

NEWSLETTER N^o 5

(November 2010)



Campaign to Protect
Rural England

SWINDON AND NORTH WILTSHIRE BRANCH

The North Wiltshire and Swindon Group Constitution and Rules of Procedure

Wiltshire CPRE has changed its status to a limited liability company with charitable status as well as being a registered charity and has changed its name to "Protect Wiltshire". We in the north need to bring ourselves up to date and as we have never had a proper Constitution and Rules of Procedure we have agreed among ourselves a draft one which we had hoped to publish in this newsletter for all our members to study. Unfortunately this has not proved to be possible as the Wiltshire Branch in Devizes has to agree and confirm our Constitution and Rules and owing to delays in agreeing their own Constitution and Rules with National Office they are unable to agree ours.

It is hoped that this position will shortly be resolved and that we can send out our new Constitution and Rules of Procedure in the next newsletter with the hope of having it ratified at our Annual General Meeting next May.

Elizabeth Money-Kyrle

Aggregates in North Wiltshire

Much concern has been generated within the district this autumn by the issue of a consultation document regarding the list of potential sites to be allocated for minerals extraction. Many of the sites are around Calne, some close to Chippenham and others towards Devizes in the Bromham area. Also included are new ones in the already heavily worked Upper Thames Valley.

The purpose of this article is to try to put the issues in perspective.

In order to supply the needs of the construction industry for building houses, industrial development, offices and new roads and to ensure this supply is continuous and dependable, Central Government requires local authorities to produce Minerals Planning Policies, brought together within a Minerals Core Strategy Development Plan Document. The South West Regional Authority, within its planning document entitled the Regional Spatial Strategy, also included a series of policies which equally set out to ensure that the need is met and delivered over the whole of the South West region.

One of the processes used in arriving at a continuous and dependable supply of minerals, (a minerals land bank) is to sift through the many proposed sites and select those most suitable to be included in a Site Allocation Development Plan Document. They have to meet strict criteria contained within the Minerals Planning Policies.

The Regional Spatial Strategy, despite being abolished this summer by the Coalition Government remains relevant in some respects. RSS minerals policies contained delivery requirements based on calculations which presumed economic and housing growth would continue at the same rate as the past 10-12 years. In this way a figure was arrived at for calculating the Land bank of Aggregates for each authority, known as an apportionment. This requirement was apportioned between the seven mineral planning authorities within the South-West region, with Wiltshire being apportioned 1.85Mt per annum of sand and gravel.

The first RSS document assumed a growth of 2.8% GVA (Gross Value Added) but the new draft document even suggested a rise to 3.2%. This wholly unrealistic assumption, was still considered likely at the time of the Public Inquiry into the RSS, and is one of the reasons that there is so much pressure on Wiltshire to produce many new sites. Wiltshire is a major producer of soft sand and gravel which is concentrated in two main areas, both in the north of the county.

As long ago as 2008 the draft revised guidelines for national aggregates provision for the period 2005-2020 were saying that there were downward trends and variations in the demands for aggregates. This was due to variety of factors including aggregates being used less intensively and the unreliability of long-term construction forecasts. These pre building slump comments combined with the need to recycle

construction material on site would indicate that the need for primary aggregates is even lower.

However, despite the present slump in the construction industry and new technologies coming on stream which require different construction materials plus the shelving of many road schemes and an uncertain economic future, Wiltshire is still working to the model which seeks to meet the target of 1.85 Mt. per annum agreed during the boom years.

The quality of the soft sand which is quarried from the Calne area is very high and makes it a valuable building material. The possible areas for expanding the sand and gravel quarries around the Cotswold Water Park are reducing, the area having been worked for many years, so new areas have to be found to meet the targets.

However new factors have come into play. Fears about climate change, predicted scarcity of food due to population increase and, since the advent of the Coalition Government, a greater opportunity for local people to express concerns on local issues and expect them to be taken seriously. Moreover, potential irreversible changes to the local landscape, to the local environment and the effects of transport on the towns and villages are issues which should be addressed with as much concern as economic priorities were in the past. It has always been assumed that the objections of local people could be met through the wording of Conditions and Mitigation in a planning permission. These are often inadequate and unenforceable.

The fundamental issue is to find the right balance between economic and population growth and environmental protection for landscapes offering sustainable food sources, as well as being areas cherished for their historical value by local communities.

Anne Henshaw

Wichelstowe, Swindon

Wichelstowe is the name given by the developers, Taylor Wimpey, to the area for development between Old Swindon (at the top of Swindon Hill) and the M4 motorway, and extending from the A4361 to Junction 16. Proposals for its development were approved in the last Structure and Local Plans in spite of very strong opposition in principle and in detail from CPRE and other organisations, including the Front Garden Action Group, which was set up specifically for the purpose and includes a representative from CPRE. Outline

planning permission was later given for the development of 4,500 houses, an employment area, central and local shopping and service areas, schools and so on.

The first detailed planning applications for East Wichel, adjoining Croft Road on the A4361, were submitted in August 2007. Since then, the formerly rural stretch of road between Swindon and North Wroughton has been replaced by a complex six lane dual carriageway junction, and the construction of service roads and other infrastructure have proceeded on site.

Housing development has proceeded very slowly. The situation in mid-September 2010 was that planning permission had been applied for on 23 of 32 parcels of land in East Wichel, to be constructed by various developers. About 340 out of 836 houses proposed have been built, and of these 180 of Sovereign Housing Association homes and 63 private purchase homes are occupied.. The remaining 55 Sovereign homes are expected to be allocated by Christmas.

In Spring 2009 it was made known that Swindon Borough Council and Taylor Wimpey have agreed to end their collaboration agreement, so that Taylor Wimpey will continue with its responsibility to develop East Wichel, and the Borough Council will take responsibility for Middle and West Wichel.. For this, the Council may need to engage consultants to prepare a design brief and to find other developers willing to finance and undertake development of these areas. In the present financial climate, progress on these further stages of development would seem to be a long way off.

CPRE have fought strongly, over a long period, against the proposal to connect the intended link road from Croft Road to west Swindon, by a tunnel under the motorway at Hay Lane and a connection to the south side of the M4 Junction 16. They argue that a connection to Great Western Way over the railway line, as tentatively considered by the Borough Council on several occasions in the past, would provide a much more satisfactory link, and that the proposed alterations to Junction 16 to accommodate the additional traffic are unsatisfactory and unsafe. They will continue to pursue this, if and when the proposal is submitted for planning permission, but that also seems to be quite a way off in view of the present financial and development situation.

Geoffrey Hamilton

Planning Update

We continue to wait for the promised Planning Review promised by Wiltshire Council. A consultation was held nearly a year ago but we still await the outcome. There is still concern about the 'call in procedure' for applications to be dealt with by the Development Control Committee, instead of being delegated to a Planning Officer. At present the only way this can be achieved is for the Unitary Councillor for the area in which application is to ask for it. CPRE continues to believe that this is less democratic than the previous system

A number of changes have taken place prior to the outcome of the review. Listed Building and Conservation Area Applications can now be called in to Committee. However less information is sent through to Parish Councils about planning applications, minor amended plans are no longer sent through, neither are decision notices, just lists of the actual decisions. But it is the notices that contain the conditions, often an extremely important part. This information is available on Wiltshire's web site, but not all people have access to the internet. Parish Council's are often the first point of contact for local people, so this is regretted by CPRE, and further removes the planning process from individuals.

Brian Taylor is the Area Development Manager for Planning at the 'Northern Hub', of Wiltshire Council to be found at Monkton Park in Chippenham (the previous North Wilts building) Tel: 0300 456 0100. Brad Fleet is the Service Director, Development for Wiltshire Council tel:012250713169 working in Trowbridge.

Also we have been waiting for the outcome of a Wiltshire Council Review on Enforcement. This is where development takes place that either has no permission or is built not in accordance with a planning consent. Hopefully this will be available soon, as it is nearly a year in the making also. Robust enforcement procedures are central to the planning system, without it the system fails and it is simply not fair on the majority of people who do follow the rules. Recently CPRE received a reply to a letter on Planning Enforcement from Greg Clark MP, Minister for Decentralisation at the Department of Communities and Local Government. I quote from the final paragraph "Local planning authorities have a wide range of powers to deal with unauthorised development. For these to be effective, it is important that the local planning authority

follows through with the necessary action required to stop breaches of planning control once enforcement action has started. If anyone feels that a local authority has neglected its responsibilities to the point of maladministration, it is open to them to seek redress from the Local Government Ombudsman."

CPRE encourages you to take an active part in what happens in your part of Wiltshire, remember a planning consent stays with the land. To submit an application is to invite comment, it is your right to do so, you have to live with the results.

Pauline Lyons

Cotswold Water Park

Members may be interested in what is going on in the Cotswold Water Park, which is of course partly in Wiltshire. Some years ago a virtual gift of several lakes was made to Glos. County Council with the aid of government funds, and further payments were made to maintain the lakes for the benefit of the public. Further funding from government was halted and GCC passed over the lakes to the Joint Water Parks Committee at a peppercorn rent of £1- per year. A very nice green oak visitor centre was constructed at the waters edge, and the public enjoyed swimming, walking and cycling and studying nature.

A new chief executive of the Cotswold Water Park, Dennis Grant, is said to have suggested that new dynamic business methods should be introduced. A deal was then allegedly struck with Watermark a large property developer, and the public were excluded from the area. When challenged about the WPC rights to do such a deal, it was said that GCC had changed the rules to allow it. But Esmond Jenkins, a local councillor, asked under the "freedom of information" act, to see what advice GCC lawyers had given at the time. GCC lawyer William Canaway had written that the new lease appeared to give Watermark "carte blanche" to develop. He went on to say..." I cannot help feeling that if the sub tenant conspicuously makes an enormous fortune out of this deal while GCC stands to make nothing....it may one day be subject to scrutiny"

Esmond Jenkins reported the matter to the LGO because there was no evidence that the lawyers' concerns had been heeded. He said.".....it was all done in secret, not even the Water Park Joint Committee was consulted".

The upshot was that Dennis Grant and Finance Officer Nick Hanson were arrested on..."suspicion of theft, conspiracy to defraud, money laundering and false accounting." Nick Hanson then died of a suspected heart attack at age 47, leading to more speculation.

Lessons can be learned here. Certainly if a philanthropist is contemplating leaving something for the benefit of his fellow man, then one thing is for certain sure....he must get it sown up legally and properly, and if trustees are involved, then they must be persons worthy of that trust.

David Bowen-Jones

Editor's Last Word

By the time you read this the developer Gleeson Homes will have held a Public Exhibition in Malmesbury of their proposal to build up to 800 houses in the town, an increase in the housing stock of 30% on top of the huge expansion of the last ten years.

The proposals have excited considerable opposition, with the Town Council and Residents' Association both actively encouraging local people to take an interest and express their views.

There appears to be a growing appreciation in Malmesbury that the unfettered "bog standard" building of the last few years, allegedly to meet housing need but in fact a classic case of 'predict and provide', has eroded the character of the town. More of the same would only make matters worse.

An opportunity for the new localism we hear so much about, and CPRE, to make their presence felt.

Optimum Population Trust (OPT)

Those of you on John Swainson's email distribution list cannot have failed to notice his mails on the OPT and its ongoing campaign to have the issue of perceived over-population, both here in the UK and worldwide, moved on to the political agenda and debated more openly. In mainstream political circles this has been a taboo subject in recent years.

Certainly there would seem to be a link between population growth and pressure on the countryside and on resources generally.

We would very much welcome your views on this topic. Is this a debate that the Branch should contribute to?

Jim Thomas

Who we are – your Committee

Anne Henshaw – Chairman; **Pauline Lyons** – vice Chairman; **Elizabeth Money-Kyrle** – Secretary; Brian Burrows, Geoffrey Hamilton, David Bowen-Jones, Marie Kamkar, Jane King, Fred Soady, Charmian Spickernell, John Swainson, and Jim Thomas

Feedback

We encourage feedback so that we stay in touch with, and represent, the membership as best we can. If we have missed, or look set to miss, a planning issue that you think we should look at – please tell us.

Contact us

Anne on 01249 817003
Elizabeth (membership and programme) on 01380 850281
The Editor on 01666 822381 (Jim Thomas)

Or Via The Website (See Footer)
[You can also see this Newsletter on our website.]