

## **CPRE London Annual General Meeting 20 May 2021**

### **Item 3. Annual Report of the Trustee Board 2020**

#### **REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2020**

##### **STANDING UP FOR OUR GREEN SPACES**

If it were ever in any doubt, the events of 2020 have demonstrated just how important London's green spaces are for the health and wellbeing of its inhabitants. The ability to get outdoors and connect with the natural environment during the coronavirus pandemic has been a lifeline for so many people. We drew attention to the value of green spaces throughout the year to support our work on protecting spaces under threat. We promoted the results of a public attitude survey following the first lockdown measures which found that 62% of Londoners think that protecting and enhancing green spaces should be a top priority. Almost half of Londoners reported that they visited green spaces more during the lockdown.

While many of us have benefitted from this increased contact with nature and the reduced air and noise pollution as a result of the pandemic, access to green spaces is unequal across London's communities. That is why we spent part of the year developing a major new campaign for Ten New Parks for Londoners promoting the objective of *#GreenSpace4All* through a blog and social media in preparation for a full campaign launch in 2021.

Over the course of the year, we engaged with or assisted local campaigners in relation to planning casework which threatened green spaces and other sites in Barnet, Enfield, Merton, Redbridge, Richmond, Sutton and Tower Hamlets. We also submitted responses to consultations on Local Plans in Barking and Dagenham, Croydon and Redbridge.

We carried out a review of threats to the Metropolitan Green Belt and published an associated report *London's Green Belt: our Climate Safety Belt*. This was widely publicised and sent directly to the Mayor of London and Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government urging them to stand firm on protecting the Green Belt from development.

##### **NEW LONDON PLAN: GREEN BELT AND METROPOLITAN OPEN LAND**

At the start of the year, the Mayor of London responded to our letter urging him to resist the Inspectors recommendations following the public examination of the draft London Plan that would have weakened protection of the Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Land (MOL). In his response, the Mayor said:

*'I agree that some of the Inspectors' Panel recommendations for changes to my draft London Plan policies may weaken their approach to protecting London's Green Belt and MOL.....I believe that the continued strong emphasis I have placed on protecting London's Green Belt and MOL is justified in order to help avoid urban sprawl, driving the reuse and intensification of previously developed land to ensure the city makes efficient use of its infrastructure, and that inner urban areas benefit from regeneration and investment. This is the key part of the approach the draft London Plan takes to prioritising development on brownfield land.'*

We raised similar concerns in our letter to the Secretary of State urging him to resist proposals that would undermine protection of the Green Belt. While his response indicated he was unwilling to change his position on the policies in the draft London Plan, we were pleased that he wrote:

*'The Government shares your belief that the Green Belt is, and should remain, a great asset to the country. This applies both the Metropolitan Green Belt around London and to the Green Belts that surround a number of other urban areas in the country. The Government has sought to firmly apply Green Belt policy as you request in your letter.'*

The Mayor and Secretary of State agreed on final amendments to the draft London Plan in December paving the way for its formal adoption. While we fear Green Belt and MOL protections could be slightly weakened as a result of the Government intervention, we were pleased that the policies remained relatively strong.

### **PLANNING REFORMS AND THE IMPACT OF COVID**

We contacted all London MPs to brief them on our position on the Government's planning reforms and their implications for London in advance of a Parliamentary debate in October drawing their attention to a detailed briefing paper on the wider implications prepared by National CPRE. We also raised concerns over the implications for third parties and community groups of new regulations to allow online planning meetings and decision-making in the light of the current crisis and helped develop a set of shared principles for safeguarding the public voice in planning with Just Space, the London Forum and others. We presented these at a well attended webinar on 'community engagement in a post Covid world' organised by the think tank Future of London.

### **A MORE NATURAL CAPITAL: AN AGENDA FOR THE NEXT MAYOR OF LONDON**

Throughout the year, we led discussions among environmental groups with a presence in London to develop a coalition manifesto to set out an agenda for action by the next Mayor 'to improve London for people and nature'. Before the Mayoral and Assembly elections that were due to take place in May were postponed, we had coordinated meetings with the leading Mayoral candidates or their teams and launched the joint manifesto *A More Natural Capital*. With the elections postponed until May 2021, we reconvened the coalition to review the manifesto and our election strategy. Towards the end of the year the coalition had grown to 18 groups, including Wildlife and Countryside Link, an umbrella body for smaller organisations, and we had revised and updated the manifesto in the light of the pandemic.

### **SPACE TO BUILD**

Following our earlier research on finding suitable previously developed land for new housing supported by National CPRE, we shared our expertise with other groups in the CPRE Network including Oxfordshire, the London Forum of Civic and Amenity Societies, and local campaign groups. We also promoted research commissioned by National CPRE which revealed the generally poor design of new housing, although schemes in London were judged to be better than in other regions.

### **HEALTHY STREETS**

The Healthy Streets Scorecard partnership went from strength to strength over the year with more groups joining the coalition including Wheels for Wellbeing. Even though we were not able to incorporate the emergency Covid-19 measures put in place by councils, the 2020 Scorecard helped them compare how well they are doing in relation to other boroughs and identify areas for future action. An interim report on School Streets was issued in November showing that the number of healthy School Streets has increased in London under the Mayor's Streetspace Plan, with 383 installed and 68 more planned. The Scorecard coalition urged councils to make trial School Streets permanent and roll traffic-free schemes out to every primary and secondary school in the capital where possible.

In November we published a report *Parking Transformed* showing how land allocated to car parking could be redeployed to make London a better place. We argued that there is no need for every street to be a car park and reducing car parking can help reduce congestion, pollution and road danger, encourage more walking and cycling, and provide opportunities to create more green space.

We also prepared a response to the Mayor's consultation on future arrangements for the congestion charge following the announcement of the Government support package for Transport for London in the light of the pandemic.

## LONDON'S COUNTRYSIDE

Our innovative agenda to promote the value of London's countryside continued throughout the year, although due to the pandemic we were unable to organise associated outdoor events. We played a central role in organising the Urban Tree Festival which took place entirely online, coordinating a series of nine highly successful webinars with expert speakers on various urban tree topics including London's Street Trees, Trees and the New Urban Ecology and the Future Urban Forest. The webinars attracted over 1000 participants, including many from overseas. We continued to assist the GLA and Forestry Commission in the preparation of an Urban Forest Plan for London which was published in November which we expect to play a lead role in helping to implement. Thanks to the support of thousands of voters in the London Tree and Woodland Awards, the Urban Tree Festival was crowned as the *Lockdown London Tree Champion* by the Forestry Commission and Greater London Authority.

In advance of National Tree Week in November we co-hosted an online launch of *Living with Trees*, a guide to growing, protecting and celebrating trees written by Robin Walter and published by Little Toller, which attracted over 150 participants. We have also produced a 10 point action plan to protect and nurture trees based on an original version prepared by our Chair for Merton.

We launched an urban hedge initiative in the Autumn and invited local groups to apply for a small number of 'micro-grants' to assist in the creation of new urban hedgerows. We received a number of applications for funding and identified four groups who met our criteria: Friends of Albion Millennium Green in Lewisham, Crouch End Open Space in Haringey, Friends of Wray Crescent in Islington and Three Kings Piece in Merton. Sadly, due to pandemic restrictions, the Crouch End Open Space scheme was the only one able to proceed during the year.

Despite the restrictions caused by the pandemic, we were able to proceed with the delivery of our *Growing Together* initiative for users of the Magpie Project which supports mothers and children at risk of homelessness in Newham. Following the planting of several fruit trees and hundreds of bulbs, three raised beds were constructed in Forest Lane Park with the help of Forest Gate Community Garden and volunteers from National CPRE. We were unable, however, to engage directly with users of the Magpie Project in the planting and harvesting of produce from the raised beds as we had hoped. While we made progress in developing our 'Rural Rides' pilot project to organise visits to Epping Forest for Magpie Project users to be hosted by the Epping Forest Heritage Trust, our applications for funding were hampered by changing priorities of the potential funding bodies due to the pandemic. We plan to revisit this project when the opportunity arises.

We continued our work with the Ramblers and London Living Streets to develop six new green walking routes linking central London with its surrounding countryside and green spaces. This initiative arose from our work on the *More Natural Capital* manifesto and includes a Great Eastern Parks route linking the City of London with the Lea Valley.

## **GOPARKSLONDON**

Following the establishment of the *GoParksLondon* website and consortium, we began to consolidate the partnership and develop the website content. We continued to support the London Friends of Green Spaces network helping to organise a networking event before lockdown, issuing *Our Patch* newsletters and recruiting a communications consultant (Tim Webb) to help promote the website. We also appointed a new contractor (Laura Collins) to provide support for the friends group network and encourage them to engage with and provide information for the website. The number of 'listings' on the *GoParks* website increased to over 4,000 and we worked with GiGL, the data suppliers, to improve the accuracy of listings and website content. While the pandemic affected our promotional activities, we started to develop plans and online materials with individual boroughs to promote their local parks, with more than half of London boroughs showing an interest in participating. We also began discussions with key partners over long term plans for the initiative once core funding from the GLA and City Bridge Trust comes to an end.

## **GREEN, CLEAN AND TRANQUIL**

Our work on the quality of public space continued during 2020 albeit without any Green Clean or other associated events. The draft *Public London Charter* which sets out roles and responsibilities for managing public space was formally issued for consultation by the GLA in October. We had previously organised two seminars at earlier stages in the preparation of the Charter and combined with several groups who had been involved in those seminars with a view to preparing a joint response to the consultation paper. We stressed the importance of green infrastructure in public space and the need for an ongoing programme to increase the public benefit from public spaces.

We also participated in consultation by Grovesnor Estates on future plans for Grovesnor Square, one of the largest squares in central London originally conceived in the eighteenth century as a piece of 'countryside in the city', including by speaking at an associated webinar where we emphasised the importance of providing a natural and tranquil space.

Working with Tranquil City and Richard Tisdall Associates, we developed a project proposal for research to promote more equal access to tranquil spaces across London in response to the impact of the pandemic with a view to securing funding from the public health sector to deliver the project.

Prior to the pandemic, the noise impact of aviation was an increasing problem for many communities in London. We contributed to a report presenting ground-breaking research, alongside CPRE Sussex and other groups, into the effects of aviation noise which attracted extensive media coverage. We called for an independent review of aviation with a view to implementing a phased closure programme of City Airport to unlock the development potential of this seriously blighted part of London's former Docklands.

We welcomed the decision by the Royal Parks Agency to initiate trials across five parks to reduce the impact of cut-through traffic and improve the experience for visitors.

## **COMMUNICATIONS**

After considerable technical work, we were delighted to launch our new website in April featuring CPRE's new national branding. The new look and structure has enabled us to communicate more effectively with a wider audience of partners and supporters. We produced a number of blogs on key topics and created an online website survey to gather feedback on the new format.

Our new photo competition *Picture Green London* launched in June and attracted over 60 entries with three winning images selected with the help of our expert judges, Professor Kate Jones, Deputy Mayor for the

Environment, Shirley Rodrigues and photographer Derek Man. The winners were announced at last year's AGM and we have used the images in an associated press release and on our website. With our support, the overall winner, Marieke Wrigley, created a book and calendar of images of Brockwell Park over the year (A Year in the Life of a City Park).

Our campaigns continued to receive regular coverage in London's local media and some national media including articles in the Times, I-Newspaper, Evening Standard, and online news channels. We also had articles in the technical journal Planning in London, as well as coverage of our activities in the Countryside Voices magazine produced by National CPRE.

We issued four seasonal Green London newsletters during the year with news of our activities and associated stories. This newsletter has now replaced our bimonthly eBulletin which we ceased to produce in April due to the retirement of its editor. We strengthened our presence on social media channels, with our followers on Twitter growing by 25% over the year.

Over the course of the year, we took part in meetings and seminars, mainly online, with: Thames Water; a number of London MPs including Rupa Huq, Feryal Clark, and Lyn Brown; a 'peri-urban' farming seminar organised by Sustain; the London Green Infrastructure Partnership; National Trust; Urban Design London; Future of London; the Urban Forest Partnership; and Green Alliance.

## **MEMBERSHIP AND FUNDRAISING**

Due to the pandemic we were not able to organise events during the year other than online. We were particularly disappointed not to be able to host a Christmas celebration to thank our members and supporters as we have done in previous years. Our AGM was delayed until October and took place online with a panel discussion on *London After Lockdown: Priorities for a Green Recovery* with presentations from Ben Rogers, of the Centre for London, Shirley Rodrigues, Deputy Mayor for the Environment and Energy, and Dr Clare Melhuish from the Urban Lab, University College London, followed by a lively discussion with over 60 members and supporters.

Our *Ten New Parks* appeal attracted almost £2500 in donations in 2020. Income from membership remained broadly stable. We received financial contributions from a number of environmental groups towards our role in convening and coordinating the *More Natural Capital* coalition. We continued to receive funding for our *GoParksLondon* project from City Bridge Trust and the Greater London Authority, as well as from the Integrated Transport Commission for the Healthy Streets Scorecard, and a further £10,000 for our work on protecting green spaces from an anonymous donor. We are very grateful to all our funders and donors for the financial support they provide to enable us to carry out our work.

## **TRUSTEE BOARD**

Tony Burton CBE was re-elected as Chair at our AGM in October, along with Danny Garvey as Vice Chair and Jo Ellingham as Trustee. Tara-Jane Sutcliffe stood for election to the Board for the first time having been coopted to the Board earlier in the year, as did Poonam Douglas who stood for Hon Secretary to replace Jo Clayton who was standing down, and Alena Kalashnikova as Hon Treasurer to replace Alexander King who stood down after 4 years in the role. All candidates were selected following an open recruitment process. Emma Bould was also elected as a Trustee at the AGM having been proposed by Tony Burton and Danny Garvey. We thank Alex and Jo for their work for CPRE London. Our Register of Trustees is available on the Charity Commission website.

The Trustee Board continued to meet on a quarterly basis online to review management of the charity and receive reports from staff and honorary officers. An extraordinary meeting was held in May to discuss the implications of coronavirus pandemic for our strategy and operations. The Board also met informally online twice in November to discuss strategy delivery and existing and potential new audiences. We continued to liaise regularly at staff and trustee level with the National CPRE charity on strategic issues, joint fundraising initiatives, developing new

audiences, and a review of regional operations, including attending the online national AGM in June and national Conference in October.

### **STAFF, CONTRACTORS AND VOLUNTEERS**

During 2020 we continued to operate with a small staff team, all employed part time, comprising Tim Fountaine, Office and Accounts Administrator (0.2 FTE), Alice Roberts, Head of Campaigns, and Neil Sinden, Director, (both 0.6 FTE). We contracted Laura Collins to provide network development support for GoParksLondon following the end of Helen Monger's contract, as well as Tim Webb to provide communications support for the GoParksLondon project.

At the start of the year we welcomed three new communications volunteers. Matt Coulson assisted with the design and launch of our new website, Lucy Farrell with our communications with our supporters, including editing the Green London newsletter, and Esmee Heath with our social media channels. We also recruited Sarah Ahern as a volunteer coordinator who is helping to develop a volunteer strategy and Ros Keeley who has been helping to organise our supporter records. We also continued to benefit from the support of policy volunteer Louis Smith-Lassey who helped with our work protecting green spaces and Lynne Roberts who assisted with the Growing Together project. We are hugely grateful, as ever, to all our volunteers for their commitment and hard work, as well as to our landlord Alan Baxter for his in-kind support.

*If you would like further information about any of the matters covered in this report or would like to become more involved in our work, please contact us at [office@cprelondon.co.uk](mailto:office@cprelondon.co.uk)*

Tony Burton, Chair on behalf of the CPRE London Trustee Board

April, 2021