

ANTAS

ASSOCIATION OF NORTH THAMES AMENITY SOCIETIES



Tim Franklin

Cartoon thanks to CASE. See page 3, West of Stevenage - A Black Day for the Green Belt

NEWSLETTER WINTER 2005

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Public Consultation - is *anyone* listening?

John Davies, Vice Chairman

After responding to more public consultations than I care to remember perhaps it's time for a reality check. Is there any evidence that even the slightest bit of notice is taken of all the inputs that have been made? No matter how well argued, or the strength of the evidence presented, it feels as though local, regional and national government work on the principle of "We don't go for

public consultation until we've decided what to do".

The distinction should perhaps be made between specific planning applications, where success can be achieved through well-argued objections, and matters of policy, where it is as though the wisdom is "Public consultation; you just have to tough it out".

Of course there is a statutory obligation to carry out public consultation exercises, but there is no corresponding requirement for policy to be modified on the basis of what the public might think. The whole paraphernalia of public consultation on a national scale must correspond to an enormous expenditure of money, time and

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Obituary — Anthony Wethered

Merrin Molesworth, the Chesham Society

Anthony Wethered died on 31st May 2005 after a severe illness. He is greatly missed. When Anthony retired as secretary in 2002 our then president Jennifer Moss said, 'Ever since ANTAS was first formed, "ANTAS" and "Anthony" have been almost synonymous'. The idea of a grouping of amenity societies in our area had arisen before Anthony came on the scene, but nothing definite had happened. When Anthony became a member of the National Council of Civic Trust Societies he took the initiative and did the hard

work needed to bring ANTAS into being. At first he acted as both Secretary and Treasurer, in addition to producing the Newsletter.

He recruited new members, replied to consultations, organized meetings with top-drawer speakers, produced the newsletters

and so much more, all with wisdom, humour and his characteristic gentlemanly charm. He remained vice-president of ANTAS president of the Marlow Society until his death. His thoughtful advice and calm support are a great loss.



On a lovely sunny day in July at All saint's Church, Marlow, a packed congregation heard tributes to Anthony. The sunshine seemed sadly inappropriate.

While there is statutory obligation to consult, there is no requirement for policy to be modified on the basis of what the public thinks.

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resources, and to what effect? There appears to be a real, and possibly growing, mismatch between government rhetoric about local participation and involvement, and the reality of public consultation.

At a time when ever more policies are offered for public consultation (including Statements of Community Involvement) it seems that more and more people are saying "Why do we bother?" Is this a shared perception? And if so, what can be done about it?

Editor's comment:

We want to know if there is a broad general perception of a problem covering national, county and district government. Specific examples prompting the question include "The Future Development of Air Transport in the UK - A National Consultation" 2002 and 2003 leading to a White Paper in 2004, and now the Public Consultation on the Luton Airport Master Plan in 2005/06. Also the housing allocations within the Hertfordshire County Structure Plan with Public consultations in 1996 and 1997 leading to adoption

in 1998, which provides the basis for the Planning applications in 2002 and the Public Inquiry in 2004, with the 'minded to approve' in 2005. (We think of this as the West of Stevenage sacrilege—see page 3). There are also North Herts District Council Public Consultations that any sane volunteer just wouldn't want to get into.

We would like to hear your comments so please reply to the Editor at 107 Hivings Hill, Chesham HP5 2PJ email merrin@computercompany.org.uk or direct to John Davies.

West of Stevenage - a black day for the Green Belt

John Davies, Hitchin society

Next time you travel along the A1(M) past Stevenage, just glance at the woods, green fields and hedgerows to the west of the motorway. Welcome to West of Stevenage. All this, including the long, straight hedge marking the line of the Roman road to St Albans, is still in the Green Belt. But the decision has now been made for this to become probably the largest building site in the East of England. The battle to save the Green Belt, (waged for almost ten years) is all but lost.

The news broke on 20th October, when the Deputy Prime Minister released the Inspector's report into the two planning applications for the site, and announced his intention to grant outline planning permission for the scheme based on 3,600 dwellings.

It was at the end of 1995 that Stevenage Borough Council first offered to solve the problem of meeting the County Council's housing targets. They proposed a massive expansion of Stevenage across the A1(M) motorway into the Green Belt, and onto land that was not even in Stevenage, but formed part of North Herts. They proposed an initial phase of 5,000 houses, with a possible second phase taking the total to 10,000. They argued this scale of building was necessary to justify the infrastructure costs of linking the site with the rest of Stevenage.

All who knew the area were dismayed by the proposal. CASE (Campaign Against Stevenage Expansion) was formed to fight it, which it did with overwhelming public support. Three rounds of public consultation and conclusive evidence against the scheme at an Examination in Public, were all overruled in a highly political vote in County Hall incorporating the scheme into a new County Structure Plan in 1998. And that has led to where we are today.

The scheme was never incorporated into a revised Local Plan for North Herts as it is non-compliant with PPG3; it failed the sequential test of building on brownfield sites first. The developers therefore decided to force the issue, putting in planning applications for two schemes, one for 3,600 dwellings and the second for 5,000. These were inevitably "called in" to be determined by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, and a public inquiry was held in early 2004.

The Inspector's report remained at the ODPM for almost a year without its contents being revealed to the public. It is only now that we know the Inspector recommended going ahead with the smaller of the two schemes. He admitted the scheme would be damaging, but that exceptional circumstances were justified in meeting Hertfordshire's housing needs.

The Deputy Prime Minister in accepting the Inspector's recommendation has laid down no fewer than 51 conditions to be fulfilled. These include a planning obligation in respect of transport facilities and infrastructure that must be submitted within three months, and will no doubt be difficult for the developers. But it can only be concluded that with the DPM giving the green light to this unsustainable and car-dependent development, the developers will do everything necessary to ensure that outline planning permission is confirmed. After that, detailed planning permission will inevitably follow. With the 3,600 dwellings worth perhaps £0.75 billion, the developers will not let this slip from their grasp. And of course, the 3,600 must be seen as the first phase towards something larger, perhaps even the 10,000 houses originally envisaged by Stevenage Borough Council ten years ago.

But will even the 3,600

dwellings actually contribute to Hertfordshire's housing numbers by 2011 remains? The last thing the developers would want is for such a glut of housing to result in lower prices (despite all the intentions of the Barker Report). And won't all the builders be busy elsewhere in 2011?



Changes of ANTAS committee

The Editor

Things have moved fast at ANTAS with three changes of personnel at the last AGM. Chairman, Peter Diplock resigned, he had always maintained that a chairman should not stay in post too long. We will miss the thoughtful role he had played in ANTAS day to day affairs, even after he moved away to Rutland. His post has been filled by Tony Fooks of the Wycombe Society who is already

making his presence felt, and you can read his introductory comments on the back page.

Peter Diplock's guidance is not lost to us however because he has undertaken the role of president which was vacated by Jennifer Moss. I personally thank Jennifer Moss on her retirement. Despite her formidable intellect, Jennifer is always practical and more than happy to pitch in and help physically on the various organizations with which she is involved. She helped me on many occasions – and still does.

Now Peter has stepped into her shoes and if his work as chairman is anything to go by, he

will be a worthy successor president.

Ron Sims has tirelessly undertaken the role of treasurer since the inception of ANTAS. He has put in years of commitment on behalf of member societies and was thanked at the AGM. His successor is Alistair Maclean from the Potters Bar society.

David Peevers of the Buckingham Society is also a new member of the committee.



Alistair Maclean & David Peevers

Bembridge's discussions with ANTAS members

Following his talk Peter Bembridge joined in a discussion with members. Comments and suggestions from the floor included:

1. Civic Trust regional associations cover too large an area and too great a variation of interest making it difficult for individual societies to identify with them. It would be more effective to concentrate groupings of societies with common concerns on planning matters.
2. The Civic Trust makes little impact in the media on matters of national importance, unlike CPRE and the environmental campaigners. This matter

is being addressed but the appointment of an external affairs officer does depend on funding.

3. There was concern when the Civic Trust increased registration fees, whether societies were getting value from being registered. The increase went towards funding the regional associations. The value of this was now being questioned by member societies. It was agreed that societies would like to see the Civic Trust represent their views on regional and national matters of importance to government. This would require some mechanism for 'feeding up' matters to the Trust for consideration. At pre-

sent there is no funding or resources for this, but the priority for the new fund raiser (to be appointed), would be the securing of a regular annual funding, some of which might be used for this purpose.

4. ANTAS members spend lots of time challenging applications under the new Licensing Act. The Trust is actively involved in researching the impact of the new legislation and would like to extend this work, but this would require securing matching funding. A national press release will be made by the Trust on 24th November when the new Act comes into force.

Are CT regional associations an effective way to channel civic societies' views to the regional government?

Talk by the Civic Trust's Managing Director, Peter Bembridge

John Davies, Vice Chairman



Peter started with an overview of his three priorities at the Civic Trust; money, engagement with civic societies, and enabling civic societies to engage more effectively with the wider system.

The Trust's finances had not been as strong as they could have been, but his role, as determined by the Trustees, was to turn this around. One problem is that part of CT's funding is in the form of grants for specific programmes, whereas the need is for unrestricted income for the Trust to use in the most effective way.

The recent increase in fees for civic societies had made some question the value of membership. Peter emphasised that the fees do not cover the costs. The whole of the increase had been used to fund the regional associations. The question needed is, should the civic societies' involvement be self-financing, or

should it be subsidised?

A key change is the use of information technology and communications to make the work of the Trust more effective. For example, it is being used to support the judges of the Green Flag scheme recognising excellence in parks and open spaces. It is proving a powerful tool, capable of offering benefits across the whole of the civic society movement. They are looking into obtaining software, and indeed computer hardware, at discounted prices for civic societies.

The Trust is learning from similar national organisations, such as the Citizens Advice Bureau, where computer based systems are used for aggregating issues from the branches and identifying major topics for attention at the centre. A similar approach could benefit the Trust, where all civic societies are involved in planning issues, and the common threads need to be identified and taken up centrally.

Heritage Open Days are a success, involving 26,000 volunteers, but some areas had no events. A difficulty is that they are held shortly after the start of the school year, but the date is part of the Europe-wide initiative set for September.

A more fundamental issue is that Civic Trust programmes do not always seem to be connected.

One approach is to get a critical mass of activity working in one place to influence local authorities. Merseyside has been chosen because the Trust has a Liverpool office, and there are 20 civic societies in the area. A post-graduate student is employed to raise awareness of the Civic Trust and the societies. As well as linking with Liverpool's Year of Culture in 2008, Leeds' 800th anniversary is also being held and opportunities presented by the Leeds & Liverpool canal.

Finally, Peter touched on the training and education programme. Moving away from residential courses, there will be new initiatives involving English Heritage funding and links with Building Preservation Trusts.

AGM, another successful meeting

This year the annual meeting was held in the picturesque St Ippolyts village in the hall beautifully restored as a millennium project, in Waterdell Lane. It was generously hosted by the Hitchin society.

Banding together to share experience and good practice gives societies more clout and the opportunity to respond to consultations more effectively. Society representatives benefited from the exchange of views and information at the AGM on 15 October. The willingness of member societies to be involved, as demonstrated by attendance at the two meetings each year, is most encouraging, and there was enthusiasm to take on officer roles or join the Committee.



There is not enough room to include society reports in this issue but they are available on the website www.antas.org.uk.

The Committee hopes to create an area on the web site, only accessible by user identification (id) and password, where an up-to-date ANTAS Contact List would be shown. We are seeking approval from member societies to show the names, addresses (both postal and e-mail) and telephone numbers for their officers. This secure area would allow no public access or crawling by web robots like Google's, or nasty web spiders'

Radlett Society & Green Belt Ass'n

Graham Taylor

We made representations to Hertsmere BC regarding re-development of a former industrial site known as the Houseboat Works – so called because of the unusual design of the upper floor and round port-hole windows in the elevations. Developers had proposed 65 units on 1.85 acres – a density well above the guidelines. The plans included 15 'affordable' units. The Inspector refused the appeal.

Our response to the EERA draft spatial strategy, related to Radlett's position inside the M25 and in the London Arc. Councillors have observed there are insufficient 'brown field' sites in the locality to meet the 'unproved' housing demands of EERA's plan. I ended with a quote from a letter in the Times earlier this year: Beware of any

policy to which the previously respectable but now grossly insulted and put-upon term of sustainability is applied.

We detected another housing scam offering Green Belt plots in Theobald Grove, between Borehamwood and Radlett and an Article 4.2 directive has been applied.

Chiltern Society

Geoffrey Legge, Planning Coordinator

We continue efforts to convince the Regional bodies EERA and SEERA and Milton Keynes South Midlands of the importance of protection of the Environment and the conservation of its natural resources particularly ground water.

We submitted detailed comments to EERA, the start of whose Examination in Public is now delayed until November, and we are in discussions with a view to participation.

Although SEERA have told the Government they consider the allocation of 28,900 houses annually until 2026 is sustainable, some Authorities who are consulting on local distribution, believe they will seek to impose the considerably higher housing figures suggested in the Barker Report, which in our view are totally unrealistic. We support the view of Regional Assemblies that there should be firm commitments by Government to financing the necessary infrastructure before any developments are authorised and commenced.

We continue to urge recognition of the special significance of the Chilterns and work with the Local Authorities on their Schemes of Community Involvement and Local Development Frameworks. Assurances given that the new Planning System would be simpler and quicker are looking increasingly unreliable!

The Radlett Society was unable to make a verbal submission due to non-availability of members with time and knowledge. What would other societies do? Would they hire a consultant? How would they meet the costs?

East of England Plan

Andrew Sangster, Secretary

In March ANTAS objected, on behalf of its members in Hertfordshire, to the proposals in the East of England Plan (RSS 14) for massive new housing developments in the countryside to the north of Harlow, and in North Herts, including to the west of Stevenage. In addition, we objected to the statement that sub-regional development strategies, such as that for the North of Harlow, will take precedence over the single policy for the London Arc, the ring of towns and Green Belt designated countryside around London.

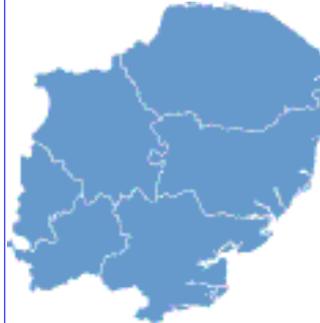
In June the Panel appointed to conduct the Examination in Public of the Plan selected ANTAS to take part in the debate on Matter 8K, which will consider the adequacy of the Plan with regard to the western part of the London Arc. In particular it will address the district level apportionment of regional growth to Dacorum, Hertsmere, St Albans, Three Rivers, Watford and Welwyn Hatfield. Other participants include regional government, local authorities, transport agencies, developers and environmental and voluntary organisations. We did seek to have all the London Arc falling within the East of England region considered, but this suggestion

was not adopted.

Along with the other participants we have submitted a written statement, drafted by Peter Newby of the St Albans Society, addressing six key questions posed by the Panel; the closing date was 9th December. We will now have the opportunity to examine the submissions from the other participants in preparation for the public debate on the strategy for the western part of the London Arc, scheduled for Tuesday 21st February at the Spirella Building, Letchworth. Although the exercise only covers south-west Hertfordshire, all the concerns and the arguments deployed to justify or criticise the strategy will also be relevant to south-east Buckinghamshire and, no doubt, will be subject to similar scrutiny in the EiP for the South-East Regional Plan.

Although neither ANTAS nor local civic societies were finally invited to participate in the debate on Matter 8J, development west of Stevenage, the umbrella group CASE has now been invited to take part. Together with the County and District Councils, CASE will no doubt make a strong representation against development in this area.

The East of England incorporates six counties: Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk. The unitary local authorities of Luton, Peterborough, Southend and Thurrock are also within the re-



gion. The East of England is one of the largest of the English regions at just over 19,000 square kilometres. It extends from the fringes of London in the south to the North Norfolk coast. It is mainly low-lying with parts at or below sea level. Nearly 5½ million people live in the East of England.



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Registered with the Civic Trust

www.antas.org.uk

ANTAS Newsletter is produced, published and edited by
Merrin Molesworth, email: merrin@computercompanion.org.uk,
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Chairman Writes

by Tony Fooks



I feel honoured and challenged to become your chairman for the ensuing year and thank my own High Wycombe Society for their support. ANTAS is a platform for the knowledge and experience of our members. Our meetings are informative with good speakers and opportunity to share know-how. So much has grown from that first sounding-out meeting in Jennifer Moss's garden, of the Local Amenity Society Advisory Committee with Graham Reddie, and Roger King of the Aylesbury Society. From the executive and all ANTAS members a big thank you to Jennifer. I believe that ANTAS will continue to grow in strength and effectiveness as it faces the 21st century.

We take inspiration from the Buntingford Society and their new young members. Let's all follow their example and recruit a new member or group this year.

Well what about the future? The East of England Plan, South East Plan, Local Development

Frame-works, West of Stevenage and the Polices issued by the ODPM office are challenging us. I feel it is important that ANTAS collectively makes appropriate comment. In this context the Civic Trust has invited ANTAS and the Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Association to take part in a pilot scheme to highlight collective concerns within societies, feeding them into the Regional Associations, then onto the National Executive with a view to presenting a strong debate within the Government's Regional Bodies. In order to participate we need your concerns sent to ANTAS (Hon Sec. Andrew Sangster) in order that the executive can collate and forward them.

Finally I wish all members and groups a very active New Year. .

The next Antas meeting will be held in the Wendover Memorial Hall on Saturday, 22 April 2006. Rumour has it that the Wendover Society catering team is excellent so make time to stay on for lunch.

Support ANTAS, be at the Examination in Public of the East of England Plan, Matter 8K "Western part of the London Arc in Herts". It will be at the Spirella Building, Letchworth on Tuesday 21 February 2006 from 9.30am—5.30pm. The Spirella building used to be a corset factory. The enlightened employer had a ballroom on the top floor. It is now all restored for business use and well worth a visit. For directions see www.spirella.com/ballroom-map.htm