

**Message from Tony Burton, Chair, CPRE London for
the joint CPRE and CPRE London Christmas
Celebration at St John's Church, London W2 on 18
December 2019**

Christmas and the New Year provide an opportunity to reflect. I have recently picked up the volunteer reins to Chair CPRE London nearly two decades after leaving CPRE's employ, and have been reflecting on what it means to be England's leading countryside charity in London, our capital city? And how do CPRE's eternal messages about the value of beauty, and the importance of making good use of land, resonate for a generation which is sounding the alarm on an ecological and climate emergency?

At one level I am finding many of the answers reassuring. Their origins lie in the same campaigns that CPRE has wrestled with for generations. These are the campaigns that brought us the planning system and created the Green Belt to curb urban sprawl. They are the campaigns for beauty in all our lives and for the right to experience dark skies and tranquil areas.

London has been the cradle for so much of this – from the great campaigns to save Hampstead Heath and

other areas of common land, to Octavia Hill's vision for more "open air living rooms for the poor" as delivered by initiatives like her Wandle Valley Open Spaces Committee in the early 20th century. These campaigns are in the tradition of making the benefits of the countryside available to everyone, whatever their circumstances and wherever they live.

We know of the huge public concern about the scale and quality of new building, its poor design and the impact of noise and air pollution. We also know that the places local people care about are too often overlooked, and their knowledge and insight too often ignored in deciding their future.

So this is why at CPRE London we are working to bring more of the benefits of the countryside - its beauty, tranquillity, wildlife and places to escape – closer to people's doorsteps in the city. This can simultaneously improve the quality of life for more Londoners and reduce the pressure on rural areas caused by people moving out. City life also means less travel and less impact on resources and the climate too.

We are championing the countryside which is found in the city. Londoner's countryside is not just in the

Green Belt, the North Downs or the Chilterns. It is in our everyday lives as well as those places we might visit at the weekend.

London is blessed with a remarkable network of green spaces, rivers and waterways. Nearly 50% of the capital is green. This isn't by chance. It is because successive generations have stood up to be counted on what they consider to be important. CPRE has been part of this story for a long time, offering support and providing leadership since 1926. The climate strikers are the latest, compelling, chapter, sounding the alarm and calling for us all to listen to the science if we want the story to end well.

To a large extent, London remains a city of villages. Their stories evoke local pride and provoke community action. Each time we protect or support one of London's town greens, local markets, historic buildings, local wildlife areas or community assets we are making the city a more attractive place to live, helping protect the countryside from further sprawl and reducing our climate impact. The more Londoners can meet their needs locally so the less we need to travel and the fewer emissions we make and resources we use.

In my own piece of the city, Mitcham, south London, we are at the poorer part of town. Life expectancy drops by a year for every stop on the wonderful tram that runs east from Wimbledon. Yet there is a fierce pride in Mitcham's story. Its network of protected town greens, its 18th century pubs and 17th century manor houses, and the oldest cricket ground in the world. These village roots drive a demand for quality from new development and a desire to make the area even greener, to strengthen our local market and to provide for more of our energy locally, all helping to meet the challenges of a new age.

CPRE knows how to be a local champion and we are committed to making London an even more wonderful place to live. But I also know that we have to do more and to do it swiftly. As we wrestle with the climate and ecological crises and the consequences of urban sprawl, we will find answers that lie in the story of London's growth and the landscapes beneath our feet. We all need to step forward to recognise, celebrate and protect London's neighbourhoods. These lie in an often hidden landscape rich with rivers, open spaces, vistas, woods and footpaths. There are too many stories of special places lost or threatened and of open

spaces kept private where local people aren't welcome. Yet this is also a landscape rich in opportunity where new green spaces can be made, landscapes revealed and public access created.

This is why CPRE London is mapping the green spaces that matter to communities, tackling the waste of brownfield land, identifying the city's tranquil places and demanding wider public access and better links. It is also why we are ever vigilant and fighting the constant pressures to erode our precious green spaces. In just the last few weeks we have seen the Inspectors into London's Plan call for a major review of the Green Belt and there are relentless efforts to water down strong protection of Metropolitan Open Land.

We find too many green and open spaces fenced off or neglected, and we are campaigning for ten new major parks as just one priority for the next Mayor of London. Working with others, such as London Wildlife Trust, Living Streets, National Park City and the Ramblers, we will be putting London's environment and the climate challenge at the front of the Mayoral elections.

We are also developing our role in connecting the opportunities of green space and the countryside with

communities that historically have had less access, by virtue of their geography or economic circumstances. This includes working with the Magpie project in Newham to improve their local landscape, and provide community growing spaces. We are just beginning on the journey to make these connections and are looking to develop our role.

CPRE London believes we won't solve the challenge of the climate emergency, the ecological crisis and the threat to the countryside without making our cities thrive. And to do this CPRE London is here to give our city's landscapes and neighbourhoods an ever stronger voice. At this special time of year we ask for your support in helping CPRE do even more for our countryside, our city, our wildlife and our climate.

And now it gives me great pleasure to introduce you to Lesley and the London Sings! community choir.