

# ANTAS

ASSOCIATION OF NORTH THAMES AMENITY SOCIETIES

## Eco-towns - good or bad?

John Davies,

The latest thinking on the government's immensely challenging housing targets is to include a number of "eco-towns" amongst the development proposals.

These would, in principle, be new settlements aimed at achieving the highest standards of sustainability. The housing would be required to meet the target of zero carbon emissions; energy requirements would be minimised by the highest standards of construction, while the small amount of energy still required would be produced from renewable

port corridors, but with no specific features to justify the term "sustainable" in any objective sense. So, what might be different this time?

One thing is sure. Building new settlements on largely greenfield sites, and often in particularly fine countryside, will be vociferously opposed by local residents and environmental campaigners alike. Even where the locations are classified as brownfield sites, this is likely to be the result of former defence use, including airfields, rather than representing the

within the broader area of interest to ANTAS. A brief look at these proposals throws up some of the strengths and weaknesses of the eco-town concept, particularly as it might be implemented in this country. The two schemes in our area, Weston Otmoor in Oxfordshire, and Marston Vale in Bedfordshire, provide some interesting contrasts even at this early stage of development.

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sources, wherever possible generated on-site. This does need to be seen in the context of the government requiring *all* new housing to be carbon-neutral by 2016, so the specific benefits of eco-towns need to go rather beyond this if the concept is to have real meaning.

It is perhaps inevitable that people will question the environmental credentials of the proposed new towns. After all, for the last decade or more, new large-scale housing schemes have been promoted as "sustainable developments" aimed at creating "sustainable communities". On examination, these have been found to be simply large developments located broadly within defined trans-

genuine re-use of derelict industrial land. The loss of such land will also be strongly opposed.

The government advanced the eco-town concept further this April, with the announcement of a short-list of 15 preferred locations. In a month or so, this is to be refined to just 10 towns, of which the first five are to be built by 2016, and the remainder by 2020. These will be the first new towns in England in 40 years.

Of these, there are just two schemes



Philip Kolvin, Chairman of the Civic Trust, had the ANTAS meeting mesmerized, see page 5. Photo courtesy Roger King

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### **Weston Otmoor**

Located close to Weston on the Green, and extending almost to the Ot Moor semi-wetland nature reserve, this development is just 7 miles to the north-east of Oxford. It is bordered by the M40 motorway and would extend on both sides of the A34 Oxford to Bicester road. At present it is largely farmland, with a grass airfield on part of the site; some of the land is within the Oxford greenbelt. The line of the former Oxford to Cambridge railway (now termed the east-west rail link) marks the southern edge of the site.

The developer, Parkridge Holdings, is proposing a new town of 15,000 dwellings, with a population of 35,000, and 12,000 jobs on site. In addition to the housing being aimed at "zero carbon" once in use, the developer proposes a combined heat and power (CHP) station on site and "innovation" in terms of waste disposal and water management. The two parts of the site would be joined by bridges over the A34 road; the proposal has these lined with shops and houses as an architectural feature of distinction.

The obvious criticism is that the development would be highly car-dependent, either for journeys to Oxford or for long-distance commuting via the M40. The developers meet this objection by two specific proposals. First of all, they state the development will fund the reopening of the east-west rail link between Oxford and Milton Keynes, with a new station serving Weston Otmoor. Secondly, they propose a tram system within the new town,

free to residents, linking the housing areas to the station.

Without such massive investment in public transport, the development has no credibility as an eco-town, but equally, there is no precedent within this country for such transport provision for a relatively small, stand-alone, housing development. If a culture of car-dependency is to be avoided, it would be essential for the new transport arrangements to be available from the very start of the development, although it is hardly possible that the investment for even a partial reopening of the east-west rail link could be in place before the first house is sold. The tram system has simply no credibility for a settlement of just 35,000 residents. The government has set its face against modern tram (or Light Rail Transit - LRT) systems, for example recently rejecting a LRT proposal for Leeds, with a population of 425,000, the largest city in Europe with no metro or LRT system.

Quite apart from transport arrangements, Weston Otmoor raises serious issues of loss of productive farm land, the effect of water run-off on the Ot Moor nature reserve, and the negative impact on nearby settlements, including Bicester, where the town centre is in need of regeneration. Overall, perhaps falling short of the expectation of an eco-town.

### **Marston Vale**

An area of land stretching some 8 miles south-west from Bedford towards the M1 motorway is now known as Marston Vale. Bordered to the south by the Greensand Ridge, and

to the north by low hills, much of it has been marked by the effects of clay workings and brickworks. At one time 20% of all brick production in England was concentrated here, with the landscape dominated by over 150 tall chimneys. Now only one brickworks is in operation, and the future of that is uncertain. As a consequence of the clay workings, the area includes a number of landfill sites. Although the landscape is much degraded by industrial activity, there has recently been considerable remediation through the development of lakes and forested areas.

The only significant part of the Oxford to Cambridge railway still in use passes through the area, providing passenger services between Bedford and Bletchley, and with developments in hand to extend through services to Milton Keynes Central.

The developer, O&H Properties Ltd, is proposing an eco-town development of eventually 15,400 dwellings, including 9,000 dwellings on land now in their ownership. The proposal includes extensive areas for employment and mixed development and calls for a high standard of sustainability, with zero carbon dwellings, water neutrality, and waste and forest biofuels being used for CHP.

Transport arrangements include making use of existing railway stations on the Bedford - Bletchley line, and also a planned new station on the Midland Mainline south of Bedford. The developer proposes that integrated transport should be provided within the area through a "Quality Bus Partnership" Although

the site already provides employment opportunities, and these may be expected to increase, there is likely to be considerable outward commuting to Milton Keynes, Bedford and beyond. The rail-based infrastructure that currently exists offers the potential for meeting increased demand for commuting and other journeys to major centres, and this site may well be a credible option for sustainability in transport as well as in housing provision.

A concern in the current proposal is the dispersed and fragmented nature of the areas identified for housing development. This may militate against the development of a strong sense of community with a well established town centre, and for local journeys to be feasible by walking or cycling. If this scheme is selected as a site for eco-town development, it must be hoped that this aspect will be revisited at the detailed planning stage.

### **Next steps**

Once the government announces the sites selected for the first eco-towns, the debate will intensify with local objectors protesting about loss of countryside and others challenging the environmental credentials of the proposals. If there is to be a serious intent to achieve sustainability in new housing in the broadest sense, including construction, and the external implications, including the environmental effects of travel to and from the new settlements, it is essential for lessons to be learned from best European practice. There is considerable catching-up to be achieved before this country can claim leadership in this field.

## The Chairman Writes

Tony Fooks

This will be my last letter as chairman of ANTAS. It has been a wonderful experiencing to meet so many of you and be able to discuss issues relating to your own area. The support and input from the Executive team has been tremendous and I thank them for their input.

I am pleased to report that Martin Brookes of the Amersham Society will I hope, be accepted at our AGM in October as your new chairman. Martin has a wealth of experience and I am sure will lead ANTAS into 2009 with great panache.

Finally I will not be far away as I have accepted the role as Chairman of the Civic Trust South East Region. I hope to make this as active as ANTAS during the coming year. It is my intention to hold a "Getting to Know Your Societies" event in the spring of 2009 which I hope ANTAS will participate in. I hope that you have a great summer and many thanks for your support during my term of office.

## SHLAA - What's That???

Chris Woodman

Yes, it's one of the latest abbreviations from DCLG (say Declog, we understand). SHLAA stands for Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment. At least it's very pronounceable. SHLAAs supersede the reassuring familiar Urban Capacity Studies of yesteryear. SHLAAs were introduced by PPS3 Housing (particularly Annex C thereof), and if you search hard on the DCLG website, you will find a highly detailed document called *SHLAAs Practice Guidance*. This reminds us that: *A top priority for Government is to ensure that land availability is not a constraint on the delivery of more homes.*

A tall order, as we all know. In fact, PPS3 requires planning authorities to:

- identify specific, deliverable sites for the first 5 years of a plan that are ripe for development;
- identify specific, deliverable sites for years 6-10, and ideally years 11-15, to enable the five-year supply to be topped up;
- and where that is not possible for years 11-15, to identify broad locations for future growth; *but*
- not to include an allow-

ance for windfalls in the first 10 years unless there are justifiable local circumstances that prevent specific sites being identified.

SHLAAs are the Government's chosen tool for fulfilling these requirements. SHLAAs must identify sites with housing potential, assess their housing potential and assess when they are likely to be developed.

In fact, this requires a huge amount of work – a site-by-site assessment of each site's "suitability, availability and achievability". Moreover, the Government insists that a "partnership approach" should be followed from the very start. This should involve not only regional and local planning bodies but a whole range of key stakeholders, such as house builders, property agents, social landlords, and "local communities".

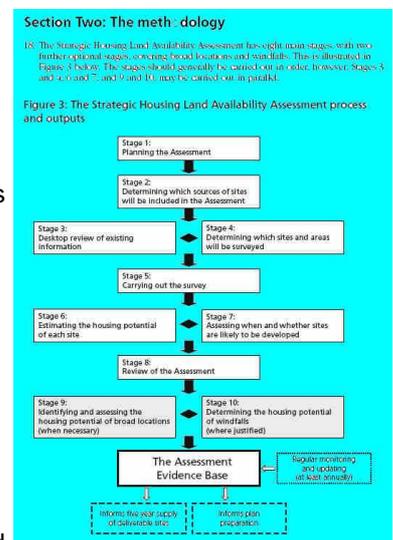
As usual, Wycombe District Council seems to be well up with the game, and the High Wycombe and Marlow Societies were invited to a workshop in High Wycombe on 5 June, where they joined in discussion of the various criteria that

should be used to assess the first requirement - "suitability", which includes brownfield-versus-greenfield, Green Belt, AONB, and any need to retain community buildings, employment land and playing fields etc. They were also asked, and subsequently agreed, to participate in the series of meetings that would go through the site-by-site consideration.

It also emerged that the Wycombe model for this exercise is for Stage 1, the drawing-up of the SHLAA, to be a relatively non-political and technical one. Stage 2, when the SHLAA is drawn on to make the allocations of sites for housing in the Local Development Framework Site Allocations Document, would be led by elected Councillors (although there will no doubt be consultation, as for other parts of the LDF).

Although somewhat daunted by the potential task, we can only urge our fellow Societies to make sure they too are involved in this process in their own districts. It is the bottom-up path into influencing where

housing goes in your area. The Practice Guidance does not specifically refer to "amenity societies" but it does require involving "communities", and we are the most obvious embodiment of that concept outside the elected Councils.



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That whole language seems to have been corrupted now by government so that sustainable development means something about endogenous growth - a concept that he doesn't understand. It is developing sustainably for business. But that's not the objective—the objective is surely to create a world which works for its citizens. So Philip feels strongly that we desperately need organizations which cannot be dismissed as greenies, we're not Friends of the Earth. We see the whole picture, not just the environment, we see the cities as well, the communities, the places for our children in those communities. It is about creating cities that we care to live in, and we are proud to hand on to our children. To achieve that we can't just take on the local council because in so many aspects the council won't have the power any more. CT needs to be able to speak nationally as a national movement.

When Philip talks about the Civic Trust's ability to speak as a national movement, he talks about Michael Hammerson who gives his time for free, a bit of Paul Davies when he's not talking about the night time economy—his High Street UK, and a tiny little bit of Hanna Mummery. CT just doesn't have the capacity to talk at the national level and Philip wants an organization which is capable of talking at national level. The CPRE has about 13 people working in policy, whereas CT don't have one person just working in policy. Philip wants to be able to put out the papers, create the thinking, meet the ministers, do the persuading: so that societies' concerns are properly reflected at national level.

The CT has started to think more like that and has had more press this year such as letters in the newspapers. They are going to get a high profile president who will raise the CT profile the way that Bill Bryson's advent has raised the profile of CPRE. Philip wants the movement to talk nationally.

The other thing is for the CT to provide better support to local civic societies. It busts a gut now and made great strides before Philip's time, but must do more. There is now a dedicated person—Alberta Stevens, who is the civic society liaison. CT puts out publications like Grass Roots, which people are finding useful and also puts it online. But CT can do a whole lot more to provide learning support and education and moral support to societies. Just as when there is a local concern and societies want ANTAS to talk for them on an executive level, CT could do that. Philip sees this not as a contract but as a compact whereby the civic societies give the Trust the support it needs in order to feed back. He's been

talking around this over the last few months. CT has held Away Days and developed a number of proposals which have started to be put out to local and regional groups. Philip was talking to the Yorkshire and Humber Association of Civic Societies (YHACS) which is an active regional association and he addressed the national council of civic societies about this recently.

It is quite scary because it costs the CT £120,000 per year to run what Philip regards as a skeleton service to local civic societies. Income from the societies is £60,000 so just to stand still they are £50,000 short and they don't have it any more. CT is re-tendering for Green Flag this year—that has been funding the civic societies. People look at CT accounts and see a million or two coming in but in fact what happens is that each of the programmes is funded by a particular organization. For example Heritage Open Days is funded by English Heritage and the cash can't be siphoned off. Philip is trying to build up the civic societies as a ring-fenced movement in its own right; then if government pulls support or whatever else happens, the civic society movement will be self sustaining. He means ring-fencing quite seriously, anything which comes from the civic societies would go back in a sealed system to the movement. "I'm talking about service."

Policy – the CT needs better policy thinking to ensure that policies are clear on every major issue of the day.

Press – CT has a small bit of a press officer who normally works elsewhere and gives time when he can.

Campaigning – Philip wants at least somebody to decide what this year's campaign is about and to help people with their campaigns. Somebody with a local problem can phone and ask for help. He wants learning resources so the CT could supply an area with a problem in gambling premises or the night time economy or a threat to housing or whatever, with the necessary written and aural learning resources.

Philip also wants better web resources. CT has taken a big step with the launch of the Trust website. People can go to the website as they would look for the local B&Q, and click to (say) the Amersham society and find out what its issues are and its contacts. We've got to work on the internet more. They've costed out a base minimum for a campaigning organization and the answer is a quarter of a million pounds. CT can't even afford a fund raising officer, so Philip is starting rather as he started with Crystal Palace—with 7p in the pot. Although starting from a low level he does feel that if he can bind the organization together and just make a start

then he can build on that for future years. Even 12 months from now, if CT can just fill the gap between the 60,000 coming and in and the 120,000 needed just to maintain services at the current level, that would be a realistic aspiration the first year.

There are a number of things involved. The first crucial, is that it is difficult to get a movement going when you don't know who your constituents actually are. There are a quarter of a million people out there and CT can't reach them. Philip can send a letter to the person in charge. If the society isn't online but some of its members are, the first step is to seek their assistance in asking their members to give their details. Two things flow from that, the first is that CT can inform them of what the Trust is doing. If an instant issue comes up requiring a response, CT can inform the societies this is going on, "please would you like to get stuck into this?" For example the CT has got one of the world's leading thinkers on the night time economy coming over from America but can't notify the local societies because their newsletter isn't out until after the event. CT needs to contact societies by email. With a quarter of a million names CT has at least got some ability to bind societies together and get some fundraising. It is not a lot, £1 per member to create a sense of national movement. Philip's first step is to find out who those local people are and put the Trust in contact with them. He doesn't want to go over anybody's heads, he's highly respectful of the structures within which the civic societies operate—the regional movement, the national societies. It is another level at which we can communicate, in the same way as CPRE national members also belong to the local branch. CT has all sorts of ideas for how to develop nationally.

"I'll finish by telling you one thing". Civic normally means municipal, it means we want to have a sense of civic pride and interest in our civic buildings. And that was the inspiration for the CT when it was set up 50 years ago. It is not the only meaning of that word. We need to recognize that we are in a world now where the issues transcend our local problems. Issues like global warming, how does that affect the water levels in our local river? Issues of population expansion—how does that affect the Aylesbury Vale green areas? And one of the biggest issues of all: we're now a multi-cultural society and often people's allegiances are no longer local. They are not necessarily to the church, trade union or Scouts group or even to their political party. Peoples allegiances are often to global brands like Nike or Adidas or Google—things which transcend not just local organizations

but nationhood itself. All our old conceptions about citizenship and what it means to be British are being challenged.

Philip lives in London where 300 languages are spoken in local communities. What is it to be a citizen in the UK today? Is it the heritage buildings or the cricket teams, our political institutions or is it the monarchy—for a lot of people around where he lives that is seen as really rather hostile. We need to think beyond the conception of protecting our own space, to understand what it actually is to be a citizen. If you ask people what is your nationalism, what does it consist of? Very often it means we beat the Germans in the war and in the World Cup, but what does it mean positively, not negatively, not against somebody else but for? What is it that makes you stand up and think "I'm proud to be part of this society"? Philip is not sure he knows the answer but thinks it resides somewhere in some notion of citizenship, the other meaning of civic. As a movement CT are wonderfully placed "we don't have any enemies" to develop notions of citizenship around not hostility or being anti anything, but around community and responsibility and a sense of care for our garden, for our own patch. To plant a seed, striking a positive blow not just for Amersham or Wendover but for England—this is what CT stands for. To get back in touch with a sense of sharing, the Victorians would have understood that as they were setting up their co-operative movement. It would have been no problem to an England that was mostly governed by the local church, which did so much in terms of alms houses and welfare and so on. Within this society the civic society movement has the opportunity to stimulate debate on citizenship. Next year the CT are going to run a series of lectures on citizenship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century called Citizenship and Heritage, Citizenship in Design, Citizenship and Civil Liberties through a series of speakers.

The idea of micro-parks emanates from this concept of building something positive in a citizen oriented way for your own community. Philip wants to stimulate the gap year where kids can go—not back-packing off to Thailand but spend more time contributing to community based things which make England great—its coastal areas and its forests, its heritage buildings. To translate those ideas into action CT needs people in the office. It's a question of bringing energy from your sentiments and beliefs to a national office which can articulate those beliefs nationally and then can feed back the resources which you need to become more effective local organizations. "That is where I hope we are going".

## Philip Kolvin speaks to ANTAS as heard by Merrin Molesworth



Philip interestingly and amusingly described how he became involved in campaigning for the cause of Crystal Palace. It was about democracy. In a genuine democracy people have the primary responsibility for their own cultural, environmental and historic assets; the decisions that affect us are taken by communities. Philip is inherently distrustful of consultation because of his experience with Crystal Palace. He doesn't mean that individual societies should be at the end of some sort of consultation process, he means civic societies should be *right* up there, at the outset, making the proposals, being involved in the decisions which effect people's lives. It is his passion that local people should have a sense of dominion over their own environment. It doesn't matter whether you're talking about Greenfield sites, or water, or the economy—the things which seem to be the dominant themes for society.

Philip also feels local people need to find other local people so as to create a sense of movement—a moral army, which can guide thinking at a national level. We're not the planning authority and we're not the highway authority. We are the moral authority because we are affected by this proposal. He decided he was into positive campaigning and was responsible for a number of nice green schemes in South London which involved the same campaigning technique of bringing people together and exercising influence. Then he was offered the chairmanship of the Civic Trust. He knew a little about the Trust and the website showed that it was into everything that he was into. Philip wanted to help on a strategic level as well as a local level although he likes to have a local issue.

He described what the Civic Trust stands for – the main cornerstones, and listed first—heritage, not a heritage organization but it is part of the narrative. CT holds Heritage Open Days—sites opened by local volunteers who are there to tell the stories; some 3,000 sites were opened last year, and a million people visited. CT is edging into London now, with the support of English Heritage, and hoping to extend heritage open days to become a heritage open weekend, or up to three weeks, because people find it difficult to get to all the wonderful places. CT plans to have a heritage aspect to the London Olympics—a Cultural Olympics, to introduce visitors to Britain to more of our heritage. Get organizations to work together to

include buildings and gardens. Last year CT organized a scheme called Made in Britain working with people like David Mellor and Alan Bridge—water—people who make wonderful British design, to help promote it. We still do have a manufacturing base in Britain and its future is to manufacture better than anybody else. To bring all those brands together to try to advance them as parts of our heritage. There is also a group called Sacred Britain which is bringing together a sort of multi-faith group of Church, Muslims and Jews to show the heritage in our religious buildings.

The second thing the CT does which is really close to Philip Kolvin's heart is Green Space. The flagship is the Green Flag Awards which the CT has been running for the government: awards which recognize qualities of management and so forth in our parks and give local authorities some benchmark standards to aspire to. *If there is a green flag flying you know it is a well run park.* CT has just become joint custodian of a huge award scheme for Community Spaces, and will be doling out a lot of money in a transparent way, for groups or local authorities to improve their own green spaces.

We often think of our parks and regional parks, but another idea, not novel, is for micro parks. That few square yards of uncared for neglected space beyond the supermarket or by the bus stop, or behind the platform or on the edge of the estate that nobody is taking much care of. Such a space could be lovely, it could have a bench and a bin, and then people on their way to the shops could sit down and read the paper and make a connection with the area they wouldn't otherwise have made. Civic societies could take stewardship of their square yards of space or their 50 square yards of space. The Micro Park would be a sort of calling card for the civic society movement—our statement that we care for and are exercising stewardship and thinking about that bit of land. CT is thinking about different ways to promote greenness and are re-tendering for the green flag awards this year. It's fingers crossed as it is the driving force of their philosophy.

The third element CT is dealing with is design and regeneration, (Philip is not sure if these go in the same categories). CT runs awards for buildings, not like the Stirling Prize which is for the big signature, knock out gherkins and those sort of buildings. What the CT Awards celebrate are community

buildings which serve a function for the community. The design is part of it but the function, the way it coheres with the narrative of the urban environment, the way it doesn't impose itself, is part of the environment and is responsive to the needs of local people—those are the kind of things the judges are looking for. CT had a wonderfully successful awards ceremony in Newcastle which Philip went to, next year it will be in London. It is the 50th anniversary of the CT awards. And CT does other things associated with regeneration eg. pilot programmes in Great Malvern as well as other places—called High Street UK, which brings local people to work out how they can improve their own commercial environments. CT has a scheme called Biz Fizz for helping people starting as entrepreneurs to set up their own community-based companies.

One of the most timely to him personally because of his profession, is Night Vision—a government sponsored project to look at the effects on the night time economy of the Licensing Act 2003. Arising from that, CT produced a report about the kinds of things which could be done to promote sustainable night time economies. Philip feels the government has got it all wrong. You're never going to solve the night time economy by trying to squeeze it out of existence—it just doesn't work. The brewers are very powerful people in this country. What you can try to do is promote sustainable economies, mixed economies, where people as old as him are attracted to visit town centres at night so there isn't a sort of youth oriented, alcohol driven monoculture. So there is a better sense of sharing. You can't do that by legislation, you do it by good planning, good action, good community involvement. The CT is doing a number of things, it is creating a qualification for the management of the night time economy—at present there is none. CT is also creating an award called the Purple Flag Award which sits along side Green Flag Awards and will reward towns and cities who grasp this nettle and put in place positive measures to make their towns and cities better places at night. Just ordinary things like loos, a safe way of getting home, safer car parks, better community wardens, promoting non-alcohol events such as music or art festivals, keeping libraries, museums and galleries open later. When you think of your town at night you're not thinking of drinking places but "wow, there's lots to do" and "we'll

get there and we will get home safely".

Philip told us where he thinks it is all going. There are two elements. The first is—you hear a lot about the civic society movement but where is it moving to? What does the movement consist of? You only have to sit here for ten minutes and you can see that there are individual societies who are doing an amazing amount locally with ten people on the committee all burning themselves out, all doing the best they can. But if you add up those little drops of rain there are a quarter of a million people belonging to civic societies in this country. That's more people than the Labour Party has got or even the Women's Institute. So if the CT can get this right, it could speak for all civic society members on a national level.

Philip asks what influence can we exercise on a national scale? There was just this little Voltaire notion, of "as long as you can do your own patch that's enough". It may be all you can do but if everyone else is cultivating their own gardens and we can speak for all the gardeners and influence policy then we've got tremendous responsibilities. Philip calls it a sort of army of the intelligence; this is what the civic society movement is. He feels he has banged on at this—in so many different spheres, the decision making is taken out of the hands of local communities.

The planning bill is going to take out of community hands the biggest schemes the nuclear schemes, the power stations, the major motorways, the airports; and you're going to find some distant quango saying "that is where it's going to go". Green belt, AONB won't matter because the infrastructure planning commission (which is un-elected) has decided. And the SEEDA/ SEERA thing is another example of this. It is sacrificing environmental control to development needs. We lost the idea of sustainable development. When Rutland talked about sustainable development a few years ago, what he was talking about was developing in a way which sustains the assets of the earth so that we've got something to hand on to our children.

## Local Development Frameworks in a Changing World

*Andrew Sangster,*

In recent issues of this newsletter we have highlighted the predictions for changes in global climate and the implications for this country. More recently it has become painfully obvious that the era of cheap hydrocarbon energy is over and that efforts must be made to use every form of energy more efficiently. Against this background local planning authorities are engaged in preparing local development frameworks, as required by the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act, to implement the strategies, including those on climate change, set out in the various regional plans. When the Association was invited to comment on an action plan jointly produced by Stevenage Borough and North Herts District Councils for the expansion of Stevenage westwards and northwards (SNAP), we were disappointed to find a proposal which seemed to indicate 'business as usual'. We recognise that there is a need to regenerate the Stevenage New Town but think that a more radical approach, taking account of recent changes in circumstances, is needed if communities are to be created that will be truly sustainable over the years ahead.

We identified climate change, energy price escalation, sourcing of infrastructure funding and a reduction in credit availability that will continue long into the future as the major factors which should now drive the plans for Stevenage. Instead the consultation proposal seemed to be based on "more of the same", developer-led, relatively low-density, housing on the perimeter of the town. If this plan were to be adopted, how could car dependency be reduced? For public transport to be effective it has to operate between nodes of high density occupancy. We suggested that developments with higher average density (say double what is currently proposed) based on the existing sub-communities in Stevenage would provide a more sustainable outcome with the following benefits:

- reduced demand for new infrastructure
- opportunity to create a wider mix of housing, which could help regeneration, raising of skills levels and improved educational achievement in neighbourhood schools
- a more effective and attractive public transport network

- building to the highest possible standards of environmental performance; zero carbon and water-sustainable housing development.
- opportunity to install combined heat and power systems, with on-site renewable energy generation, reducing overall carbon emissions.

Expansion of employment we thought best done on or adjacent to existing employment areas, thus enabling them to serve more effectively as public transport nodes. Furthermore, if the growth rate of private car use is to be reduced physical facilities for improving road transport should be limited to providing improved access for buses. We also said that the local planning authority should control the mix of dwellings, both affordable and 'aspirational', offered on developments

It is interesting to note that our views largely chime with the outcome of the recent exercise undertaken by the University of Hertfordshire on how to accommodate the County's housing requirements under the regional plan.

## East of England Plan

*Andrew Sangster*

Hertfordshire County Council has recently sought a judicial review of the Plan, more correctly called the Regional Spatial Strategy, as published on 12<sup>th</sup> May. It is contended that the Government has presided over a flawed process and failed to carry out adequate environmental assessments under the relevant regulations and directives. The press release notes that the implications of the scale of growth for the county as set out in the Plan are profound and cannot be overstated; Hertfordshire is already one of the most densely developed counties and its roads can hardly take the current traffic.

This scale of development would bring huge pressures on the environment, the loss of hundreds of acres of greenfield and green belt land, the risk of gridlock on already congested transport routes and could overwhelm the county's services and infrastructure. The Council's view is that throughout the consultation process it seemed the Government had a clear view about the intended outcome and that it could override local concerns about the scale and pace of development being considered for Hertfordshire. The Council and the people of Hertfordshire consistently warned the Government that without a massive investment in infrastructure the planned scale of growth would be untenable and unsustainable.

## Editorial – round-up of society reports

*Merrin Molesworth*

Water emerged as a theme to a number of societies in the ANTAS region – either too much, too quickly or too little. Welwyn's beautiful chalk stream – the River Mimram, has dried up twice in the past 10 years, exacerbated by abstraction. The Chesham Society notes lack of water in chalk streams, particularly the Chess and Misbourne, for several months or/and years at a time. Historically it was rare for them to dry up. Reasons are shortage of rainfall compounded by over-extraction lowering the water table, together with drier seasons, probably caused by climate change. Increasing house building on catchment areas will mean less water percolates down to the aquifers. Wendover has 20% additional housing imposed with little attention to infrastructure.

Buckingham was severely flooded last July. Now traditional management of the river bed and banks has been tried again and proved successful when the next heavy rains caused the river to rise, this time without serious floodwaters. Hertford is concerned that the Stevenage and North Herts Councils' joint Action Plan (SNAP), for the major development proposed north of Stevenage appears to ignore the increasing threat of climate change, being 'business as usual'.

The Chiltern Society, involved at length in the 'Examination in Public' of the Draft South East Plan, was delighted that the Panel based its proposed new River Thames Policy on the Society's draft. Hitcham & Taplow suggest

building an airport on the Thames Estuary and in Aylesbury a canal-side shopping centre threatens to destroy one of their last few green areas. Marlow is not complacent about the Environment Agency (EA) plan to sell or rent Thames lock-keeper's properties, although the ones in Marlow and Temple Locks are not included yet. The EA efficiency review left representatives at a River User Group (RUG6) meeting short of answers on matters such as safety. East Herts is considered to be an area of water stress and following criticism at the Examination in Public of the East of England Plan,



water industry and the regulatory bodies have started working in unison to plan and co-ordinate future water supply and sewage treatment needs.

Supermarkets with their free parking have an advantage over high street shops laments the Chesham Society. Hertford is experiencing supermarket wars and High Wycombe deplores the tatty appearance of the new market stalls since the Council outsourced the running of the market. Aylesbury objects to another supermarket being built alongside the canal and away from the town centre in an area earmarked for residential use.

Another thread seems to be committee fatigue. St

Albans Society is represented on most of the host of committees around the town and views are taken seriously by the Council and the local newspapers. While there are some 370 households on the membership list, day-to-day matters of the Society are left to the 10-strong committee, plus about 20 members called upon in hours-of-need, and age is a consideration - the average age of committee members is at least 60. Welwyn Planning & Amenity Group notes that its active involvement in such things as the Parish Plan requires sufficient capable and willing volunteers with the time and energy to engage and remain committed. They don't want to restrict their range of local involvement. Aylesbury will have a population of 100,000 people by 2020. At present it has a committee of only six of which four are active. The good news is that Aylesbury has had an influx of new members, partly due to achieving some headlines in the local paper. Controversy and campaigns always bring in new members.

## ANTAS spring meeting at Aylesbury

*Tony Fooks*

The halfway meeting of the year was hosted by the Aylesbury Society. Reports were given by the Secretary, Treasurer and Chairman, covering such items as Rural Forum Work, Civic Trust South East, and Government consultation responses along with issues in your own area and our newsletter.

We were fortunate to obtain Phillip Kolvin the new chairman of the Civic Trust UK, who gave an inspirational talk on how and why he joined the Civic Trust. He spelt out the future of the trust and its activities and actions that are necessary to move into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, all of which can be obtained on the ANTAS web site, (see page 5).

Many thanks go to the Aylesbury Society for hosting an excellent day including the tour around Aylesbury Town centre. The Kings Head certainly set the scene for our meeting.

**President**

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Merrin Molesworth

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Beaconsfield Society

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Association

Bishop's Stortford  
Civic Federation

Buckingham Society

Buntingford Civic Society

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Hertford Civic Society

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Hitcham & Taplow  
Society

Hitchin Society

Marlow Society

Oxford Civic Society

Potters Bar Society

Radlett Society

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Welwyn Garden City  
Society

Welwyn Planning and  
Amenity Group

Wendover Society

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civic  
trust

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Civic Trust South East  
(CTSE)

East of England  
Association of Civic  
Societies (EEACTS)

London Forum

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## Stansted Airport – Second Runway

Andrew Sangster

Earlier this year BAA submitted to Uttlesford District Council a suite of planning applications seeking approval for a second runway, together with the necessary associated infrastructure, at Stansted Airport. More recently the Council has extended the deadline for comments until mid-September. ANTAS has taken the view that these applications are premature, principally because there is at present no certainty of need and the outcome of the public inquiry into raising the operational ceiling from the current 25 million passengers per year to 35 million has not been announced by the Secretary of State. Even if this previous application were to be approved, there remains potential to further raise the operating capacity of the runway to possibly

45 million passengers per year, almost double the present limit. This would be the logical next expansion. Our view is reinforced by the prediction that the necessary upgrading of the rail link, involving adding two further running lines to the main line from London, could not be completed in time to meet the forecast opening date for the second runway. Furthermore, it is now clear that the huge increase in the cost of aviation fuel heralds the end of ultra-cheap flights, thus raising a question about the need for further expansion of airports in this country, or, at the very least, suggesting that a more cautious approach should be adopted.

**ANTAS AGM will be at Hertford on  
Saturday 18 October 2008**

Once the need to reduce carbon emissions is factored in, a massive increase in airport capacity seems far from sustainable.

## Rejuvenated Civic Trust South East

Tony Molesworth, Secretary CTSE

The activities of Civic Trust South East had been minimal since the death of the previous chairman, Brian Horsley. A new committee under the chairmanship of Tony Fooks, was elected at the Annual General Meeting on Saturday 31 May. The existing 127 societies who are members of CTSE were contacted and activities and supporting services are planned within the region to support individual societies and direct contact with the committee will be established.

The next action is to re-establish the Civic Trust South East web site and arrange its linkage to the updated Civic Trust web site. The newsletter for all societies in the South East Region will be resumed.

As part of the restructuring, a new constitution was adopted which will give greater flexibility for operation of CTSE in relation to structure and timing of meetings and allow greater control over the region's financial status. The previous constitution did not permit raising of funds from outside bodies. Funding by the Civic Trust alone is insufficient to operate the CTSE region activities at the level that the new executive committee envisages. Since funding providers will normally only consider support and donations to registered charities the new constitution is based on the Charity Associations Model Constitution and will enable CTSE to become a registered charity.