all carefully managed for wildlife, especially pollinators. It is a shining example of the 'social good' so often cited by funders as a desirable outcome – but in this case, flowering abundantly from the very nature of the enterprise.

This small piece of typical West Penwith farmland was used as a training ground for would-be farmers after the Second World War. It was later bought by Cornwall Council and in 2009 a small group of local enthusiasts leased the land to grow vegetables. Then in 2014 when the Council decided to sell it, a huge fundraising effort was set in motion. The National Lottery's 'Local Food' fund, plus a community share offer, plus a generous local benefactor all contributed and the land was purchased. Bosavern Community Enterprises Ltd was set up as a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) charitable organisation with a strong local membership and a management team led by a Board of Directors (directly elected by the members). There is a small core of paid posts and a large team of regular and occasional volunteers. The farm produce is sold in the Farm Shop, at farmer's markets, in a veg box scheme, and wholesale to local hospitality businesses. They are signed up to the Wholesome Food Association pledge and farm to organic principles. They are mindful of soil enrichment and carbon capture, recycling organic matter, using minimum tillage, and as little mechanisation and as much 'no-dig' as possible.

The farm has developed a number of schemes and activities in response to local needs for learning or special support and the farm has become a key resource for the wider community in and around St Just. Bosavern is the largest Community Supported Agriculture Project in Cornwall and has received a number of awards and commendations including an 'Outstanding' certificate from the Royal Horticultural Society for its pollinator planting. It sets an example of how obviously beneficial, as well as urgently necessary, the production of food is in an economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable way, for now and for the future.



PLANNING MATTERS



Photo: Planning Committee - Cornwall Live

Recent Decisions

Leans Field, Trevarrian
Outdoor Cinema
Appeal reference APP/3307064
DISMISSED

East of Wellington Place, Carnon Downs
5 dwellings and site access
Appeal reference APP/3295228
DISMISSED

Gorran Churchtown
17 dwellings, access & parking.
Planning application PA22/02389
REFUSED

Headland Hotel Headland Road Newquay
Installation of photovoltaic panels & LBC
Planning applications PA22/11258
REFUSED

Objections lodged with Cornwall Council - Awaiting Decision

Trewidden Road St Ives
Erection of a Premier Inn hotel
Planning application PA22/11311

Meudon Hotel, Maenporth Falmouth
10 holiday units, swimming pool, restaurant, gym
Planning application PA22/11402

Penhale Camp, Camp Road, Holywell Bay
Holiday and leisure facilities.
Planning application PA22/02896

Penhale Camp, Camp Road, Holywell Bay
9 new & 3 refurbishment dwellings
Planning application PA22/02794

Gillyflower Golf Club
19 holiday lodges, classroom and access
Planning application PA23/02502

Hotel Bristol, Narrowcliff, Newquay
180 apartments, 44 bed aparthotel
Planning application PA22/10572

Trelissick Gardens, Feock
New 250 space carpark, crossing, access
Planning application PA22/10184

The Hub, Quarry Cottage, Quethiock
1 glamping dome, parking, recycling footpaths and landscaping
Planning application PA23/05143

Higher Lane, Mawgan, Helston
Development for up to 20 houses
Planning application PA22/07887

Prow Park Business Village, Newquay
Change of use of land for parking and containers
Planning application PA22/05334

Carbis Beach Apartments, Carbis Bay
Six new Aparthotel apartments
Planning application PA22/04841

Barn Hill, Cadgwith, Ruan Minor, Helston
Construction of a detached dwelling
Planning application PA21/12133

Trefresa Farm Rock Wadebridge
Hotel, cinema, spa, 9 huts, 13 lodges
Planning application PA20/10041

Carbis Bay
Habitat enhancement, viewing area
PA23/01527

Gwithian Towans
1 bedroom chalet
PA23/02221

Trispen, South of Carland Cross
Solar Farm, battery storage
PA2302629

Permission in principle
Lowertown
Up to 2 dwellings
PA23/05560

Halgavor Moor
Residential development of up to 540 dwellings.
Planning application PA20/10618
Paused by Natural England 05/22