

ANTAS

ASSOCIATION OF NORTH THAMES AMENITY SOCIETIES



The April meeting of ANTAS was hosted by the Beaconsfield Society and held at the Parish Church in Beaconsfield Old Town, next to the Fitzwilliams centre, pictured here viewed from churchyard.

Picture courtesy the Centre for Bucks Studies, www.buckscc.gov.uk/photo_database/

NEWSLETTER SUMMER 2004

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The Chairman writes

by Dr Peter Diplock

Much of the content of this Newsletter is based on our April meeting. The timing, after the meeting, enables us to provide a summary of the talk given by our speaker, Dr Caroline Lucas, and to use some other contributions from the meeting. Please ensure that as many people in your Society have an opportunity to read the articles.

Having succeeded in getting

an MEP to speak to us in April, I hope that we will be able to attract other good speakers to our future meetings. If any of you have good links to other MEPs or to Westminster MPs, please let Andrew Sangster or me know.

We need to continue to find ways of getting more people actively involved in the activities of our individual Civic

Societies, and also in ANTAS and the two Regional Associations. Some of the articles in this Newsletter show what some groups are doing to encourage involvement. Let us know if you have good ideas – that work! I am concerned that requests for help are more often than not met by silence, or by very good reasons why help is not possible.

(Continued on page 4)

Consultation issues, how effective are our responses?

by John Davies, Hitchin Society

I am concerned about the effectiveness of responding to consultation exercises - whether local, regional or national government. On topics as diverse as the national Air Transportation consultation, right down to the local level such as a Town Centre Strategy for Hitchin, our inputs seem to be comprehensively ignored.

The Air Transportation issue is a good example: many well thought through submissions were made by national and local organisations, almost certainly making the same, consistent points on environmental issues and challenging the government's (industry's?) forecast for growth. These views were completely ignored in favour of the government's starting point (and the preferences of the aviation industry and its well-oiled lobbying machine). It's almost as though the old adage really is true 'Never consult until you have decided what you are going to do' - certainly from my experience in industry, consultation only took place once a decision had been made, and consultation was then only on marginal issues (perhaps the how of implementation). In the above example it is remarkable that the government's preferred strategy (for Luton) is not even one of the options it actually consulted on, and certainly wouldn't have been put forward by any of the objectors. It will be interesting to see what happens next on the judicial review now being sought.

Any consultation submis-

sion is only going to have any effect if it is combined with a very high profile PR/press campaign combined with effective lobbying of ministers, leading councillors or whatever. Local civic societies can do this if they try hard enough to get their arguments into the local press. Nationally, it is vital to get good press coverage, but I suspect that the Civic Trust has not been as successful at this as CPRE or CABA (or English Heritage). As a matter of interest, the Guardian a few weeks ago, had two long articles on the same page, one about market towns based on a CPRE press release, and one on soul-less urban spaces being run by CABA - nowhere was there a mention of the Civic Trust, although surely this is prime territory for the CT.

Given that we will always be very short of resources able and willing to address the issues in consultation papers, we should prioritise just how those resources be used to the best effect.

Local: (civic society level) should be done by local people who know the details and who should have good contacts with the local press - in Herts and Bucks ANTAS should provide advice if a society needs help, perhaps by providing a link to a society more experienced in the issue in question.

Regional: (SE or E of E) Consultations on truly regional issues should be handled by the CT regional association rather than by ANTAS, as the regional

associations should be developing the appropriate contacts to maximise the effect of the inputs they decide to make. Regional publicity is a difficult one as there is no real regional press - there is regional TV but this will only get involved in the most controversial of planning issues involving a large and vociferous campaign group.

National: (Civic Trust) Perhaps the CT should be more of a voice for civic societies at a national level - and getting maximum publicity in the national press on issues of widespread importance and concern. Just possibly, ANTAS and similar sub-regional groups could be at their most effective in providing an input on selected topics by providing a view from a representative cross-section of societies. Such an input would be integrated in an overall CT response, but this would hopefully carry more weight than any ANTAS submission.

In the hierarchy of local, regional and national inputs there is little distinctive and separate role for a sub-regional/ cross-regional input but ANTAS has a highly valuable role in raising the standards of what is done within our area through spreading best practice and providing the contacts to share knowledge and expertise. On this basis we should be highly selective in what we do, and target our activities on what we can do to best effect. ●

OF COURSE YOU PARTICIPATED
IN THE DECISION -
SURE DIDN'T WE TELL YOU ALL
ABOUT IT ?



Beaconsfield Potted History

by Dr Les Davies, the Beaconsfield Society

The town has a long history, first being mentioned in 1185 as Bekensfield; while the 'a' was introduced into the name much later, the pronunciation remains to this day as originally spelt. Although the name would seem to mean a 'field by a beacon', a more credible derivation is probably a 'clearing in the beeches'.

By 1255, the town had a street market and the fair, still held on 10th May each year, dates from 1269. Much of the character of the old town dates from the

days of coaching, when it became a staging post, with many coaching inns; the associated activity of highway robbery is commemorated in local place names such as Cut-throat Wood. The four main roads from the town centre crossroads, Aylesbury End, London End, Windsor End and Wycombe End, also mark the importance of the coaching trade.

With the arrival of the railway, the New Town was developed one mile north of the original centre, and this today provides the

shopping centre of Beaconsfield. With its excellent rail services to London, closeness to the M40 and only 13 miles to Heathrow, there are now great pressures on housing. Also with excellent schools it is not surprising that in-fill housing developments include anything up to six bedroom, six bathroom houses, while many people born in Beaconsfield have to move away to find a home.

Commuting and other pressures of modern life result in fewer and fewer people

willing to volunteer for activities such as the Beaconsfield Society, but even this needs to be seen in the context of there being 'no challenges, only opportunities!' ●

Communication Communication Communication Communication Communication Communication Communication

Dory Morgan, Hughenden Valley Residents' Association

At the April meeting of ANTAS communication was a major concern. As a relatively new member here are some of my thoughts; I may be teaching my grandmother to suck eggs of course!

Civic/Amenity Societies, the Civic Trust and its Regional Associations run the risk of becoming insular. It is too easy to assume that those you serve understand the role you play. Try to make use of residents' associations' ability to communicate with every household. The High Wycombe Society's recent initiative of inviting representatives from all residents' associations in their area to regular meetings should be adopted by all Civic/Amenity Societies. The representatives can report, and receive support on issues affecting their patch, be informed of town, district,

county and regional issues and most importantly, learn about the role of the Society. Information will filter back to the residents via newsletters and websites. Even if the initial response to attend is poor, persevere and offer to attend residents' association meetings or write an article for their newsletters – the personal touch works wonders. By holding regular meetings with residents' associations you are in a position to open more doors, ie. get onto local government partnerships as you will be able to prove that you represent the whole community.

Equally, the Civic Trust and its Regional Associations must communicate more with the Societies they represent; if possible appoint a PR Officer. Visit Societies and offer to write about your role/ work in their

newsletters. Invite Society representatives to regular regional forums. By being more open and showing that you are a worthwhile body to join more people will learn of your role, membership will increase and funding will be more forthcoming. With a growing informed membership you too are in a position to have greater input but this time at regional and central government levels.

I suggest that at every other ANTAS meeting, instead of having a guest speaker try to get to know each other better by dividing into small groups to discuss topics raised during the Society reports, then re-group and discuss any interesting findings. ●

It is too easy to assume that those you serve understand the role you play.

Buckingham Society - getting members involved

by David Peevers, Events Secretary, The Buckingham Society

Our members were passive recipients of newsletters and demands for subscription renewals; we needed to connect effectively with members and give them a society worth belonging to.

We initiated a new programme designed to attract and involve members, and appointed an events secretary to work with the membership secretary and other committee members to develop it. Events so far have tackled a subject of concern in Buckingham.

For the first meeting, Aylesbury Vale District Council's Martin Dalby spoke about the new Local Plan for Buckingham. The membership then poured over maps and enjoyed a lively question and answer session. We were pleased that he emphasized that AVDC welcomes local views right from the earliest planning stages. Next was a visit from Brian Patten of the Environment Agency, project manager for our section of the River Great Ouse, who clarified Agency plans regarding flood man-

agement for the town. He too valued the views of local people and was well received. This furthered our aim to establish good contact with the Environment Agency whose work is so important to Buckingham. Another event examined the potential growth of Milton Keynes, our aggressively expanding neighbour.

Transport is a real issue for us so we plan a lively evening on the topic, 'Transport in Buckingham: are we being ignored?' Society members will hear from experts from local government, transport users and pressure groups. The highlight of each event is the discussion generated between speakers and members as this really airs concerns and widens horizons. Our expanding membership is demonstrating enthusiasm, becoming better informed and really finding a voice.

We decided at the start to have a mix of afternoon and evening meetings and so far, evenings attract significantly more people.

Not all our events tackle heavy issues. We plan some fun in the summer with afternoon walks, starting with the National Trust's garden at Stowe on our doorstep. Then former chairman of the Society, Ed Grimsdale, will walk and talk about the curiosities of Buckingham.

Before the business of an event, members meet and chat over a glass of wine or tea and biscuits. Events are good opportunities for recruiting. Non-members pay more to attend but get a refund if they join. We are assessing whether an entry charge is the best method to recover costs.

We place posters in the town advertising forthcoming meetings and also issue press releases both before and after each event. Publicity is helpful in establishing the credibility and status of the Society and also helps members feel good about belonging.

Our events are proving really rewarding and we are looking forward to developing the programme. ●

We send a steady flow of information to our members to keep them informed and motivated. It is encouraging that new subjects and new speakers are now being suggested by the members themselves.

Peter Diplock looks forward to seeing you all at our AGM in October. If anyone is willing to get more involved with the ANTAS Committee please speak to him or Andrew Sangster.

(Continued from page 1)

Individual Societies have their own local concerns. These may be specific to them or shared with other Societies. That is one of the reasons that ANTAS was formed - to provide a louder voice than would be possible if everyone was just working in isolation. The Regional Associations were set up by the Civic Trust to provide a strong regional voice. They will only work if more people get involved. Does your Society send a representative to the Regional Meet-

ings? If not, why not? Does your Society respond to requests for help? If not, why not? If you do not know what the Regional Association does and why it is important to get involved, invite someone to one of your meetings to tell you what they do and why.

We should respond to Government consultation documents that are likely to affect us - but how? How should we do this in the most effective way? In my role as a Trustee of The Civic Trust I am contacting

all Regional Associations to find out what they do and whether any of them have an effective and efficient process.

Dory Morgan makes a suggestion (*above*) about the format of our ANTAS meetings. Would you like us to take up her suggestion? I am concerned that the time taken for the Society reports can be quite long. Should we use green, amber and red lights to limit the time for each speaker - what do you think?

Competition and Civic Societies

by John Davies, Hitchin Society

If competition is a good thing, why should a town have only one civic society? Perhaps there is room for two or even more, each campaigning for the historic and built environment.

These thoughts probably seem strange to members of societies secure in the knowledge that theirs is the one undisputed civic society in town. Many places have enough difficulty in sustaining just one active society, without the luxury of having several competing groups. But in one place at least, there are overlapping societies campaigning for the town's built environment, and competing for membership, publicity and influence. Although this could be seen as the mark of a healthy and vigorous local community, it can also have negative consequences; a lack of focus in dealing with the local council, duplication of effort (always in short supply), and confusion in the mind of the general public.

In the case of Hitchin, it is as though there is some

underlying need to reinvent the role of a civic society every decade or so. It may, of course, be that some feel the civic society is no longer achieving its original purpose, and that the only way of fighting new threats is to form a new group. However, there may be a further mechanism at work.

It is almost as though each new generation needs to make its mark on the local scene, and rather than working within an established framework, wishes to make a fresh start. Perhaps each group of newly established residents, typically as thirty-something professionals, feel strongly about a threat to the town and determine to 'do something' about it. They probably have not even heard of the town's civic society, and if they had, would probably think it too staid and set in its ways to campaign as actively as they would wish. So they set about forming a new organisation, with a committee, constitution and newsletter; in effect another civic society.

Since the Hitchin Society was formed in the early 1960's, this cycle has in effect been repeated twice, and now in recent weeks we have seen the process at work yet again. A new group of articulate, relatively young, people with up-to-date presentational skills, have set up their own vigorous, high profile campaign against the Council's plans for the town centre. And very definitely not wanting to work through any of the three established groups in the town.

This raises various issues for an established civic society. Should it work with each new organisation as it arises, or should it argue that one civic society is enough for any town? How should a civic society remain as the focal point of making representations to local government, and not be seen as just another local pressure group?

Perhaps one lesson is that civic societies must always remain at the cutting edge

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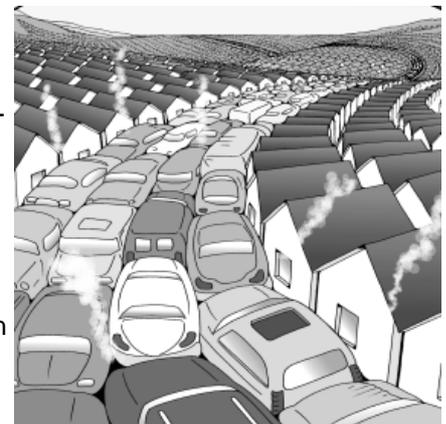
..... each new generation needs to make its mark on the local scene, and rather than working within an established framework, wishes to make a fresh start.

Housing Allocation and Democracy

An issue which cuts across all societies in the ANTAS region is that of housing allocation as decreed from Westminster. The Chiltern Society is also concerned at the loss of local democracy and have had success lobbying MPs and in particular Andrew Selous, MP for South West Bedfordshire. All societies are urged to try that avenue. Hansard quotes his report from the

Chiltern Society newsletter concerns at the examination in public process "... a Government office made it quite clear that it was not the job of the EiP (Examination in Public) to question Government Policy on growth in the South-East of England. We're stuck with it, like it or lump it. ...the process of an Examination in Public is inadequate, undemocratic and disem-

The Editor
powering ... which no longer allows individuals, local groups or voluntary organizations ... to put their case except in writing ..., nor to have convenient access to the debates." The Chiltern Society latest newsletter Chiltern News, is out but now available on the website www.chilternsociety.org.uk



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 unsustainable. The impact of developing so many homes in the South East has not been fully assessed'.

I propose a way forward that has at its heart a moratorium on plans for large-scale development in the South East. Instead, there should be radical tests to ensure the economic diversity of other regions and the maximum use of previously developed land and buildings. A crucial new factor in achieving this is the EU Directive on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) which comes into force in July. This will provide for a high level of protection of the environment, and integrating environmental considerations to promote sustainable development.

The usefulness of this approach is that a SEA Report is required to include information on 'reasonable alternatives, taking into account the objectives and geographical scope of the plan'. The examination of alternatives must be broad, and cover a range of objectives and how to they might be achieved. Equally important, the SEA Report must be taken into account during the preparation of a plan, and not just when the final decision is being made.

Local Food, Case Study

Moving from the sort of development we don't want, to the sort we do. I share a case study aimed at building strong and vibrant communities in the countryside. Rural communities are in serious decline; nearly half of rural parishes don't have a shop or school, and three-quarters don't have a daily

bus service or doctor. We need to learn from rural transport initiatives in other EU Member States, but such initiatives will not by themselves bring back life to rural communities.

Agriculture is central to that task, yet farming is also in crisis; declining numbers and low incomes, averaging in 2002 just £10,000 per year. Instead, I want to look at how local food can help revitalise the countryside and market towns, rebuild communities and improve the environment. Local foods can deliver on sustainable development - economic (by providing a profitable route to market), environmental (cutting down on transport) and social (a sense of community between buyer and seller).

A Local Food Action Plan, supported by all levels of government and facilitated by the EU would break down obstacles such as rules on procurement and international trade, and internalising environmental costs (cheap fuel enables so much unnecessary international trade).

The bottom line is: if we want to see re-invigorated local food economies, based on high environmental and animal welfare standards, we are going to have to protect those economies from unfair competition from very different sorts of food economies. We are also going to have to tackle head-on the power of the supermarkets. So that is the challenge. There are excellent local food initiatives in this country, but we need to replicate them, and strengthen their role. We also need to talk about the Common Agricultural Policy and the need for real reform if we

are to achieve fair farm-gate prices for farmers.

Public procurement policies - such as food for schools and hospitals - should permit, say, 10% of budgets to be used for locally sourced foods. Where this is done, for example in many Italian towns, it is possible to specify fresh and locally produced ingredients, and to have in place organic school meal systems. We need to educate the public, and publicise the benefits of local food - to the farmer, the consumer, the environment and the local economy.

The challenges are great, at a time when the top five retailers in the UK account for over two-thirds of food sales, and half the country's food is sold through just 1,000 giant stores. But the benefits of local food are clear; it's vital that we seize the opportunities to promote it. ●

(Continued from page 5)
 of campaigning, and must be prepared to respond very fast to new situations with the maximum of publicity. Societies must make themselves known to younger groups, so that when gathered outside the school gates, at the health club, or on the commuter train, they can discuss what the civic society is doing, and how they can contribute to its work. Once we fail to do that, we will be overtaken by newer, more active groups who perhaps quite rightly should take over the mantle of the recognised civic society. ●

Agriculture is central to building strong and vibrant communities in the countryside, yet farming is also in crisis. Local food can help revitalise the countryside and market towns, it can deliver on sustainable development - economic and social.

Grass Roots and Day-glo Posters, Strategies for Successful Campaigning

Dory Morgan, Hughenden Valley Residents' Association

As a Residents' Association serving a tight knit community with over 90% membership we do have an advantage. We keep our residents informed via newsletter, website and the local press, but more importantly, when we need to 'rally the troops' we are able to leaflet drop every household within 48 hours via a team of 'road reps' – our grass roots. Each road has at least one representative on the Hughenden Valley Residents' Association Committee who also report residents' concerns at our monthly meetings.

Research your subject thoroughly. In the case of a planning application copy everything on file – sometimes what seems like the most innocuous piece of paper can reveal a useful snippet of information, get to know local planning policies and quote them verbatim. Recently when campaigning on road safety we researched guidelines/directives at both County and Central Government levels and found they conflicted to our advantage. Our leaflets tell the full facts, give bullet points on key issues/policies to assist in letter writing and a list of relevant recipients where applicable, including Planning/Highways Officers, Parish, District & County Councillors, Civic and Conservation Societies, MPs and Regional and Central Government Offices. Hundreds of letters arriving at the home addresses of the Councillors and MPs stop them in their tracks – true people power! When an important issue warrants letter writing to every local government committee member we can

take on the duty of photocopying and forwarding – dogged determination!

Through attending local council meetings and forums you get to know your local Councillors and Officers. In turn you gain their respect not least because you have a reputation for doing your homework. In knowing your Councillors you can spend more time lobbying those who may be less sympathetic to your cause. If we are concerned about a particular planning application because the decision is delegated to the planning officer, we can be confident that having notified our Ward Councillor he will 'call it in' to go before the elected committee.

Newsletters and websites are all very well but they are not constantly 'in your face'. This is where day-glo posters really do come into their own. Make sure the posters are no larger than A3 and sited on private property. On a row of garden fences facing fields carved up for speculative land sales they can inform prospective purchasers of local and national policies protecting the land, advise them to seek expert planning advice and ultimately deter them. Equally, a whole story can unfold on a stretch of fences along a main road through a village or town. You have a captive audience during rush hour when the traffic is crawling along – use it. By changing the poster colour and message regularly you keep the campaign fresh and when a wider audience needs to be made aware place smaller versions on the windows of your cars. These basic strategies and

philosophies work for us, we hope they can be of use to you.

Footnote

Notification of planning applications is limited to immediate neighbouring properties and a tucked away section of the local press. But we need to communicate quickly with and advise the whole community of any major issues or contentious planning applications as time is usually of the essence. To keep abreast, most local district council weekly bulletins contain the latest news and planning applications that can be emailed to you on request. Alternatively, get into the habit of looking at the local council website weekly. You are then in a position to inform all members/residents of anything of importance.
<http://hughenden.org.uk/>
(note no www) •



Hughenden Valley

Civic Trust South East

Merrin Molesworth, Chesham

CTSE has made submissions on 11 consultations. The additional houses the Barker Review requires (100,000) are only likely to be achieved by distorting the planning system to the benefit of the developers, and most will need to be Affordable to achieve the 30-40% proportion. CTSE now has a place on the Housing Advisory Group. On-going consultations are (a) a Sub-regional Study for towns along the South Coast, (b) with the Countryside Agency) Future of the Rural South East.

Local Strategic Partnerships represent the best (if not the only) route for a local Society to be involved in decision making. Approach your District or County Council for information.

You are invited to the CTSE Autumn Conference on Saturday 2 October at the Medway Civic Centre, Strood, Kent, hosted by the City of Rochester Society. The topic will be Conservation and Development in the South East. Contact the Secretary Alan Moss, 32 Powlett Road, Frindsbury, Rochester Kent E2 4RD phone: 01634 721886 e-mail secretary@city-of-rochester.org.uk. More details on our website www.civictrustsoutheast.org.uk. •

Saving the South East creating really sustainable communities

*Dr Caroline Lucas, Green Party
MEP for the South East, addressed the ANTAS, meeting, a
shortened version follows.*

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(CTSE)

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Residents' Association
Marlow Society
Potters Bar Society
Radlett Society
St Albans Society
Stony Stratford
Community Association
Wendover Society

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I start by quoting from a poem by Philip Larkin called *Going, Going*. 'And that will be England gone, ... but all that remains for us will be concrete and tyres'. I would juxtapose this with an observation from a Select Committee report on housing and planning 'The gap between the English regions affects everybody. It is persistent and increasing. Reducing this gap could improve everyone's quality of life.'

These two quotations really sum up what I want to talk about. People feel 'developed to death' as they see green space being eaten up by more concrete and tarmac. This cannot be dismissed as 'nimbyism'; we have a legitimate concern about development that prioritises expansion in the South East, while other regions are crying out for further jobs and sustainable development.

With a population of over eight million - more than several European countries - the South East's role as the 'engine of the British economy' has brought considerable prosperity. The region's GDP of around £140 billion per annum is equivalent to the national economies of Portugal, Norway, Greece and Denmark. If an independent country, it would rank 22nd in the world's economy. But such prosperity has brought other problems - a lack of affordable housing, ever-worsening travel congestion, and ever-more threats to green belt land and open spaces from property and infrastructure development.

In contrast, while graduates and investment are attracted to London and the South East, no less than 730,000 houses lie empty across

England; there is a lack of an adequate national strategy. And even within the South East, for all its increased affluence, there are pockets of severe deprivation counted amongst the most deprived areas in Britain. It is hard to see how development that threatens protected areas in the South East, attracts more people, demands more transport and resources, while simultaneously diverting resources away from other regions that need jobs and investment, can possibly be defined as 'sustainable'.

We need a different way forward. We need a debate on how to make development more genuinely equitable and sustainable, and on how European legislation on environmental issues can help achieve that.

The South East's role as the 'engine of the British economy' has brought considerable prosperity. If an independent country, it would rank 22nd in the world's economy.

The government claims it aims to 'protect the diverse nature and character of the South East', while the Regional Economic Strategy argues for 'the South East to continue to drive the UK economy'. These aims are incompatible. There is increasing recognition that the concentration of development in the South East is the mirror image of relative decline in other regions, and even the government's own Select Committee said 'Building more homes is not a panacea, and could be

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www.antas.org.uk

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