

**Colne Valley Park CIC Annual Forum 2018
at The Great Barn, Harmondsworth,
Friday 28th September 2018.**



MINUTES

Welcome & Introduction

John Whitby, Chairman of the Colne Valley Park Community Interest Company

JW welcomed people to the Forum and thanked them for coming. He explained why he is involved with the CVP: he has farmed in the Colne Valley his whole life, and is passionate about the local countryside. The Colne Valley Park Community Interest Company acts as a 'champion' for the Regional Park, which lies on the edge of Herts, Bucks, Berks, London and Surrey. Our work is guided by the six objectives of the Park:

- To safeguard the countryside
- To maintain and enhance the landscape
- To conserve and enhance biodiversity
- To provide opportunities for countryside recreation
- To achieve a vibrant and sustainable rural economy
- To encourage community participation

Thanks to English Heritage and the Friends of the Great Barn for allowing us to use this wonderful building.

Justine Bayley from the Friends of the Great Barn explained this remarkable building is one of only a handful of its type in the country. English Heritage purchased the barn in 2011, as it was not being maintained. It is Grade I listed, and is significant on account of its age (it dates back to 1426, a fact confirmed by tree-ring dating of its timbers), rarity, size and association with Winchester College. Medieval documents show how the barn was built and used. It influenced gothic-revival buildings. The barn also has 'group value' on account of its association with the church and village. Archaeological finds in the area date to around the 6th Century.

Guest Speaker, Lord Randall

Lord Randall explained that he had been MP for Uxbridge for 18 years, stepping down in 2015. He then became a Director of the Colne Valley Park CIC, but had to relinquish his post when he was appointed special adviser on the environment to the Prime Minister. He said that a look at his voting record will confirm how much importance he places on the Colne Valley.

It was great being in the Great Barn, as he believes it sums up what the Colne Valley is about – a landscape made up of hidden jewels. A lot of people pass by such places without realising they are there. It is still the case that few tourists come to the Colne Valley, but local people can appreciate the wildlife, lakes and ancient woodland here.

Lord Randall said he has a great interest in wildlife, especially birdwatching, and he is especially fond of the green areas around West Drayton, Uxbridge and Stockers Lake. Little Britain is a regular haunt, the ideal environment for thinking things through. The proximity of these places to London, makes them 'pretty special'. When Lord Randall became a Director of the Colne Valley Park, he quickly realised there was so much more to the area. As part of his induction he visited John Whitby's farm and was impressed at the extent to which farming is being carried out; lots of people still don't think of the area like that.

Lord Randall praised the CVPCIC Board for doing a great job. The Colne Valley is under constant and mounting pressure, not least from housing and large infrastructure projects. Proposed expansion of Heathrow and HS2 are two of the biggest threats. He said this is why we need people to keep an eye on the Colne Valley and to keep up the hard work. Having been an MP, he knows it is not enough to say: 'I don't want...', 'I don't like...' – there is a need for hard facts and good reasons for objecting to plans that threaten our precious landscape. A lot is going on in terms of responses by the CVPCIC. There is also a need to consider how to deal with developments should they go ahead, in order to ensure the maximum mitigation measures can be achieved.

The Regional Park is there to be loved and used. Walking, angling and cycling are just some of the activities that can be enjoyed, but unfortunately not enough people know about it. One of the key problems is that the Regional Park straddles a number of Boroughs and Districts, and that this can cause confusion. No one authority can 'keep an eye on it'; Lord Randall would like to see an overall planning authority covering the Regional Park, as is the case for National Parks. 'Badging up' the area is fine, but it is difficult to convey the full extent of the area to people. There is need to get funding for the Regional Park instead of funding going from local authorities to the Lee Valley.

The health benefits of getting into green spaces is clear, so it is necessary to maintain the area and encourage sustainable use. Lord Randall urged those attending the Forum to take account of the suggestions listed on the back of the Colne Valley business card: explore the park; 'like' it on Facebook; follow @Colne_Valley on Twitter to keep up with news and developments; become a member of the Friends of the CVP and spread the word. He emphasised the need for everyone to act as individuals, as the Park is 'our special place'.

Major planning proposals and mitigation. Jerry Unsworth, Planning Consultant for the Colne Valley Park CIC

The CVRP is sandwiched between two of the biggest proposed civil engineering projects in Europe (HS2 and Heathrow), plus many other developments. We will always fiercely oppose developments that conflict with the six objectives of the Park.

We take a pragmatic approach, whilst making our opposition clear. This means seeking to mitigate the impact of local authority- or government-approved developments on the Park's objectives. Position statements on HS2, Heathrow expansion and rail access to Heathrow can be found on the CVP website.

CVRP is a member of the Heathrow Strategic Planning Group – the only member not a Local Planning Authority or Local Enterprise Partnership. We act as champion for Green & Blue Infrastructure, and chair the environmental sub group.

If it goes ahead, Heathrow expansion will fundamentally change the southern third of the Park. The CVRP has identified three key issues – as follows, our requested solutions are written in italics:

- Permanent loss of parts of the Colne Valley Regional Park. *We are seeking mitigation that will reduce the scale of any loss, and seeing that loss is replaced elsewhere*
- Loss of the Park's Functionality. *We are seeking mitigation through a landscape-scale vision, and by taking a multi-functional approach to mitigation and long-term management*
- Impact on rivers and loss of connectivity from Thames to Chilterns. *We are seeking mitigation on a catchment scale, addressing habitat connectivity*

Our responses to other planning consultations over the last year have included Western Rail Link to Heathrow; the Mayor of London's transport and environment strategies; Slough and Spelthorne Council's Local Plan issues and options; Chiltern and South Bucks register of Brown Field sites. We respond to many other site specific planning applications where resources allow.

£2.5M Colne Valley Landscape Partnership. Stewart Pomeroy, Groundwork South

'Colne Valley: A Landscape on the Edge' is a new initiative that features an ambitious range of 19 projects. They include measures to conserve wildlife habitats, raise awareness among local people of the Park and the need to reduce water consumption, improve access routes into the area, support local conservation groups, and encourage residents and visitors to celebrate their landscape by getting out and about in it.

The success in securing £2.5m to fund this over the next three years is the result of many years' work dating back beyond 2013. The research and development has helped us in many ways – e.g. the production of a Colne Valley Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) in 2017 which tied together many older LCAs produced by councils, and it filled in the gaps where councils have not produced an LCA.

Monitoring and evaluation, and planning for legacy (to ensure the funding secured can have a lasting impact), are vital to this project.

More information can be seen in the 'Landscape Conservation Action Plan' at www.colnevalleypark.org.uk/projects/colne-valley-landscape-partnership-scheme

Questions on the above three, presentations

Q Protecting land is important, but how can we improve derelict land where landowners are allowing things to degrade?

JU: Local authorities have the power to do something about it: Section 215 notices can deal with untidy land, and there are opportunities to undertake enforcement action. All this has resource implications. People want certainty on the future of land; the sooner areas are resolved, the better. The question is, how will the areas be managed in the future; this is down to funding and landowner agreements.

Lord Randall: The Government is trying to bring in greater control on large-scale flytipping. Scrub etc. can be a valuable biodiversity resource. He remembers there being proposals to extend a garden centre in Uxbridge (Green Belt); this was unsuccessful. The land was abandoned and now it is of greater value for biodiversity than it was before.

Q. How are we going to get better at getting the message across to people about the value of the Regional Park? It is a challenge getting people engaged.

SP: The awareness of the Park is higher than it was 5 years ago but agreed that it is nowhere near where it could/should be. Lack of funds has been a key factor in this. With the Landscape Partnership, funding will be spent on interpretation & events, a new website and better use of social media, newsletters will be more widely distributed, Evaluation Consultant may help provide ideas on improvement. All of us have a role in getting the message out there.

Lord Randall: The lack of local newspapers does not help. The CVPCIC has recruited a new Director who has worked in media and this has been a real bonus. Encourage people to follow the CVP on Twitter; it is a good way to keep updated threats and

opportunities. Need to emphasise when particular sites are part of the Colne Valley e.g. volunteers at the Old Orchard pub to raise awareness that the beautiful view is part of the Colne Valley.

Paul Graham asked that each audience member task themselves to recruit an additional member of the Friends of the Colne Valley Park by the next Forum.

Q. How can decisions be made about whether one objective of the Regional Park is more important than another? Some farmland was used for tree planting as part of HS2 mitigation.

SP: The CVPCIC petitioned against HS2 planting trees on this farmland. Unfortunately this was ignored

JU: The strength is that equal weight is given to all objectives – it's not a case of 'either, or'. The scale of impact on the landscape is so significant that a comprehensive approach is needed. There is a need to approach mitigation for major developments in an integrated manner – it is too easy for the area around the airport to be grubby. Land should be managed in line with the Park's six objectives. The CVPCIC aims to get the right solution for the Green Belt in the area.

Lord Randall: Nature can heal itself if given a chance. It is possible to improve on what exists now.

Colne Valley Spatial Vision. Arup & Mike Woods, Director of the Colne Valley Park

One of the Landscape Partnership projects is to produce shared vision for the next 50 years that can shape projects and fundraising, and inform mitigation from developments directly affecting the Park. Arup has been commissioned to do this work over the next nine months.

This is an opportunity to bring together existing and new information, projects and initiatives to produce one unified, compelling spatial vision. This can then be used as a master document for future project delivery (a five-year and 50-year look ahead), as well as forming an evidence base for Local Authority plans.

Members of the Arup team then set out some questions to help kick start the information gathering process. The results of these discussions have been written up by Arup and are distributed along with these minutes.

Round-up and Close – John Whitby

JW thanked the Forum delegates for their attendance and input. He added it was good to see such a wide range of organisations represented: 70 organisations have joined as members of the Colne Valley Park CIC, and we greatly value this support. If your organisation has not yet joined, please speak to the CIC directors or Stewart Pomeroy from Groundwork