



The countryside charity Cornwall

Cornwall **Matters** October 2023

CPRE Cornwall newsletter

Issue 7, October 2023

Among CPRE's current campaigns, the idea of siting solar panels to harvest energy from every available rooftop is particularly relevant to Cornwall. Here, we see productive and eco-friendly farmland covered in these panels when there is a far more efficient and sensible alternative. In this issue we are privileged to have an article from the eminent Cornish-born scientist Professor Peter Dobson, who sets out the issue in no uncertain terms.

Following our piece on the St Just Community Farm, in this issue we have one on orchards in Cornwall, featuring especially the Community Orchard on Penbeagle Hill up above St Ives. We underline how much good work is being done by community efforts in Cornwall – not least on the development of these local food-producing projects but also the Forest for Cornwall which has been carried forward by innumerable local community actions all over the Duchy.

This issue also contains information about CPRE campaigns in the battle to mitigate climate change and support biodiversity, notably a new partnership with the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Local Nature Partnership (CoISLNP) that aims to help shape an effective strategy for **Local Nature Recovery**. Please do spare a few moments to undertake Cornwall Council's survey (see the link below): it will be used to shape our action for wildlife and the natural world for years to come.

Protect Earth are working to restore the ancient woodland at **High Wood, Liskeard** and are looking for volunteers to help clear small conifers so that native species can re-establish. They say ...'why not come and enjoy a slightly different day out – no experience is necessary and tools will be provided.' The next working party dates are **18 & 19 November** – to book, e-mail help@protect.earth or use their Eventbrite listing:

[Cornwall, United Kingdom High Wood Liskeard Events | Eventbrite](#)

Cornwall Council reports that they are to invest £9.1m on the most needy sections of its 4,500 miles of roads, plus a further £5m from the Department of Transport to deal with

potholes. This is surely good news for all of us.

As always, we must underline our need to attract new members and donors to support the work we do on planning issues for local people. We have a publicity leaflet to distribute and if any member would be willing to take a few copies to leave about in their local area, we would be very grateful. We find places like farm shops, agricultural suppliers, and vets as well as libraries, community centres, galleries, garden centres, and cafes are all effective places to leave a few. Do please get in touch if you can help.

In the Planning Section, we feature a case of illegal development in the middle of the historic village of Breage, near Helston.

♥ 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.



Rooftop Solar

Professor Peter Dobson OBE,
Emeritus Professor of Engineering Science, University of Oxford

This Government is rushing through a policy of covering the countryside with solar panels in what are euphemistically called “solar farms”. It is misguided and foolish because these inefficient devices only work well in the UK in daylight and the summer months. The country is losing much-needed agricultural land as a result. It is ironic that our same Government is talking about increasing the use of land for both food production and biodiversity. For solar energy and indeed any form of renewable energy to be effective it has to include some form of energy storage and currently this is to be provided by very large Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS). Most of these are incorporating lithium ion batteries in large containers that have to be carefully monitored and temperature controlled. These could pose serious fire and health hazards so they should be sited well away from houses. Guidelines about fire safety for such BESS facilities were only recently

issued and are not covered by Law: guidance produced by the National Fire Chiefs Council . This seems to have been kept out of the public awareness and were only mentioned in a revision of a document from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities and the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/renewable-and-low-carbon-energy> This demonstrates, again the ill-planned rush by Government towards its flawed Net Zero policy.

So, if there is an urgency and need for solar energy, are there alternatives to siting the solar panels elsewhere instead of on agricultural land? Yes, of course there are and it is very surprising that more consideration has not been given to exploiting the largely unused rooftop spaces in the UK. Likewise, there are possibilities for covering car-parking areas with solar panels connected to local battery storage to provide for charging electric vehicles.

The benefits for everyone would be considerable: this suggestion does not use valuable agricultural land and will not despoil the countryside because the sites are already there in villages, towns and industrial estates. Land is going to assume increasing importance to reduce the amount of imported food, and the installation of solar panels on fields is not going to enhance biodiversity, and indeed may lead to long-lasting agricultural and ecological damage. Covering the beautiful and high-quality land in Cornwall is tantamount to vandalism being condoned by a Government that has not taken the trouble to analyse the situation strategically. At no point in the rush to Net Zero was there a proper cost analysis performed or consultation with the many experts.

Cornwall is blessed with more sunshine than much of the UK, and rooftop solar or “car-park solar” makes a lot of sense especially in supermarket and shopping areas, where that energy could be used for EV charging and other local purposes. The seasonal variation in solar energy also matches the tourism season when the demand for electrical power will be highest, especially as the adoption of electric cars becomes more established. By generating electrical power locally in the tourist season it will also reduce the need for extensive new cabling and large battery storage because this could make use of the existing power connectivity. There are also rooftop spaces in schools, public buildings and factories where the solar power could be usefully employed. This would reduce one of the biggest barriers to the adoption of solar energy, so it should appeal to investors, consumers and Government. In addition, this will add to the resilience of the National Grid if managed properly and be swifter to implement.

So, what is there not to like? Developers and the public will be much more supportive of such rooftop schemes and this will eliminate the considerable time wasted on public

enquiries for the ruinous despoiling of our rural environment. These advantages need to be drawn to the attention of the Solar

Taskforce <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/untapped-potential-of-commercial-buildings-could-revolutionise-uk-solar-power> It would be desirable, indeed essential, to have a moratorium of all “solar farm” installations until the Solar Taskforce has deliberated.



Photo credit St Ives Community Orchard

Community Orchards

Elizabeth Knowles

There used to be many orchards on farms all over Cornwall with a long tradition of local fruit growing and cider making. Many were lost to building developments or as a result of changes to farming practices after World War II. Now, there is a movement underway to bring more productive orchards back to life. New community orchards have been set up, alongside a number of local commercial fruit, juice, and cider producers. The Orchard Network UK lists Cornish orchards on their website: www.orchardnetwork.org.uk. They include sites from the Tamar Valley to Kehelland, Newquay, Fowey, the Helford River, and St Ives; the National Trust has orchards at Cothele and Trelissick and there is even an orchard at Cornwall's County Hall. Traditionally, the main fruits grown were apple (eating, juice, and cider), pear, plum (especially at Kea near Truro), medlar and quince; cherries were grown in the Tamar Valley. Some new orchards are now including bush fruits like currants, gooseberries, and blueberries.

There is a lively groundswell of interest in community farms and orchards, and to help and encourage these initiatives Resilient Orchards Cornwall (a Community Interest Company) was set up. Their aim is to provide advice, support and practical help as well as to diversify the fruits grown and to make sure plantings are resilient to the challenges we must now

expect from what seems to be accelerating climate change. They also run workshops on pruning and maintenance work. Anyone who has a site or an orchard in need of restoration can get help, and trees are available free through the Forest for Cornwall programmes. Currently, a new Community Orchard is under development at the Trenoweth Estate, on the north side of Redruth.

The Community Orchard at St Ives is an excellent case study in what can be achieved by a strong community effort. On Penbeagle Hill above the town, 30 acres of open access land have been developed from a bracken and bramble wilderness into productive use. There are fruit trees, fruit bushes, nuts, perennial vegetables, and bee hives. There is a committee of management, a few paid staff, and a loyal band of volunteers. There is also a nature reserve with woods and wildflowers: a thousand native trees have been planted; mature well-managed hedgerows give shelter to part of the site. At the very top of the hill, there is heathland with granite tors and spectacular views of the sea. The first hundred trees were planted in February 2013, most of them apples of known Cornwall and Devon varieties. Later, pears, plums, cherries, figs, kiwi, and medlar were added, and berry bushes including currants, blueberries, raspberries, and gooseberries. For more information, including how to visit go to:

www.stivesorchard.co.uk



Photo credit Cornwall Council

Some notes on current works to mitigate climate change

Elizabeth Knowles

Working with the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Local Nature Partnership (CloSLNP), Cornwall Council is running a public survey prior to establishing a **Local Nature Recovery Strategy** for Cornwall. You can respond on line and **the deadline is 22 October**. CloSLNP

are on the steering group for this project and we hope the outcome will be a well-articulated strategy that can be carried through into action right across the natural world in Cornwall over many years to come. See:

www.letstalk.cornwall.gov.uk/have-your-say/survey_tools/nature-recovery-survey

The Cornwall Wildlife Trust has described a new way of farming that incorporates trees and shrubs on land already used for crops or grazing, named 'agroforestry'. Together with the ELMS schemes to support wildlife and biodiversity on farmland, and new ways of maintaining and conserving hedgerows, this idea could be part of a revolution in land management. Besides the benefits to wildlife, this integrated system could provide a different and more resilient range of crops, better soil retention and water conservation, and, one can imagine, a rich and beautiful landscape.

***Note:** in our last issue agroforestry was mentioned in Jane Michell's piece at no.5 of the 'points raised' and the 'agro' was omitted by mistake: apologies from the editor.*

The Forest for Cornwall reached a landmark this summer with **600,000 trees planted** – the equivalent of one for every resident - since its launch in 2019. The aim is to plant one million by 2025. The forest covers approximately 600 hectares so far, spread wide over many sites from woodlands to hedgerows, trees in towns and villages and single carefully sited 'Landmark' trees. This year's special **Tree Week** is **25 November to 3 December**, when the 2023-24 winter planting season will be launched. Current projects include Pristow Fields in Falmouth, more planting at Saltmill Park in Saltash, Bodmin Beacon where a new community woodland and orchard will be established, and trees for WI groups all over Cornwall to plant in Tree Week.

Congratulations are due to the Cornwall Wildlife Trust for raising enough funds to be able to acquire 53 upland acres next to its Bartinney Nature Reserve near St Buryan in West Penwith. This will secure a substantial tract of valuable grassland, wetland, and heathland habitat and help towards the long term aim of establishing a network of connected corridors for wildlife and biodiverse vegetation.

The government continues to roll out its Sustainable Farming Initiative (SFI) and the Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes through this, the second of seven years transition away from farm subsidies. A new round of applications is invited, for schemes from 1 January 2024 and there are also funds for land recovery projects under the Countryside Stewardship scheme. The Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG South West) says there is ...a lot of interest in new SFI actions and we are expecting many farmers to apply in the coming months. DEFRA has made a wide range of actions

available, has improved payment rates and has increased prescription flexibility.’ FWAG themselves continue to offer help and support for farmers and landowners in Cornwall.

It has been reported that important environmental protection rules for sensitive areas like AONBs are liable to be set aside by the government. More sewage from housing or pollution from industry and farming should not, they now say, prevent development in or near these sites. The Office for Environmental Protection has asked Michael Gove to admit the consequent risk to water, habitats and wildlife. Our environmental rules need to be strengthened, not undermined: they are often ignored or side-stepped. The RSPB’s view is that we are ...’already one of the most nature depleted countries on earth and broken promises will not save our rivers or protect our wildlife and wild spaces. People want stronger safeguards for our environment and climate, and it is well past time our leaders listened.’



Photo: Cornwall Council

PLANNING SECTION

Cherry Mason's Fruit Farm, Breage.

One of our longest running cases is Cherry Mason's Fruit Farm in the historic village of Breage.

The owner of Cherry Mason's Fruit Farm, Mr von Conway, was served with an Enforcement Notice by Cornwall Council on 23 March 2021, instructing him to cease trading as a campsite and dismantle the infrastructure installed without planning permission. He subsequently appealed the Enforcement Notice (APP/3273258) and on 18 August 2022 the appeal was dismissed, the enforcement notice upheld, and planning permission refused. Mr von Conway had one month to cease the use of the land as a campsite and twelve months in which to cease the residential use of the land and to return the land to its pre-existing condition. Neither requirement of the Notice has been complied with which is a criminal offence.

Therefore, if Mr von Conway has not complied with the requirements of the Enforcement Notice it is incumbent upon the Cornwall Council to re-instate the land under the powers that are available to it. The proposition apparently being advanced by Mr von Conway, that doing so would be in breach of his right to live a 'nomadic lifestyle' - is plainly nonsensical, because he has been living on the site unlawfully since he purchased it in 2016. Plainly, an ultimatum is required to comply with the enforcement notice within a specified period or a court order to that effect.

Mr von Conway has recently submitted a further application (PA23/03831) which seeks planning permission for what is essentially the same developments that the Inspector required to be ceased or removed. However, pursuant to Section 70c of the 1990 Act, Cornwall Council can decline to accept a retrospective application for development where a pre-existing enforcement notice is in place and this must be even more the case where that enforcement notice has subsequently been upheld by the Secretary of State. We are therefore surprised to see that this application has even been validated.

Logically, granting permission for the new application would mean overturning the Secretary of State's own decision and would almost certainly be challenged by him for obvious reasons. It would also make the enforcement process never-ending which would be fundamentally against public policy.

CPRE Cornwall has raised these points with Enforcement and Planning in Cornwall Council and is waiting for a response.

Planning Summary

Recent Decisions

<p>Lowertown Helston Permission in principle. Maximum of 2 dwellings Planning application PA23/05560 REFUSED</p>	<p>Higher Lane, Mawgan, Helston Outline application up to 20 houses Planning application PA22/07887 REFUSED</p>
<p>Gorran Churchtown 17 dwellings, road access, parking, open space Planning application PA22/02389 REFUSED</p>	<p>Land North Of Tredavoe Newlyn Prior notification, agricultural track Planning application PA23/05638 WITHDRAWN</p>
<p>Gwithians Towans 1 bedroom chalet adjacent to 109 Planning application PA23/02221 REFUSED</p>	<p>The Hub Quarry Cottage Quethiock Glamping dome, parking/turning Planning application PA23/05143 APPROVED WITH CONDITIONS</p>
<p>Headland Hotel, Newquay Photovoltaic panels within hotel grounds Planning application PA22/11258 REFUSED</p>	

Objections lodged with Cornwall Council - Awaiting Decision

<p>Cherry Mason's Fruit Farm, Breage Change of use for campsite Planning application PA23/03831</p>	<p>Gillyflower Golf Club 19 holiday lodges & classroom Planning application PA23/02502</p>
<p>Bosavern, St Just Retrospective construction of a lake Planning application PA23/05034</p>	<p>Carbis Bay Hotel, Carbis Bay Habitat enhancement with viewing area Planning application PA23/01527</p>
<p>Polurrian Hotel, Mullion 15 suites, spa & function room Planning application PA23/04388</p>	<p>Carland Cross, Trispen Solar farm & battery storage Planning application PA23/02629</p>

<p>Trewidden Road St Ives Erection of a Premier Inn hotel Planning application PA22/11311</p>	<p>Prow Park Business Village, Newquay Change of use of land for containers Planning application PA22/05334</p>
<p>Meudon Hotel, Maenporth Falmouth 10 holiday units, pool, restaurant, gym Planning application PA22/11402</p>	<p>Carbis Beach Apartments, Carbis Bay Six new Aparthotel apartments Planning application PA22/04841</p>
<p>Penhale Camp, Camp road, Holywell Bay Holiday and leisure facilities. Planning application PA22/02896</p>	<p>Barn Hill, Cadgwith, Ruan Minor, Helston Construction of a detached dwelling Planning application PA21/12133</p>
<p>Penhale Camp, Camp road, Holywell Bay 9 new dwellings 3 refurbished dwellings Planning application PA22/02794</p>	<p>Trefresa Farm Rock Wadebridge Hotel, restaurant, cinema, spa, 22 lodges Planning application PA20/10041</p>
<p>Hotel Bristol, Narrowcliff, Newquay 180 apartments, 44 bed aparthotel Planning application PA22/10572</p>	<p>Halgavor Moor Development of up to 540 dwellings. Planning application PA20/10618 Paused by Natural England 05/22</p>
<p>Trelissick Gardens, Feock New 250 space carpark, crossing, access Planning application PA22/10184</p>	