

ANTAS

ASSOCIATION OF NORTH THAMES AMENITY SOCIETIES

Societies rally round a civic society initiative

by the Editor

After the dismay, there was encouragement and tangible support for a platform for civic societies.

The Civic Trust went into administration in April after more than 50 years of campaigning to improve the quality of the built environment. It was the umbrella organization for more than 700 local civic and amenity societies across the UK.

The news that the Civic Trust had folded came as a shock and everyone at the ANTAS meeting on 25 April was talking about it. The Civic Trust had been in a precarious financial situation – membership fees from civic societies did not cover the cost of the required services. Staffing had risen to 35 between London and Liverpool, and there had been optimistic assumptions about Government programmes providing funding. Then the Civic Trust's bid to manage the Green Flag awards scheme was unsuccessful, and the recession was the last straw.

Yet everyone agrees that a central voice for civic and amenity societies is needed. Those left to pick up the pieces, particularly ANTAS' own President, CT Trustee, Peter Diplock; Michael Hammerson, CT's volunteer planning advisor from Hampstead; Kevin Trickett, Wakefield Civic Society and our own Tony Fooks in his role as Chairman of Civic Trust South East were

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civic trust south east
Autumn Conference
Saturday 26 September 2009

Hosted by the Guildford Society

CIVIC SOCIETIES - THE WAY FORWARD

Highlights

- Tony Burton, Director, Civic Society Initiative
The civic society movement - which way forward?
- Russell Walters, English Heritage, Head of Operations Planning & Development Group—*Heritage at Risk*
- Cllr Mike Appleyard, Bucks County & Wycombe District Councils—*What is the future of regional strategic planning?*
- Anne Milton, Member of Parliament for Guildford—*Working with Westminster*
- Laura Sandys, daughter of the founder of the Civic Trust, Duncan Sandys—*Civic Society Initiative - why do we need it?*

at The Millmead Centre
Guildford Baptist Church
Bury Fields
Guildford GU2 4AZ

Have your say on the future of the civic and amenity society movement in workshop and networking sessions

civic trust south east
www.civictrustsoutheast.org.uk
the Guildford Society
www.guilfordsociety.org.uk

From 9.15am—4.30pm, cost per delegate £10 including lunch, parking £5. To book a place contact: CTSE Secretary Tony Malesworth email tmaleswo@googlemail.com, call 07785 501499

NEWSLETTER SUMMER 2009

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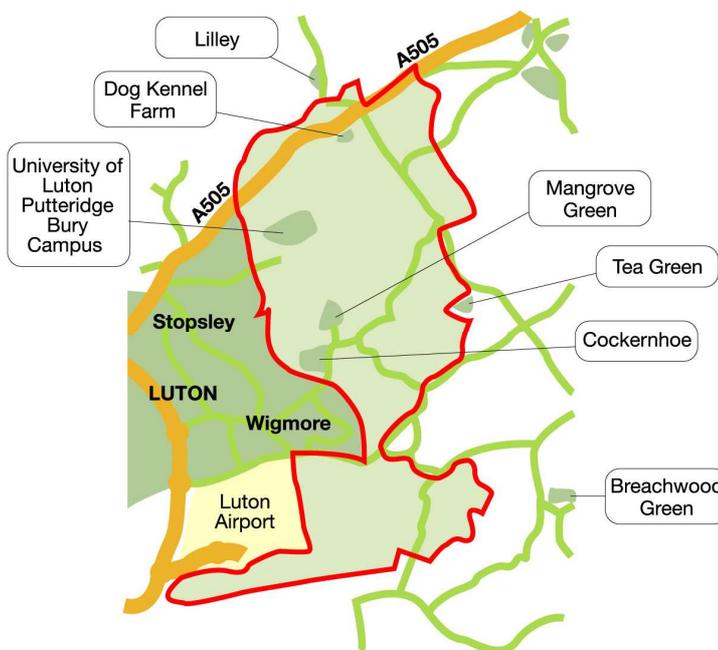
Lilley Bottom East of Luton might be covered with 5,500 houses, see page 3 for CPRE's grass-roots campaign.

East of Luton: Protecting the Hertfordshire Countryside

John Davies, Hitchin Society

The guest speaker at our spring meeting was Kevin FitzGerald, Honorary Director of CPRE - Hertfordshire, the county branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England. Kevin was asked to talk about the role of CPRE in establishing a grass-roots campaign to protect some of Hertfordshire's finest countryside, now threatened by a major expansion of Luton.

Hertfordshire's countryside is threatened by urban development on all sides, closing in like the jaws of a vice; North of Harlow, Stevenage expanding to the north and west, and now Luton planning to expand to the east. The gap between St Albans and Hatfield is closing fast, while Dacorum is also pushing towards St Albans.



In the case of Luton, a major expansion of the town is now required by the Milton Keynes - South Midlands Sub-regional Strategy, including the specific option of Luton spreading eastwards into Hertfordshire to meet its housing targets. Although any housing numbers would be over and above Hertfordshire's housing allocation, this possibility regrettably forms part of the East of England Plan.

Local people naturally see this as lacking in all democratic legitimacy. Even more so, as the decision to adopt a plan for expanding into Hertfordshire has been delegated

to Luton Borough and South Bedfordshire District Councils, bodies on which residents of Hertfordshire have no say whatsoever. Many find this difficult to understand, perhaps not fully appreciating the way **powers have been transferred to a regional level.**

Last year, Luton and South Beds decided that east of Luton was a preferred option, and earlier this year they confirmed this as part of their Core Strategy to be put to public consultation. This scheme involves building 5,500 houses, an East of Luton bypass, and possibly a guided busway, on some of Hertfordshire's finest countryside.

The area chosen for development includes the chalk upland close to Luton, with narrow country lanes linking hamlets such as Mangrove Green, Cockernhoe and Tea Green. Further east it includes the dry valley of Lilley Bottom, typical unspoilt Chilterns countryside with woods and farmland, rising towards the village of Great Offley. All this is Green Belt, a Landscape Conservation Area, and similar in character to the adjoining Chilterns AONB.

When this scheme was first mooted, people living in the area were incensed by what was proposed. As the proposals took shape, local groups formed in the area most directly affected, holding highly effective and well-attended public meetings. CPRE-Hertfordshire has been consistently concerned about the proposals, and felt that the

most effective support it could give to local protesters was to get a locally based committee up and running to co-ordinate opposition.

The advantage of a locally based committee is that it gives focus to the campaign, and the media prefer dealing with local people most directly affected by the proposals. The committee formed to protect the countryside east of Luton, Keep East of Luton Green (KEOLG) has proved to be a highly effective campaigning organisation, drawing in local people with a wide range of relevant skills and talents. Interestingly, many of its supporters are Luton residents who highly value the area now under threat.

The campaign organised by KEOLG highlighted the importance of responding to the public consultation before its closing date of 12 June. Further public meetings were held, including one in Luton Town Hall, with protest postcards, a photo competition and a high profile march through the area. The national media, including BBC Radio 4 gave coverage. The KEOLG website has been of great value, providing an excellent source of information on just what is proposed.

The result so far is overwhelming opposition to the scheme; concerns about traffic implications in Luton and in Hitchin just add to the objections from those appalled at the prospect of losing some of the finest countryside in Hertfordshire. Every effort was made to ensure that people have their say before the end of the consultation period.

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The Chairman's introduction

Martin Brooks

Depending on the economist or politician you believe, we are mired in a long and continuing recession, or we are about to see the beginnings of a recovery. What is not in dispute is we are in a recession like no other and perhaps the worst most of us have faced in our working lives. With a global banking crisis now hopefully behind us, we face a huge structural deficit in the UK public finances which will take perhaps a whole Parliament to address and correct, whichever party or combination of parties forms the new government next year.

These factors will change many of the previous assumptions made about economic growth and development and as we speak the many tiers of government from supranational down to district council will be revising their plans and lowering estimates of population growth, housing needs and infrastructure plans. This was a theme I started developing in my last (Winter) newsletter introduction.

Previous comfortable assumptions about planning gains from Section 106s as well will have gone out of the window. A number of local authorities in England have sought or are seeking salvation through Local Government Reviews (LGR) and petitioning or in some cases opposing the move to a unitary structure which does theoretically permit a one-time saving as duplicated resources are eliminated. For the time being at least, Scotland and Wales now have unitary authorities and parts of England either have them or are participating in the current LGR.

The current government has brought into being the new Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) to take a national approach to the devel-

opment of social housing and have cut the budgets recently of the Regional Development Agencies (RDA), whereas the Conservatives if elected, have pledged to abolish the RDAs which in turn had taken over certain responsibilities from the now effectively moribund regional assemblies. Only two projected eco towns have come through to the next stage of planning recently out of the original five.

The next generation of technology with the advent of "super broadband", together with further developments in the web and a titanic battle assembling between Microsoft and Google, are likely to have a further impact on the way we work and perhaps where we work. Competition spurs innovation with Microsoft, Google and others pushing competing, and perhaps converging, visions at us, signposting how they think we should use technology at work and in the home in the future. It may lead to a genuine reduction in the need to travel in order to work effectively; that is part of the vision laid before us.

So at ANTAS and our member societies we are going to face different challenges and changes beyond what we might have expected as recently as a year ago. Slower growth may stop certain highly undesirable developments in the growth hotspots of the home counties where many of us live, but the need for more social and affordable housing remains intense nationally and a great deal of transport infrastructure has lagged actual need. Resources like water seemed to have been largely ignored from the equation and in areas such as waste management and the low carbon agenda, both the European Union and UK government have committed to targets that if implemented

will have a profound impact of our daily lives. Many of these aims are laudable, one just worries that the details were not thought through in the excitement of a ministerial announcement.

I am pleased to report, as you will see elsewhere in the newsletter, that your committee is very active. The next year represents an opportunity to lobby for changes in local policy to the benefit of our communities and the built environment for the better. We hope a resurgent national civic society movement may do this at a higher level (see CSI article on page 7). In the meantime we need to respond to current initiatives, but recognising that if there is a change of government, we may find we are revisiting them again.

Andrew Sangster gave evidence to the Parliamentary Select Committee on

PPS4 on our behalf; a signal honour to Andrew who has worked and thought hard on the matter. More initiatives in this area are coming out of the Department of Communities and Local Government, despite the late stage of this Parliament.

We look forward to discussing this with member society representatives at our next meeting. We hope to see you there. In the meantime although the anticipated "barbecue" summer has changed into a very wet July, we still have some of the summer season left and I trust you all return refreshed and brimming with ideas to improve our communities during a more subdued and reflective period.



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such as the Civic Trust, but the Government has so far refused to require local societies such as ANTAS and its members to be consulted.

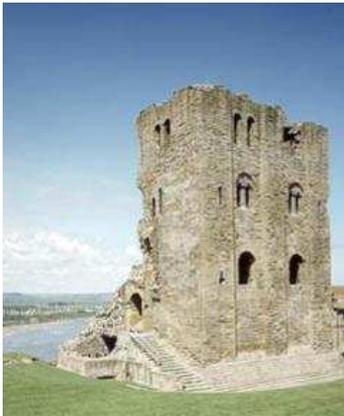
At the local level, more "local listing" of assets that would not make it on to the national list would be encouraged, with new criteria, Good Practice Guidance and statutory protection, and all local authorities would be required to maintain a HER for their area (or to "have access" to one – ie. districts could piggy-back on the lists maintained by counties, who can currently keep them). Conservation Area Consents (for changes to buildings in Conservation Areas) would merge into planning permission.

That is by no means all – if you want to read about Heritage Partnership Agreements for example, or the continuation of the Ecclesiastical Exemption, you need to visit the DCMS or EH websites, where everything is laid out in great detail.

For amenity societies such as ANTAS members, the new regime will offer us greater opportunities for involvement in the processes of designation and protection, both with English Heritage and with our Local Planning Authorities on whom many day-to-day decisions will continue to fall. It also raises the possibility of a Civic Trust's successor organisation, once it is in place, playing a role, and needing to pass on statutory notifications that it receives to its member societies.



In 2005 English Heritage stated that there were 372,038 Listed Buildings, 19,717 Scheduled Ancient Monuments, 9,374 Conservation Areas, 1,587 Registered Parks and Gardens, 59 Designated Wrecks, 43 Registered Battlefields, and 17 World Heritage Sites (designated by UNESCO).



Useful URLs are a bit long. You can get to it quite quickly by Googling "heritage protection for the 21st century" or "heritage protection bill"

White Paper text <http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm70/7057/7057.pdf>

Analysis of consultation responses http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/publications/3642.aspx/

Draft bill and CMS Select Committee report and response thereto http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/publications/5075.aspx

Red-faced ministerial statement about absence from Queen's Speech <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/nav.20038>

Specifically, Heritage Partnership agreements and the Ecclesiastical Exemption are both set out in the White Paper, and there are also passages about both in the Analysis of Consultation Responses.

Note that the new List was originally to have been called a Register, but the response to consultation said the Government had thought better of that (because everyone knows about Listed Buildings) and that it would be a List.

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- Where required by circumstances, key objectives should be ranked
- There is a continuing role for the Need Test
- Supermarkets should be prevented from invading 'comparison' goods markets where it would damage town-centre trade
- The importance of 'linked trips' between supermarkets and town-centres should be given greater recognition and

- There is a need for a more rational and believable approach to assessing degree of over-trading of existing stores (the usual justification for extensions or replacements).

These points were made and can be found in the verbatim report circulated within two days of the hearing.

Stop Press.

Andrew has received a report from the Select Committee and it supports the retention of the Need Test as a planning tool. They do however, express concern about the resources that local authorities have to do the additional work.



Planning for Town-centres – ANTAS appearance before the Select Committee

PPS4 Select Committee Spring 2009

Last summer we submitted comments on the proposed revisions to PPS6: Planning for Town-Centres. We questioned the over-arching aim of continuing economic growth when it has been shown that it is not a plausible economic model when based on expansion of credit; supermarket expansions are too often justified on grounds of ever expanding personal expenditure. Secondly, in our view there are circumstances when, of the four major objectives of PPS6: viability and vitality of town-centres should be ranked of greater importance than choice and competition. We also opposed the removal of the Need Test in favour of a more thorough and extensive impact test (although we expressed support for a more rigorous form of the latter), on the grounds that a proposal, not essentially needed, might increase choice and competition but damage viability and vitality of a town-centre. Furthermore, it might make inefficient reuse of scarce space in or on the edge of the town-centre. Lastly we expressed concern over supermarkets entering 'comparison' goods markets where they find 'easy pickings' amongst fast moving lines, to the detriment of independents' trade in the town.

In April ANTAS was invited to participate in the hearings of a Select Committee examining the proposed changes to the planning guidance. Each session takes the form of four panels comprising three representatives responding in twenty-five minutes to questions from MPs on the Committee. Our fellow members were from

Tescopoly Alliance and the Women's Environmental Network. We were advised in advance that views would be sought on the following questions:



- What should the key objectives be and to what extent has policy been successful in achieving them?
- How strong is the case for the proposed changes?
- Under the Impact Assessment Framework the Need Test is specifically removed. Will the Framework be better at achieving the objectives and what will be the effect of removing the Need Test?
- How much has altered economic circumstances changed the case for making the proposed amendments?
- What if any changes are needed to the proposed Impact Assessment Framework?

In preparation a small working group from our own Committee considered the responses we would make, but we were subsequently surprised to find that less than a week before the hearings started, a further amended draft of the planning guidance on town-centres was published in full, and was to be included in a more widely drawn replacement for PPS4, which will

Andrew Sangster, Secretary

now cover all the Government's key planning policies relating to the economy. At the same time a draft version of the promised good practice guide was published. The latter was particularly helpful in setting out how the guidance in the PPS should be implemented. This most recent version of the proposed new guidance lays greater responsibility on the local planning authorities to identify the needs of their communities at the Local Development Framework stage, including undertaking any necessary 'need' tests. Arguably this move to a more planned approach to future development offers the opportunity to enhance local democracy.

Appearing before the PPS4 Select Committee

What was learnt from the experience? Firstly, it is not an event to be feared, it gives the opportunity to reinforce views in a non-confrontational atmosphere. However, it is essential to thoroughly understand the matter being discussed so that answers can be given without reference to notes – there is not time. Secondly, identify the key points you want to make and ensure that these are woven into responses – just listen to how politicians do it. Thirdly, keep it brief. The Committee doesn't want you to lecture its members or to take over their role. Lastly, if you don't know or can't answer, don't pretend you do or can.

There is one other piece of advice given experience of this particular hearing; make sure that both you and the Committee are working on the same document.

The ANTAS group suggested the following key points to be made in answers to the Committee's questions:-

- ANTAS supports the move away from the 'one size fits all' approach of the previous draft amendments

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Did you know that the movement of civic societies pre-dated the Civic Trust by 100 years? One society began in 1846 – the Sid Vale Association, which claims to be the oldest civic society in Britain www.sidvaleassociation.org.uk. In 1957 the CT gave the movement a national voice. Today the number of civic or amenity societies is estimated to be 1,000 but nobody knows exactly. Some 704 were registered with the CT which claimed there were 3,000 societies in existence. Societies were formed due to distrust of local government and new ones are forming too eg. Transition Towns and the Slow Food Movement. Save Tinsley Cooling Towers ran a successful campaign although ultimately doomed (the towers were demolished). Today the community questions issues such as climate change or the food we eat.

Tony Burton asks where societies are going as a movement, "What do societies need to support each other and give a voice?" There will probably be choices, not a single objective. Do we need a CSI? The timescale is to build consensus before December this year and then put it into place before May 2010, to start a new, long-term solution.

Societies are doing an enormous range of things. Tony Burton has noticed some societies do not value their work, charging a pittance for entry to an event, they make remarks like "We are not doing enough to charge more".

The forums are considering these aspects:

- doing
- successes achieved
- should do—what a successful society should

- do
- what help and support societies need and the problems and costs attached
- the reputation societies have
- influence (how to increase the profile of the society movement).

There are negative questions too. The worry of external pressures from strategic partnerships; the feeling societies are at the mercy of government; how planning departments appear to report to government; and the malign arbitrary appeal system. It is not just the big projects but



the one thousand cuts of small impositions. Local government reorganization (district and regional) will take planning physically further away from local areas. However Tony Burton soon extracts the positive from seasoned society members who come to realize the contribution they are making.

The overriding activity of societies is planning monitoring – comments, interpretation (not just for members), campaigning, raising awareness of surroundings, and considerably more. Societies have a voice on significant planning issues and LDF's (Local Development Frameworks) promoting good planning with awards etc, and holding events so as not to be seen as elitist. Some provide seed-corn funding, some put together a Vision document for the town. Publications don't have to be large, eg. bus connectivity circulated to councillors. Some do practical conservation work.

Tony Burton said, "Make sure societies (people) can do what's best and right for the places where they live".

- Delegates outlined the help they would like.
- Societies need someone to represent their views.
 - Guidance on what is happening in government and planning, an overview eg. a digest which alerts, with links or a synopsis. For example a society struggling to come to terms with the Core Strategy wants to sit down with someone and find out what work is worth doing.
 - Dissemination of good practice with/from other societies' successes.
 - Entrée to educational establishments to involve young people and be perceived as younger.
 - More money eg. through corporate members, to pay for clerical and specialist staff.
 - A premises of their own.

There are constructive ideas from the grass roots up for a worthy successor to the CT.



Visit www.civicsocietyinitiative.org.uk for up-to-date information and to have your say. Also see Griff's blog, he writes it himself - http://www.civicsocietyinitiative.org.uk/blog/read_4573/

Make sure societies (people) can do what's best and right for the places where they live — Tony Burton

Successor to the Civic Trust

Tony Fooks, Chairman Civic Trust South East

When the Civic Trust closed in April this year, it left many of us wondering what happens next. I am pleased to say that on the 1st June a Civic Societies Initiative (CSI) was launched by Griff Rhys Jones, Fiona Reynolds (Director General National Trust) and Laura Sandys (Daughter of Duncan Sandys who was the founder of the Civic Trust). The Initiative was supported by the National Trust, North of England Civic Trust, Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) and the Institute of British Architects.

The Initiative is being led by Mr Tony Burton who has over 20 years experience as the National Trust's Director of Strategy & External Affairs and previously worked for 13 years at CPRE, which he left in 2001 as Deputy Director. The initiative is well underway and significant donations have been received. There are a number of Open Initiative Forums taking place throughout the country with one hosted by ANTAS and the High Wycombe Society recently held at Bucks New University. It is important that all civic societies play their part in commenting on the future role and activity they would like to see a civic societies movement take, and I would urge all civic societies to participate in one of these events. The Civic Trust South East is taking an active role in these discussions and will keep you fully informed of future actions and proposals that may be reached.



CSI launch

Take the initiative *from front page*

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heartened by the concrete offers of support from various organizations.

The National Trust is funding Tony Burton for a year to provide strong leadership for this critical period. Office accommodation and in-kind support has been donated by the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) in London, and the RIBA (in Liverpool) and a charitable 'home' to receive funds and provide governance will be provided through the autonomous North of England Civic Trust. English Heritage will deliver the 2009 Heritage Open Days. Tony Burton is actively assisted by Ian Harvey, CSI co-ordinator, who also maintains the up-to-date website www.civicsocietyinitiative.org.uk.

Three things are clear: the civic society movement needs an independent

champion; the movement needs to be supported as a network where the voice of individual societies and local groups can be strengthened, and the future needs to be rooted in what societies want. Societies need to drive the way forward.

What should a Civic Societies Initiative do for your society?

The CSI is organizing debates to explore options and find consensus around the provision of a national voice and support for the civic society movement. Tony Burton chairs a focussed discussion by members of societies to share ideas and experiences for the future of the movement. Questions considered are:

- What is the duty of a civic society movement in the 21st century?
- What is needed to achieve this by way of an effective network of local groups and

a strong national and local presence?

- What do local civic societies need to support them in their work?
- How can the network of societies link more effectively across the country?

Blackpool Civic Trust hosted the first open forum and ANTAS hosted a lively one on Saturday 25 July at High Wycombe. Civic Trust South East together with The Guildford Society will host the next one at their autumn conference on Saturday 26 September 2009. Titled "Civic Societies – The Way Forward" it will be at The Millmead Centre Guildford Baptist Church Bury Fields Guildford GU2 4AZ and costs £10 per person. Conference details and booking forms are available on-line at www.civitrustsoutheast.org.uk.

What should a Civic Societies Initiative do for your society?

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Civic Federation

Buckingham Society

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Chesham Society

Harpenden Society

Hertford Civic Society

High Wycombe Society

Hitcham & Taplow
Preservation Society

Hitchin Society

Marlow Society

Oxford Civic Society

Potters Bar Society

Radlett Society and
Green Belt Association

St Albans Civic Society

Welwyn Garden City
Society

Welwyn Planning and
Amenity Group

Wendover Society

www.antas.org.uk

Heritage Protection for the 21st Century

Chris Woodman, High Wycombe Society

The Heritage Protection Bill is a long time coming! Back in March 2007 the Government issued its White Paper with the above title. At the urging of the Civic Trust, ANTAS submitted its comments (you can still read them on our website), and in November 2007 the Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) published their "analysis of consultation". In April 2008 the draft Bill was published and was duly considered, and reported on, by the CMS Select Committee, and in October 2008 the Government issued their response, saying the Bill would be introduced in the 2008-09 session "subject to the availability of Parliamentary time".



It wasn't! On 3 December, the day of the Queen's Speech, the Culture and Communities departments jointly issued a red-faced statement saying that, post-credit crunch, time could not yet be found, but that an awful lot was being done anyway by other means – closing loopholes in Conservation Area protection, a training programme for Local Authorities, clearer criteria for Listed Buildings (and an online form mak-

The ANTAS Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday 24 October 2009, kindly hosted by the Marlow Society

www.marlowsociety.org.uk

other initiatives by English Heritage. And indeed, just as your Editor started leaning heavily on me for the text of this piece, out came the new draft PPS15 on "the Historic Environment" (with accompanying guidance by English Heritage), to replace the old PPG15 and PPG16 (Archaeology), on which the Hon Sec has already invited your comments. So much action indeed, that one wonders if the case for Parliamentary time in the next session has been weakened.

At the heart of the proposals is the Government's intention to create a new "List of Historic Buildings and Sites" to replace the current "List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest" and Schedule of Ancient Monuments (and, indeed, several lesser-known Registers – see below). The list would be publicly accessible through EH's Heritage Portal. Responsibility for designation, according to a single set of statutory criteria based on "special architectural, historic or archaeological interest", would be passed from DCMS to English Heritage. The classification system (Grade I, II* and II) would be extended to all historic assets.

The process would be opened up to public consultation, with stronger interim protection to prevent people destroying historic assets before they are listed, and there would be a right of appeal against EH's decisions to designate or not to designate. Those required to be consulted would include "national amenity societies"

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