

NEWSLETTER WINTER 2007

Infrastructure Costs— Who decides and who pays?

At our AGM Cllr Mike Appleyard challenged public perception of Regional Assemblies by presenting the facts for the South East of England Assembly (*see article on page 8*). Thoughts on lack of democracy and high cost were soon demolished to be replaced by wondering what happens when the Regional Development Agencies take over the Assemblies and the Regional Plans, and all the important decisions are taken by the business community; so much power in the name of democracy to local communities. But doesn't the official Opposition also want to close down the regional government system?

what happens when the RDAs take over and decisions are made by the business community

Then came the real shock, the cost of implementing the Regional Plan. We already knew that the East of England Assembly had disowned its own Plan because no guarantees were forthcoming from government on the funding of the £1.5 billion needed for new roads, water supply, sewerage and sewage treatment, public transport, schools, doctor's surgeries etc. Mike pointed out that in the South-East similar sums involved equate to £38k for each new dwelling or £50k if affordable homes are excluded. If central government will not provide the funds through taxation, then the only two realistic options left are Section 106 agreements attached to all new developments or a 'roof' tax on each new dwelling. The recent Queen's Speech made it clear that the government's choice is the latter. That leaves two questions: what happened to the Government's much trumpeted £50k home for first-time buyers, coupled with the Barker concept of building our way out of the perceived housing shortage, and when will the new infrastructure be put in place, before or after the new homes (or never)?

Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government says the Government will publish detailed regulations about the new community infrastructure levy - the planning charge which will replace the earlier proposals for a Planning Gain Supplement

www.planningportal.gov.uk/england/professionals/en/1115315395317.html

How much?



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Local Development Frameworks

Tony Fooks

In July 2004 the Government introduced a new system of planning to replace County Structure Plans and the Local Plans produced by local planning authorities. Regional Assemblies are now responsible for strategic planning through the production of Regional Spatial Strategies (for example, the East of England Plan) and local planning authorities, usually district councils and unitary authorities, are required to produce Local Development Frameworks (LDFs). These have to be consistent with the policies in the regional plans and must take account of the

authority's own Community Strategy and other strategic plans, such as for education, health, transport etc. The Community Strategy will have been prepared by a Local Strategic Partnership, comprising public, private and voluntary groups, and will set out the long term vision for the district and the actions that are needed to

improve the economic, social and environmental well-being within it. The LDF will not only implement the strategies in the regional plan, but will set out how the actions identified in the Community Strategy and other strategic plans will be translated on to the ground in terms of develop-

ment and environmental quality.

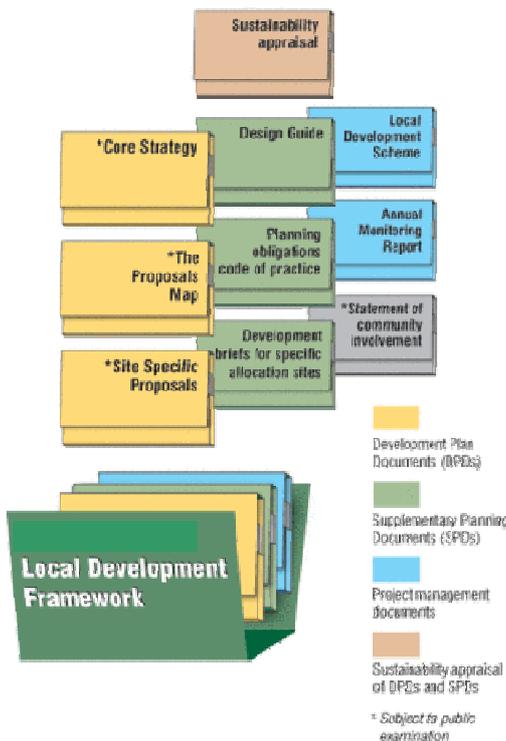
The LDF will be a portfolio of Local Development Documents covering all matters involved in spatial planning for the District. It is hoped that dividing in this manner will enable swifter updating as circumstances change. The principal document will set out the core strategies. Other essential documents providing more detail are Site Specific Allocations, identifying land in order to deliver local policies, a Proposals Map, illustrating the spatial extent of policies and possibly containing larger scale inserts, an Annual Monitoring Report on progress in preparing the LDF, and, most importantly, the Statement of Community Involvement. This latter will set out how and to what extent the public was involved in the preparation of the LDF, and will be subject to formal external examination and approval. In order to ensure the documents comprising the LDF reflect local needs and aspirations it is necessary to have a lively debate with local people and organisations with a view to ensuring that the plan improves the overall quality of life for people that live and work in the area. Optional documents include Area Action Plans, Supplementary Planning Documents and Local Development Orders.

Area Action Plans aim to deliver a visionary framework for specific areas such as town centres where significant change is expected; the more precise detail allows a master plan to be developed that can be delivered over the next

20 to 30 years and one that will be owned more widely by the Council, Press and public.

Supplementary Planning Documents taking the form of design guides, area development briefs, master plans or issue-based documents, which supplement policies in the Local Development Plan Documents, may cover a range of issues, both thematic and site-specific. They must not be used to allocate land and they will not be subject to independent examination. However, they should be subjected to rigorous process of community involvement

At the outset, the local planning authority is required to submit for the Secretary of State's review a Local Development Scheme setting out the content of the LDF and the timetable for its production. Subsequently all development plan documents must also be submitted for independent examination, involving public consultation. In addition, to comply with the relevant European Directive, all policies and plans for implementation must be subject to sustainability appraisal and strategic environmental assessment. Full guidance is given in the government's Planning Policy Statement 12: Local Development Frameworks, a somewhat confusing and uncomfortable read. But beware, it seems local authorities have different views on how to implement the legislation and the accompanying guidance.



A sideways look at a Public Inquiry— Freight Transfer Terminal in Green Belt

Graham Taylor, Chairman, The Radlett Society and Green Belt Association

Lord Leakham, the fictitious judge in Tom Sharpe's hilarious novel 'Blott on the Landscape', said at his Public Inquiry into the route of a new motorway: "Opinion is not evidence". It is a quote that has stuck in my mind ever since I edited BBC TV's adaptation of Blott in the 1980s.

It is still relevant today; as you watch the live webcast of the Public Inquiry into the proposed Strategic Rail Freight Inquiry [SRFI] in St Albans, you can see the rebuttals and proofs of the adversarial system in full swing! Each party fields the best legal advice it can get and the whole show is put on for an Inspector. Witnesses are cross-examined in ruthless fashion, their qualifications challenged and their evidence questioned down to the last word. It is not an environment for the faint-hearted and, bearing in mind the rates for Queen's Counsels, certainly not for any group with limited funds!

Due to Civic Trust rules, the Radlett Society and Green Belt Association is obliged to watch mostly from the sidelines as the fate of the former Handley-Page airfield, Radlett Aerodrome, is decided. This site is in the metropolitan Green Belt, adjoining our 'area' of Aldenham.

The property developers, Helioslough, are appealing against St Albans District Council's refusal - on 15 grounds in Feb'07- of planning permission for the 330,000sqm Strategic Rail Freight Interchange (SRFI). The land is actually owned by Hertfordshire County Council, ie. by us, the residents, and it is presently being restored to open countryside following gravel extraction.

This fact doesn't seem to concern the developers, but with so much strong local opposition from everyone including MPs and residents' group STRiFE, one suspects that there's support further

up the planning line...

There's no space to go into all the arguments here, but if the scheme is approved by the Secretary of State, Helioslough argues that it will reduce road freight. Fine! But there's absolutely no guarantee of this and it's quite possible that the developers will simply move on leaving a huge **road-road Freight Interchange** for which very special Green Belt circumstances approval would never have been granted!

Please use whatever influence you have to encourage rejection of this appeal and protect the Green Belt. Make your opinion... evidence!
www.radlettsociety.org.uk/blogcontrol.asp?showblog=1&blogID=1&blog1topicid=6
and
www.stalbans.gov.uk/living/airfreight_enquiry/index.htm

*a huge road-road
freight interchange*



Next Antas meeting Saturday 12th April 2008

New Traffic Regulations for Wycombe District

Ron Waters, Marlow

Marlow, in common with the rest of the Wycombe District, is to be declared a 'Special Parking Area' under the Road Traffic Act 1991. At the moment, parking throughout the District is subject to three different legal systems under three different traffic acts. Bucks CC is responsible for on-street parking, Wycombe District Council is responsible for off-street parking and yellow line restrictions are enforced by the police, with the exception of existing SPA in Wycombe town centre, which is enforced by NCP. To simplify and make control and enforcement more effective, the County and District, working together, are to create the District-wide SPA.

An SPA is an area where the enforcement of parking regulations is transferred from the police to the local authority, effectively decriminalising the parking offence. With its introduction Wycombe District Council will take over the enforcement of all on-street parking, including yellow lines and restricted parking areas and council owned car parks.

Marlow has suffered many years of unregulated on-street parking, particularly in our town centre. The town centre streets have become all-day car parks with the police freely admitting that they did not have the resources to enforce the parking regulations. Parking was free but time limited and many people parked all day on our streets rather than use the car parks. Additionally, our experience was that the policy of restricting parking provision to the minimum for new development with

the object of discouraging car usage just does not work. If people cannot park in an office car park they park in the nearest street.

The forward plan which Wycombe District Council has presented to us is of twelve months duration, at the end of which an application will be made to the government to create the Special Parking Area for the whole district. For the first six months existing parking regulations are to be strictly enforced. This will bring about a different pattern of parking in the town, a shake-out of long term parkers in our High Street and new data on the parking places chosen by displaced parkers, which are expected to be the nearest uncontrolled streets surrounding the town centre. The six months following will be a period of assessment and consultation when new parking regulations will be formulated.

We are told that the benefits of a district-wide SPA are:-

- Increased road safety for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists.
- More free-flowing traffic and improved parking around on-street parking.
- Increased turnover and availability of parking spaces.
- Continuity of management by one Authority.
- Increased enforcement against irresponsible and inappropriate parking.

We will have to wait and see!

During the period of con-

sultation the Marlow Society will be actively involved in such issues as the time limit for town centre parking and the level of charging or whether it should be free, the introduction of residential parking permits, preferential parking for Marlow residents, the provision of disabled parking, the provision of additional off-street parking, rear servicing for our main street shops and the places where no parking will be permitted at all. Many different opinions will be held on these and other issues and the Society has sent an explanation of the new system and a questionnaire to its members on the various options so that we can try to identify a majority approach, which would form the basis of our policy.

Central government requires the SPA to be self-financing and not to impact on council tax payers. Surplus revenues are to be spent on traffic and parking improvements. The Marlow Society, therefore will also be asking about the mechanisms for controlling the revenue and expenditure of the scheme, its transparency and availability to public scrutiny.

Societies within the Wycombe District Council area will have the opportunity to put their views to the Council. Consultation forms can be downloaded from the WDC website or obtained from WDC and BCC area offices and 'road shows' are to be held in Marlow, High Wycombe and Princes Risborough. Or you can visit WDC on www.wycombe.gov.uk/parking.



Government Consultations

Andrew Sangster

In brief our responses to three government consultations:

Heritage protection for the 21st Century:

Welcomed: Merging of the present various systems for protection into a single register; the proposal to encourage local authorities to set up local designations; and the recognition of the role amenity organisations can play in protecting the national heritage.

Concerns: Linking protection to current government proposals for changing planning control; transfer to English Heritage of the administration of the new protection mechanism and responsibility for training Local Planning Authority personnel in implementing, without specific funding; and lack of a robust mechanism for making new owners of listed buildings aware of their obligations.

Permitted Development Rights for Household-ers:

Welcomed: The change from the present often unsatisfactory system based on percentage volume increases to one based on external impact; local authorities having the power to make Article 4 directions without reference to the Secretary of State; and proposed limits on house extensions.

Concerns: Within conservation and other designated areas the effect of any proposal should be

considered from all directions and not merely the highway; the rear of a dwelling should be treated as a principal elevation where the building lies within a designated area or alongside a waterway of recognised visual value; that impact on the built environment is more important than that on the natural environment; and no national restriction proposed on use of non-porous paving.



Permitted Development Rights Microgeneration:

Welcomed: Actions that limit the impact of climate change and move from reliance on fossil fuels for energy production: for solar microgeneration we agreed that coverage of an element should be limited to 60%; but had reservations about the impact of solar stand-alone units, whilst accepting the proposed minimum distance of 5 metres from a neighbouring boundary.

Concerns: Consideration should be given to sacrificing marginal benefit in order to maintain quality of life; need to keep results

under review; disagreed with the proposal that impact test should be limited to assessing from the highway for World Heritage sites and conservation areas only; opposed the installation of wind turbines without specific planning approval; and sought a required minimum distance of 10 metres from a highway boundary.



Annual General Meeting

Andrew Sangster, ANTAS secretary

We picked our way through a construction site to a warm welcome from Dr Ruth Farwell, the Principal of Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College, the venue for our meeting. Like much of the centre of High Wycombe the college is reinventing itself, changing its name to Bucks New University and undertaking extensive enlargement and refurbishment. The resulting 'landmark' building will provide modern facilities for students, concentrating on either fitting them for employment or improving their performance if already in work, rather than providing a purely academic education. Dr Farwell was pleased that the college has close links with both local employers and the High Wycombe Society. In his welcome Roger Lawson, Chairman of the High Wycombe Society, told the meeting about the Society's co-operation with Wycombe District on planning matters and was pleased that the Leader of the Council, Cllr Lesley Clarke, and Alderman Kathleen Peatey had accepted the invitation to attend. He also noted the robust relationship between the Society and the developer of the replacement town-centre shopping area which had achieved beneficial results.

Our Chairman, Tony Fooks, welcomed representatives of Berkhamsted Citizens' Association and The Newbury Society (as observers and potential members), Peter Bembridge, Managing Director of the Civic Trust, and the speaker, Cllr Mike Appleyard. He then reported the Association's extensive involvement with the post-Examination in Public

phases of the East of England Plan and the Examination in Public of the South East of England Plan. The Association had also been active in responding to central and local government consultations including Permitted Development Rights for both Householders and Microgeneration in the Planning White Paper, heritage protection, and minerals and waste disposal plans. It had also provided written support for one of its members in its dealings with the local authority (and would be willing to provide the same service to other members), and had been involved in the present restructuring of the Civic Trust South East. He then drew attention to the excellent on-line replacement newsletter from the Civic Trust, Grass Roots, which is most informative. The aim is to make it more accessible to individual society members, but, where file size is an impediment; a smaller Civic Trust Update is available on-line; for both, registration for automatic receipt is available.

The formal business was concluded by the re-election of the current officers and other members of the Executive Committee, and by a financial report from the Treasurer.

Peter Bembridge then reported on progress and activities within the Civic Trust. A new chairman has been appointed, Phillip Kolvin, a senior planning barrister and a leading expert on licensing and gaming laws; he will be particularly involved in the Trust's campaigning on control of the 'evening economy'. The financial health of the Trust

has been greatly improved with a move from deficit to a respectable balance on account, with an aim to double that. Regular annual events such as Green Flags Awards and Heritage Open Days have been even more successful this year and Civic Trust Awards continue to attract a large entry.

Member societies then reported on their activities, concerns and challenges since the Spring meeting. It was gratifying to record how active members had been, even to the extent of preventing one (I don't understand this phrase) from attending the meeting. Common themes included:

- De-criminalisation of on-street car parking enabling the setting up of Special Parking Areas under the control of local authorities, as a means of improving enforcement and addressing all day parking by commuters to either local employment or London, which is damaging trade in towns.
- The building of excessive numbers of two-bedroom apartments, often with an en-suite bathroom in preference to the provision of adequate kitchen space. The numbers receiving planning approval seem to exceed requirements identified in local housing surveys and to be inconsistent with recommendations on housing mix in PPS3.
- Waste disposal and the growing need for transfer stations and incinerators as an alternative to using ever-decreasing land-fill

sites. Locations are proving contentious. The move to fortnightly collections as a means of encouraging recycling is a linked concern from a public health perspective.

- The proposed location of sites for travellers and gypsies, particularly where close to existing authorised or unauthorised sites, leading to potential problems associated with concentration.
- Overgrown and ill-maintained verges, both urban and rural, making it difficult for walkers to use some roads. Maintenance contracts are not being properly monitored and enforced, and where a Highways officer has responsibility for repairs there is inadequate funding.
- The need for more 20mph speed limits in residential areas.
- With one notable exception, the common experience is that local authorities are either not consulting in an acceptable manner, or, if they are, not responding through worthwhile dialogue.

To complete the meeting Cllr Mike Appleyard gave a talk on the workings of the South East Regional Assembly based on his experience as a member, and particularly focussed on the funding of infrastructure that will be essential if the strategies in the Regional Plan are to be properly implemented. *See back page for details of his talk.*

The Chairman Writes

Tony Fooks

Another year has passed with the annual General Meeting held at Bucks New University in High Wycombe. The Government's Planning White Paper continues to create discussion at all levels, within the Civic Trust and the South East Regional Assembly and, I am sure, within your own organisations. Please continue to let us have your views.

The Executive is encouraged by the continuing rise in membership of ANTAS. We welcome both recent joiners and those contemplating joining. Please pass on to other groups / potential members how ANTAS has benefited your Society and what they might expect from us if they join. The Executive has decided not to extend the area that ANTAS presently covers but to concentrate on those groups within the area who are not yet members.

With regard to our discussions on re-establishing the Civic Trust South East, these are ongoing, but I hope to be able to report in full at our next meeting in April 2008.

May I take this opportunity to wish all members a Happy Christmas and a very productive New Year in 2008.



South East of England Regional Assembly and Regional Development Agency *continued*

(Continued from page 8)

agreed a figure of 28900 new homes to be built each year (4040 in Buckinghamshire, 2620 in Oxfordshire and 2620 in Berkshire) with 35% to be affordable housing. The Examination in Public Panel recommended the total be increased by 10% across the Region (7% in Buckinghamshire, 16% in Oxfordshire and 30% in Berkshire) and now central government is demanding 35000 per annum. As a comparison, the number planned for Hertfordshire and the London commuter belt in the East of England is 8250, and for Bedfordshire 3650.

New jobs and housing numbers must expand hand in hand. Currently business cannot find enough people to fill jobs yet there is a need to modernise business by creating jobs in new areas of activity. At the same time effectiveness in business has to be improved, even at the expense of some imbalance, if the Region is to survive with a high quality

of life.

Mike then turned to the infrastructure needed to underpin the expansion of housing and jobs. Key road and rail routes, expansion of airports and the strengthening the broadband network all need to be supported. The public transport network must be expanded, coupled with ensuring that growth areas – Thames Gateway, South Coast, Milton Keynes and South Midlands, and the Western Corridor encompassing the Thames Valley – attract the appropriate levels of infrastructure. At the same time the sustainability of natural resources has to be maintained. Central government funds large transport projects such as the upgrade of Reading Station and motorway widening, but fails to provide support for new 'soft infrastructure' affecting everyday welfare of the population. See the separate article on infrastructure costs.

Mike then outlined the geographical strategies for

the Region, the creation of 'primary regional centres' for the purpose of focusing retail activity and employment, and the identification of 'regional hubs' linked to provide a network on which to concentrate the upgrading of transport systems. At the same time it is planned to retain and support green belts, and to give priority to conservation and enhancement of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. But all of this is contingent on the provision of supporting infrastructure.

The Secretary of State is expected to publish by the end of the year the government's proposed revisions to the draft Plan based on the report of the Examination in Public Panel. The final version would then follow in Spring next year. It is now known that government plans to place the Assembly's work under the control of the Regional Development Agency. This still leaves the questions of how to provide local authority input and how the Plan will be implemented..

If the official Opposition should gain power, it has plans to minimise regional government, to abolish Quangos and to revert to County control, with detailed planning left to local councils and no reference made to raising skills and improving business links.

The talk was followed by a lively question session, regrettably curtailed owing to time constraints, but continued over lunch. The full text of the power point presentation can be seen on the ANTAS web site. www.antas.plus.com/seera.ppt

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South East of England Regional Assembly and Regional Development Agency

Report on Bucks County & Wycombe District Councillor Mike Appleyard's presentation

When did you hear a good word in support of the Regional Assemblies? Aren't they just another layer of public expense that the North East rejected? Against this background we asked Cllr Mike Appleyard to explain and defend the role of the South East of England Regional Assembly and, for good measure, to tell us something about the Regional Development Agency. Mike is an experienced businessman and the Wycombe District Council's representative on the Assembly. In putting up a doughty defence he explained how the Assembly pursues the best interests

ship is drawn from local authorities with the addition of stakeholders representing a wide range of interests. Voting is weighted and the Conservative vote out-numbers the rest by two to one. Total income is £4.6 million, with most contributed by central government, and just over half the expenditure going on payroll (50 employees). When this is spread over a total regional population of about 8 million, the cost per head is less than 60p each year, hardly expensive.

In contrast, the South East England Development Agency has a much larger budget, a total of £195 million, and is mostly funded by central government and administered by 190 employees. This focuses on business, with plans to increase gross value added by



of the regional population and how cheaply it does it.

3% per year and productivity per employee by 2.4% pa, whilst stabilising and then reducing the Region's ecological footprint. Key objectives are global competitiveness, smart growth and sustainable prosperity.

He started by listing the principal aims: to press the Region's interest in London and Brussels, to scrutinise the performance of the Regional Development Agency and, in its best known role, to prepare the Regional Spatial Strategy, known as the South East Plan. It operates through various committees, has a budget and small staff, and takes decisions by representative voting. Member-

The principal matters in the South East Plan are the provision of new housing, the creation of new jobs and the provision of necessary supporting infrastructure. Assembly members

(Continued on page 7)