

Ways of Seeing West Yorkshire Project Review

CPRE West Yorkshire April 2021



The countryside charity
West Yorkshire

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This document was prepared by Stride Works Ltd on behalf of CPRE West Yorkshire

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Introduction

In 2018, CPRE West Yorkshire identified the need to reach out and find ways to engage new audiences. The starting point for this project was that CPRE West Yorkshire had been struggling with its campaign reach.

Other than responding to Local Plans and planning applications, we lacked ways to involve our members in our work or to connect with other groups. To address this, we decided to focus on the shared interest we had with potential friends and allies - the countryside of West Yorkshire itself.

In this way, we hoped to expand our resonance in the area, be seen as an active and engaged Branch, and through listening to the stories that other individuals and groups shared, find ways to connect with a wider audience.

There was a second reason for this plan, which was to start collecting qualitative data about the value that people placed on the West Yorkshire countryside, and through recording this data, finding a way to start raising awareness and celebrating how full of interest and value West Yorkshire's countryside is.

During the course of the project we encountered some unexpected challenges. The start of the second year of the project coincided with the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in the U.K.

We had to redesign the work around communicating in an engaging way in the virtual environment, and also consider the impact of the pandemic on how people use and value their countryside.

This report describes the project from its background and starting point through to its completion and what we can learn from it.

Identifying the Problem

Campaign Reach

Despite being comprised of five, urban-centred local authorities, West Yorkshire is two-thirds countryside. And although West Yorkshire has 3.5% of England's population it only accounts for about 1% of the national CPRE membership, indicating a shortfall in CPRE's reach and profile in the area.

The major planning applications and Local Plan campaigns we engage in are the hardest to win, and it's difficult to measure our unseen impact – what would happen if we weren't campaigning?

Our regular planning work was only being seen by the local authority that it related to, and by people immediately affected by that planning issue. It was difficult to see how we could reach new audiences and explore ways to work with people to enhance either the West Yorkshire countryside or the quality of engagement that we had with the people who lived there.

Communicating

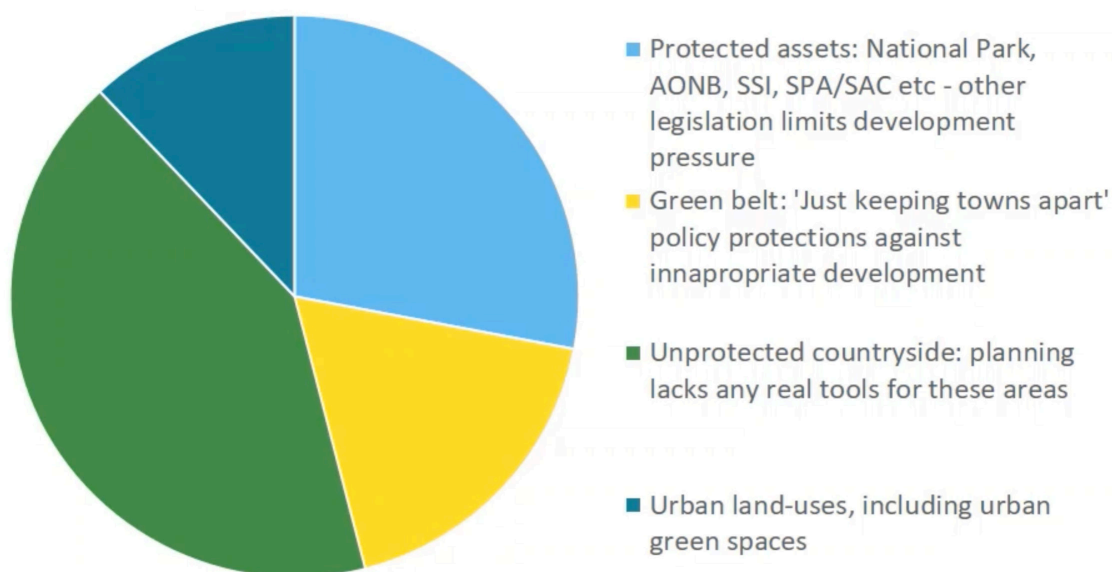
This pointed to a problem that our work touches only the small proportion of people whose lives are directly affected by planning-based concerns – and these were the only people we were communicating with. This was usually at a point where an area of land was under threat, and the focus was on defending rather than celebrating the countryside.

As the countryside charity, our reach is limited in areas not regarded as 'rural' from a planning and decision-making perspective. Could the answer lie in re-framing West Yorkshire's rural identity? Would this enable us to communicate with a much bigger audience?

These questions led us to identify the core problem, that the countryside is regarded as empty space. If the countryside were not so easily dismissed as 'empty', then it would have a different stake in the decision-making process.

If it were not so easily dismissed as empty, then the countryside would have better stake in decision-making.

The Problem: The countryside is regarded as an empty space.



Protecting ‘Empty’ Countryside From Development

Conventionally, physical loss of greenfield land to development is only preventable if it would harm recognised environmental or landscape assets. Green Belt is a policy designation which exists to defend openness between settlements, but doesn’t really say what that openness is for.

Loss of ecological value also happens through lack of active management. Woodland and grassland habitats are susceptible to being protected only when they are already heavily depleted by a combination of built development and neglect.

Many areas of open country, especially farmland, are not accessible to the public. Urban fringe landscapes are often crisscrossed with footpaths, bridleways and canal paths, but where access is poorer, people lose connection to the countryside and are less attuned to its degradation.

Protecting ‘Full’ Countryside For Nature and People

For nature – Natural systems and habitats can only be restored if we make space for them, and allow nature to flourish wherever there is potential – often in urban fringe areas.

For climate – Every piece of land offers opportunities for responding to the climate challenge, be it for peat restoration, woodland creation, renewable energy, flood resilience, or food production.

For people – As the population grows, so does the need for access and connection to the countryside. More people need more countryside.

For culture – People need to be inspired and able to create, to enable healthy, cohesive communities, tackle inequalities and accrue future cultural heritage.



Designing a New Approach

Campaigning

Over several years we had noticed that the majority of our campaigns were reactive and making only marginal impacts. This led to a shortage of initiative-based campaigns: what would we like to happen? We needed a re-think – something that would change the conversation.

We decided that our ‘full countryside’ approach depended on joining up our conventional, reactive campaigns: not just points on the map where there were planning concerns, but a connected, complex countryside that we could advocate for.

Communicating

With this in mind, we developed a communications project called Ways of Seeing West Yorkshire. This moved beyond our traditional message that the countryside is threatened, towards a vision of how much it is valued – how beautiful and interesting it is, and how different people use it.

The project aimed to extend CPRE’s reach to the many people and organisations who make up the rich picture of West Yorkshire’s countryside, but may not be directly affected by land-use planning threats; and to use this extended network of allies to demonstrate the value of West Yorkshire’s countryside to inform our campaigning work.

National CPRE’s Purpose & Priorities

Focus on People and Stories

Re-designing our local work:

- Effectiveness of our planning work
- Need to widen our reach

Our Local Messages

The countryside of West Yorkshire is:

- ‘Ways of Seeing’ Project
- New website
- Opportunities to get involved
- Fundraising Strategy

- Beautiful
- Interesting
- Threatened
- Yours!

Making Friends

We asked our members to tell us about their favourite places in West Yorkshire's countryside, and used this as a feature for the new CPRE West Yorkshire website.

We approached our friends and contacts in other organisations to contribute to our online magazine (see next page) and in particular asked them:

- What does West Yorkshire's countryside mean to you?
- How do you use it, and how would you like to see it change?
- Who makes the decisions that change the way you use and enjoy the countryside?

[You can see the favourite places using this link](#)

Influencing People

Our strategy was to gain reach and influence by listening, instead of broadcasting our existing messages. We wanted to demonstrate that we were interested in other people's perspectives on the countryside, and that we could give voice to them in a cohesive way.

This led us to develop a two-stage, two-year project:

In year 1 – research and produce our online magazines and map the network of new perspectives on the countryside that emerged;

In year 2 – engage our new friends and contacts in developing a shared vision for the future of West Yorkshire's countryside, and design future campaign work accordingly.

Favourite Places



"The Guiseley Gap has a fascinating geology. The unusual and dominant landscape feature in this corner of the South Pennines. It has been crucial in historic development. From prehistoric tracks, to neolithic stones, roman roads, medieval field patterns, and lost parks, it is a place to walk, think, and reconnect."



"Coley Beck on the Calderdale Way below Low Bentley near Shelf. In a real green corridor near built up areas, the old woodland here is predominantly beech. This photo was taken in early spring – soon the woodland floor will be a carpet of bluebells. I love the seasonal variation in the wood – and my family loves to play in the stream."



"Newmillerdam Country Park in Wakefield offers an opportunity for walkers and photographers, among others, to enjoy a beautiful and tranquil walk around the lake there whilst listening to birdsong and catching sight of the occasional squirrel."



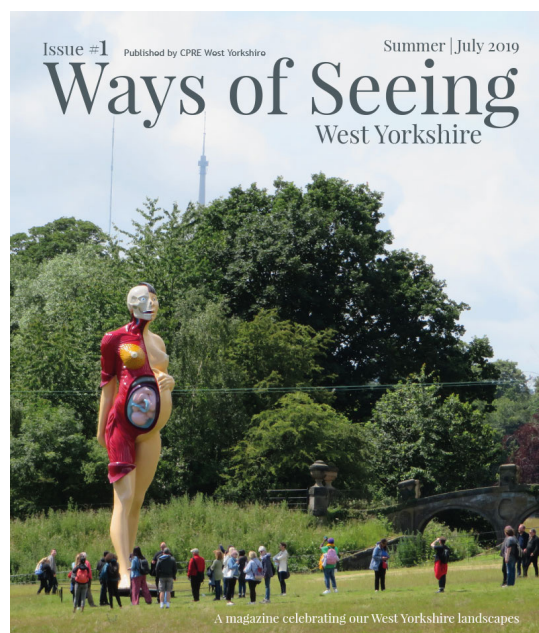
"Site of the Water Haigh Colliery, now restored to form a large park with wild flower meadows on the old spoil heap. We were assessing accessibility – that's Anne on her buggy climbing up the dump, but there was an impassable metal gate at the top, so no wild flower meadow today. The Aire & Calder bisects the park."

Ways of Seeing West Yorkshire

We produced a quarterly online magazine over one year, exploring the different ways in which people see, use and value West Yorkshire's countryside. Over the course of the 4 issues we covered 28 stories, each bringing their own audience to the magazine.

This created good website and social media traffic, and in each case we deliberately avoided content about CPRE, but allowed the stories to lead us where they wanted to go. Through this process we made new, lasting contacts, and found common ground.

We used a journalistic approach to gathering stories – using interviews and conversations, looking for seasonal or topical themes (eg. festivals, exhibitions, the climate strikes, Star Count), and being sure to find or produce good photography, brought together with high quality graphic design. This offers a good model for engaging new volunteers in the future.



In each issue we sought a balance of different perspectives:

Academic or technical: - We met several specialists whose subjects tended to revolve around climate and ecosystems, and because West Yorkshire has several universities there is scope for its influence over the future of the countryside to reach well beyond its own borders, such as the Priestley Centre at the University of Leeds which has an international remit.

Food and drink: - We covered the relationship between conventional farming, which is culturally embedded; community farming, which is about reconnecting people with land and food; and the way that people interact through eating and drinking.

Sport and other outdoor activities: - We found runners, walkers, swimmers and cyclists, and noticed the therapeutic value that people draw from being active outside, which came into sharper focus as people's experiences during the pandemic differed greatly according to their access to the countryside.

Art: - As we have seen during lockdown with Grayson Perry's Art Club, art has a therapeutic role, and we also explored the historical angle, how art tells the story of places, bringing in stories about Barbara Hepworth, J.B Priestley, Simon Armitage and the Brontes.

Philosophy and inspiration: - We met philosophers, artists, writers and musicians, and they helped us tie the other themes together, because of the connections between the landscape and what makes people think and strive for change.

[You can view our online magazines using this link](#)

Ways of Seeing Magazine

Issue 1:

Issue one set the scene for what we were trying to achieve. We gathered stories covering

Andy Leader, a landscape photographer from the Holme Valley, shared his experience of falling in love with the West Yorkshire countryside, getting to know it with walking boots and a camera.

Rachel Osguthorpe shared some information about her academic research into upland soils relating to grazing and flood mitigation.

Sally Wainright's TV Drama 'Gentleman Jack' based at Shibden Hall gave us the opportunity to highlight some of the wonderful historic houses we have in the area, some of the great Yorkshire stories and characters, and also the rich source of landscapes for filming - all from the perspective of a child actor.

There was a piece about wild swimming, an interview with a local food producer, another about cycling networks as access to the countryside, and an exploration of some of the 'sculpture triangle' of West Yorkshire from the Yorkshire Sculpture park.

Issue 2:

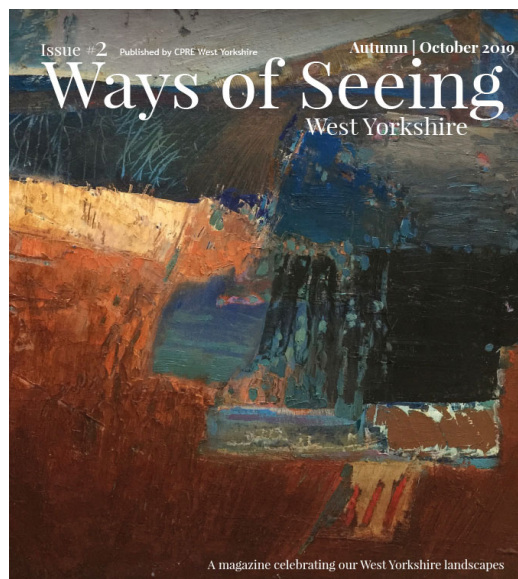
Issue two showcased a project by River Holme Connections, a charity organisation undertaking practical work to improve the quality of the river Holme, and using this as an opportunity to provide educational material, community engagement and academic research.

Paul Knights wove us a wonderful narrative about the landscape of the upper reaches of the Calder Valley, and how the landscape can bear witness to the social and economic history of farming, the cottage textile industry and the rise of industry and milltowns in the area.

We interviewed Harriet Thew at the Leeds Climate Strike, a Climate Scholar at the Priestley International Centre for Climate at the University of Leeds.

One of our trustees took us on a walk through Bronte country, exploring the landscape and literary history of the area.

We also interviewed a contemporary classical composer studying for a PhD at the University of Leeds, who is inspired by landscape in both his painting and composition techniques.



Ways of Seeing Magazine - Continued

Issue 3:

The third issue was published in the winter of 2020. We wanted the content to reflect this, so we featured dark skies with a visit to an observatory (to coincide with CPRE's Star Count campaign) and an article about street lights by a lighting engineer.

We also featured an article by Dr Norah McWilliam writing about the Queensbury Tunnel and the plan to turn it into a cycle way, a campaign that CPRE supports. Since then, the fate of Queensbury Tunnel has hung in the balance and made national news when featured in the Victorian Society's list of most endangered buildings and in Parliament.

Artist Nancy Stedman and runner Peter Newton described how their local landscapes inspire them in different ways, and Anna Guban who works at the United Bank of Carbon gave us an insight into her work around trees and natural capital. Graeme Tiffany contributed a piece about Community Philosophy and how walking and talking can create a sense of solidarity.

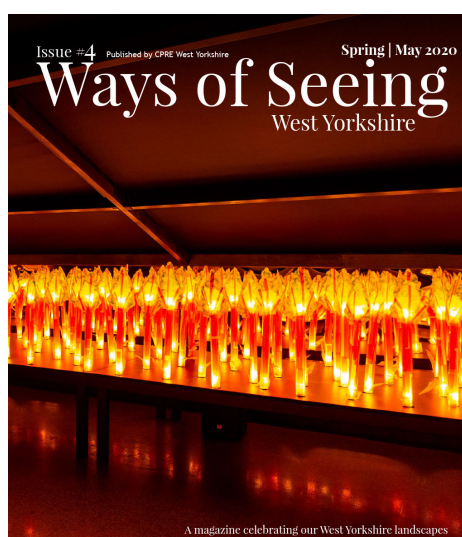
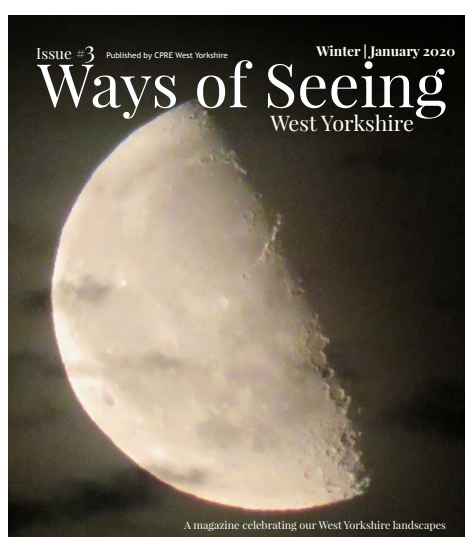
Issue 4:

Issue four was started before lockdown and completed through the lens of these most exceptional times. We added an editorial piece about how we are connecting with the details of nature around us.

As it was the spring edition, we used it to explore our relationship with the earth, the land beneath our feet, and what it is to feel grounded in the landscape.

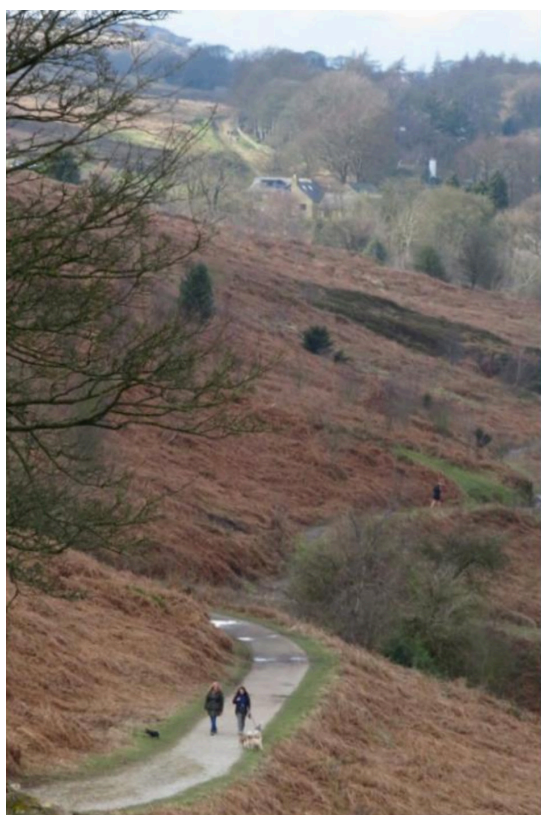
We wanted to capture the feel of new growth and new beginnings - and we were lucky enough to feature an article by a documentary photographer who interviewed a farmer of the West Yorkshire Rhubarb Triangle, capturing some beautiful images at peak rhubarb season.

We also talked to a curator at the Hepworth, Wakefield about the cultural landscape of West Yorkshire. A new exhibition had just opened, exploring the intersecting artistic paths of Henry Moore and Bill Brandt, whose shared interests include themes of labour, society and the British landscape. This exhibition had to close shortly after our conversation.



We met up with a member of the Friends of Ilkley Moor to speak about the regeneration work that was taking place to protect, promote and enhance the landscape of the moor. Owen Wells described the success of the Friends in tapping into a long tradition of radical concern for the environment and well-being.

We also visited a brand new community farm in Kirkstall Valley, on the urban fringe of Leeds, where the community were gathering together to create new ways to grow and provide local fresh food. There were some great stories in this issue, celebrating the sights and sounds of spring, and providing some inspiration during lockdown.



Mapping the Data

GIS Mapping

By plotting the areas that our stories covered on a GIS Map we were able to start building a picture of what the countryside is full of.

This is exactly the point that we were looking to illustrate - how much value there is, and how varied it is. By creating a map like this, it allows us to keep a record, share the information and build a stronger picture over time.

A map of these, more qualitative, values can be layered over quantitative data, such as land designations or survey results.

It also helped to show these disparate stories or interests as part of a community with a shared interest in the West Yorkshire Countryside.

As we build these layers of diverse stories and data, we can demonstrate the community of interest that is West Yorkshire's countryside.

New Ways of Working

One of the most important outcomes of the project is the way it has changed the way that we do our planning work.

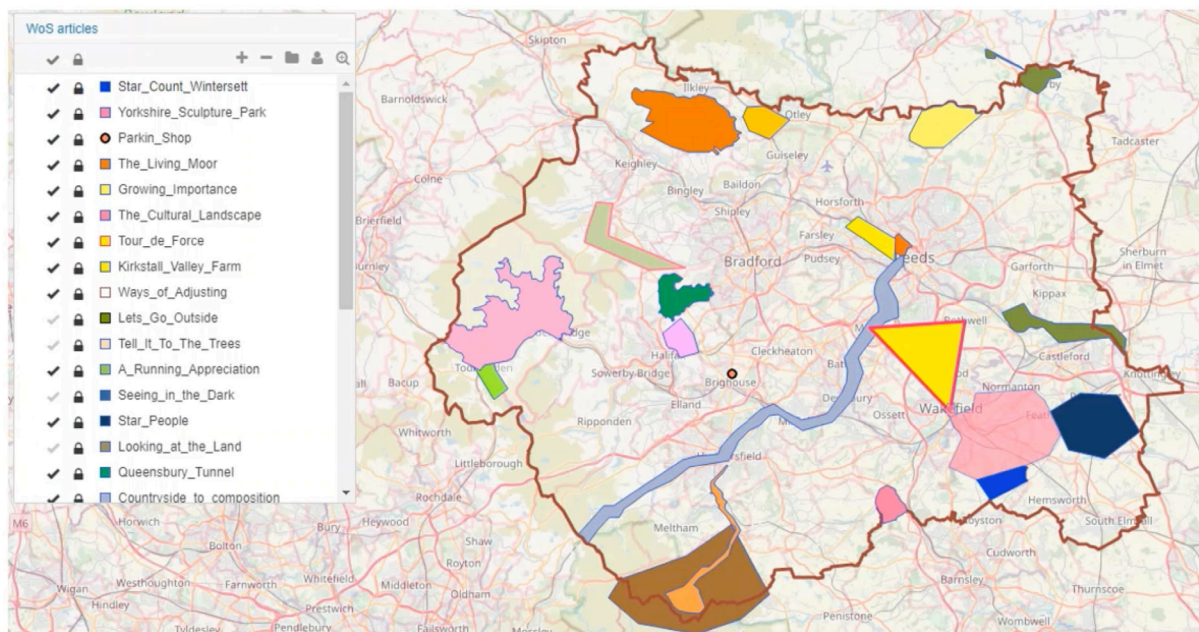
By starting from a communications perspective, such as through a walk and blog post, we are better able to connect the dots, and build a network of contacts relating to specific areas.

This approach has informed our planning work.

Rather than simply looking at a site from the desktop, we have tried to understand how a range of proposals may impact a specific area, and then use that as a way to start a conversation about how people view these places.

Making new friends brings us a better insight and a closer relationship to campaign issues.

Ways of Seeing Stories Plotted on a Map:



Limitations and Opportunities

Whilst we were constrained by the limited GIS mapping expertise within the project team, we were able to illustrate the potential power of mapping as a tool.

For example, we can show (using a walk from Dewsbury to Pudsey as a unifying theme), how we used the mapping platform to connect different data sets. We plotted the walking route itself, and used the map to identify and record points of interest along the way, how the route intersected with urban and rural elements, and how parts of the route have potential stories about the social or economic history of the area. We then wrote up the walk as a story for the CPRE website.

Some of the photos, contacts and places of interest along the way that we plotted, included an amateur observatory in Batley, a Civil War battlefield in Drighlington and an 18th century Moravian settlement at Fulneck. And we also plotted the sites of planning issues we were concerned about, and showed how the mapping system could be used to manage planning casework.

This work opened up a new way of working that allows us to record different layers of interest on a particular site or route, that we can filter as required. We have since applied this to several other planning-related campaigns.

Stargazers, Royalists and Moravians: from Dewsbury to Pudsey



Drighlington Sign



By Andrew Wood



Join our planning consultant Andrew Wood as he takes a new year walk through West Yorkshire from Dewsbury to New Pudsey.

A 21st Century Countryside for West Yorkshire



Harnessing our New Network

Having made contacts and examined a variety of stories, the next stage was how to use this to inform campaigning activity. The original idea was to have an open 'Countryside Conversation' event where we would bring our friends and contacts together and discuss collective action. This part of the project plan was disrupted by the pandemic, so we redesigned the project and moved to a virtual approach.

The underpinning idea had already emerged before the pandemic: a shared vision for the future of West Yorkshire's countryside. The term '21st Century Countryside' sprang from several sources. CPRE's own Strategic Objectives include 'promote 21st century rural life' – what does this mean, especially in a part of the country that is heavily urbanised?

We want to work collaboratively not only to defend the countryside against poor decisions but also undo past damage. And we want to help secure a future that celebrates landscape and our relationship with it? Most importantly, this needs to be a shared endeavour.

A book called 'From What Is to What If?' by Rob Hopkins also inspired us to ask, what if the future that people have in mind was actually implemented?

Seven 'What If?' Questions

- What if every land-use decision was a positive one for the countryside?
- What if everyone in West Yorkshire lived within 15 minutes' walk of green, open space?
- What if the M62 industrial corridor became full of wildlife and of places for people to connect with nature?
- What if we designed West Yorkshire as a natural carbon and water storage system?
- What if we really did get to net-zero carbon by 2038?
- What if West Yorkshire's countryside became famous as a place of inspiration?
- What if the countryside really counted in decision making?

The most important finding from producing the 21st Century Countryside report was that the route to the future is made up of many, small decisions. Cumulative effect is everything.

Our 'what if?' scenarios neatly sum up the aspirations of the many people we spoke to during the project, but the real questions are: Who is already working to make these things happen? What are the decisions that need to be made, and who is able to make them? This is the line of enquiry that we now need to pursue.

[You can view the document using this link](#)

Making it Happen

CPRE West Yorkshire can use the lessons that we learnt from this project to determine its next steps.

We have found that **listening to the experiences** of others can enhance our own understanding, and help us to forge new connections about shared passions.

We have explored the **power of storytelling** to present the countryside in a way that celebrates the diverse ways in which it benefits nature, our understanding of our history, inspires our future and nurtures our well-being.

Working in partnership with other groups and organisations helps to develop our skills and capacity as an organisation, and finding common ground is a really important step in forging new partnerships.

There are a range of ways to communicate about the things CPRE cares about, and it is important to explore all of these opportunities - especially when considering how to reach new audiences.

These are aspects of the project that can be used to inform a direction for the branch from this point.

Reaching out to others and working in partnership can strengthen our offering and our ability to inform lasting change.

The Next Generation

As part of our exploration of new ways to communicate and reach new audiences, we asked a local group of Brownies to envisage the countryside of the future. Based on their discussion, we created an animated video.

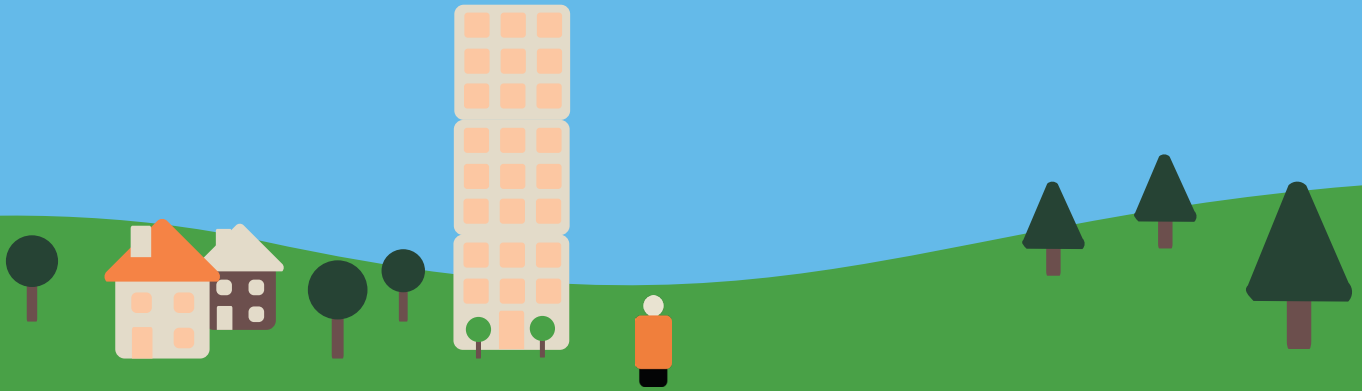
We asked them to envision the countryside in 10 years' time, inviting the next generation of young, enthusiastic users of the countryside, to create their own scenarios, express their own hopes and fears for what it would be like.

[You can view the video using this link](#)



We found a strong correlation to CPRE's objectives, so we know that we're on the right track and that common ground really does exist across the generations.

Internal Network Event



Event Aims

We held an Internal Network Event for other CPRE Branches to attend on the 23rd March 2021. This event was designed to share our experiences, in a way which focused on the wider application and implication of our findings.

We were keen that, as the Covid-19 Pandemic had curtailed some of our planned activities, we did our best to share our findings in a way that could be beneficial to others.

The event was held online. It was well-attended, and participants from across the country found that the work resonated with their own experiences and aspirations. In particular, the idea of reframing the countryside as 'full' rather than 'empty', and reaching out to a wider audience that is less constrained by planning issues, were agreed to be valuable. And the high quality visual and written content of the magazines was seen as an important way to boost CPRE's profile.

Collecting Data (using GIS)

There was a great deal of interest at the event in our use of GIS. This provides a proof of concept, and the steps we have taken to explore mapping as a tool for our work has been well worthwhile.

Other branches shared a desire to capture data such as hedgerows, wildlife sightings and land use information.

The layering opportunities with GIS means that all of these types of data gathering are possible on a single map, and able to inform each other.

There were concerns about mixing qualitative and quantitative data, but we have found the two easy to separate using the system.

Costs and training on GIS use were key areas of interest, and there is an appetite for a network-wide approach to this.



Collecting Data (Gathering Stories)

We were really pleased that our concept of reaching out to find stories as stepping stones to explore common ground and create opportunities for possible partnerships was so well received.

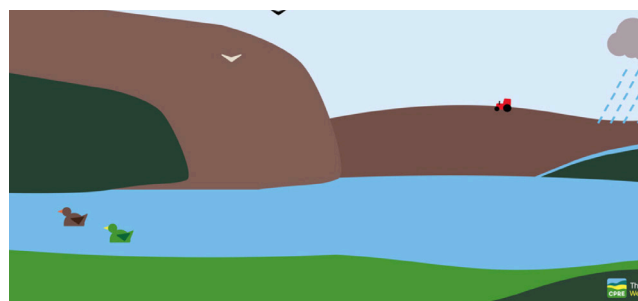
One group described similar success in working with a University in their area on a project about dark skies and street lighting.

Sharing the burden of both finances and capacity seemed to be something that chimed with others.

There seemed to be enthusiasm about finding different ways to tell positive stories. We found it positive to be able to share the experience of our project with the wider network, and hope that the discussions resonated with their work.



Online events require imagination to make them fun and welcoming, so we sent out packs to participants that including a copy of our 21st Century Countryside document and also some Yorkshire food and drink treats.



Project Conclusions



Lessons & Benefits

Listening to the stories, thoughts and experiences of other people:

- Lets the connections with CPRE's agenda emerge naturally
- Changes the way you do planning work
- Makes the work more enjoyable
- Provides opportunities to work constructively with others.
- Creates new ways to communicate
- Provides access to new audiences

We have already seen the benefit of a stronger network of friends and associates. During the recent Bradford Local Plan consultation we were able to reach out to some of our new contacts to work with them to develop our response.

It provides a way into an interesting conversation with a range of people. We can say, "We're building up a collective vision for the future of West Yorkshire's countryside, and we want to feature your perspective, we want it to be your vision as well as ours". This is a big shift in conversation from, "We need to stop these bad developments," (although of course we must sometimes have that conversation too).

A really important benefit is creating a diverse range of volunteering opportunities, such as the guest editor we found for one issue of the online magazine. This may be a way to engage with a wider range of potential volunteers, with a different set of skills to contribute.

Recommendations

As the project's funding period comes to an end, we need to reflect on how to maintain momentum. Communicating well generates additional work and therefore requires more capacity, but it should also help to stimulate interest in CPRE and attract supporters and partnership opportunities.

We have drawn the following recommendations from the project to inform future working.

- The power of listening and storytelling cannot be overstated. They enhance our own understanding of the countryside we're campaigning for, enable us to present the countryside in engaging ways, and provide stepping stones towards partnership working.
- Producing high quality, topical stories with a journalistic approach, photography and graphic design is demanding, but it is also a rewarding way to connect with people and can provide interesting tasks for volunteers.
- Approaching planning work from a communications perspective changes the nature of that work, making it more likely to engage people and raise our profile, and also demanding a clearer focus on why a planning-related campaign is important.
- There is an appetite in the CPRE network for key resources such as GIS mapping, publications and event design – and the skills to use them – being shared or pooled.



Project Finance Summary

This project was made possible through national CPRE's Strategic Collaboration Fund (SCF). To successfully bid for two years of SCF funding (£15,000 per year), West Yorkshire CPRE made its own financial commitment over three years. During 2018/19 we prepared the ground for the project. The Trustees agreed to reduce the budget for day-to-day planning casework over the two years 2019/20 and 2020/21, to enable a branch contribution.

Yorkshire & Humber Regional Group also made two significant contributions, with result that the total budget for the project over the whole period was around £48,000.

This budget was allocated approximately as follows:

- Personnel – project management, communications and creative content: £35,000
- Online materials – GIS mapping, digital magazines, website: £6,000
- Design and print of reports and publicity: £2,000
- Events, photography and miscellaneous: £5,000

The co-funded model has been reflected in our determination that the outcomes of the project should be usable and replicable anywhere in the CPRE network. The stories and contacts are local to West Yorkshire, but the findings can be applied in any local area across the country.

Ways of Seeing was not a fundraising or recruitment project: the underpinning objective was to give CPRE West Yorkshire a stronger profile and *raison d'être* to enable it to attract funds, members and volunteers in the future, but it is not evaluated by funds raised or members recruited.

Thanks

We extend our thanks to all of those people who made this project possible. Due to the pandemic, some of the expected outcomes of this project had to be reviewed. We would like to thank the SCF team for their understanding and flexibility in these unusual circumstances and Marion Temple, who as project lead kept us all on track.

We would also like to thank all of our contributors who made this project possible. They shared their stories with us, and were generous with their time. Together, they have allowed us to create a strong and vibrant picture of the countryside of West Yorkshire.

We would like to thank the enthusiastic Brownies who inspired us to create a future for West Yorkshire's countryside that would make them proud. We also thank their leader, who gathered their thoughts for us. 10 years is a reasonable timeframe to make some progress on how decisions are made, so we hope we can help the Brownies achieve their aspirations.

The positive feedback from other branches at the internal network event has boosted our confidence that we are on the right track.

CPRE's Yorkshire and Humber Regional Group were also hugely supportive throughout the project.

CPRE West Yorkshire,
www.cprewestyorkshire.org.uk
Charity number: 500481



The countryside charity
West Yorkshire