

We live in an era of slick slogans, sound-bites and skin-deep analysis of difficult issues. Responding to the success of campaigns such as the Telegraph's *Hands off our countryside*, the 'development' lobby's **YES TO HOMES <http://www.yestohomes.co.uk> campaign has just run a 'Yes to Homes Week'.**

Led by the National Housing Federation, the campaign does indeed make the powerful point that this country needs more affordable, and better, homes. We do.

Still, do campaigns such as this - however laudable - and the constant demand from many in the media and politics, that we build more and more *actually* get to the heart of the complex issues and competing demands that it is the job of the planning system to address?

Apart from nomads and the odd survivalist, it is hard to think of anyone who would say 'no' to homes. The real questions revolve around where they should be built, how many there should be, their design and appearance and how they should relate to the world around them. These are not simple questions capable of glib answers.

The NPPF – almost there

- **NPPF Guidance website**

The Government unveiled – in draft – its new NPPF website with supporting national planning policy guidance. Recommended by the Taylor Report, it replaces some 240 previous planning guidance documents. Comments are invited on the site until 9 October 2013. The draft planning guidance included on the site has yet to be finalised and existing guidance will not be cancelled until such time as the new planning practice guidance is published in final form. <http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/>

- **New 'affordability test' may force local authorities to build more houses**

The new online guidance includes a new provision for an 'affordability test' to determine how many new homes should be built. Consultants summed up the draft policy: "*if affordability is getting worse in your district at a faster rate than comparative areas, then you need to release more housing.*" Given its (relative) prosperity, it is easy to see this policy having an impact in this region; so St Albans is one of the 10 'least affordable' districts in the country (ratio of lower quartile house prices to lower quartile earnings). <http://www.planningresource.co.uk/news/1210416/affordability-test-may-force-councils-build-homes/>

- **Post NPPF rise in successes of green belt appeals**

Research released in August showed that the proportion of successful appeals against decisions of all types of development in the green belt increased from 31 per cent in the year before the NPPF was published to 36 per cent over the following 12 months. Scant support to the Government's avowed claim that the NPPF safeguards the green belt..... <http://www.planningresource.co.uk/news/1208334/>

Government issues new Planning Guidance

- **Planning Guidance (1) – Renewable Energy**

July saw the release of the Government's *Planning Practice Guidance for renewable and low carbon energy* which replaces PPS 22.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/225689/Planning_Practice_Guidance_for_Renewable_and_Low_Carbon_Energy.pdf

- **Planning Guidance (2) – Onshore Oil and Gas**

As the furore over fracking rumbles on, the Government has also published its Planning Guidance for onshore oil and gas.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/224238/Planning_practice_guidance_for_onshore_oil_and_gas.pdf .

Before burning (what remains) of our midnight oil poring over the guidance, bear in mind the DCLG/British Geological Survey's map from 2011 showing '*prospective onshore sedimentary basins, illustrating significant oil and gas fields and discoveries*' – none of which are in the East of England.

http://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CDsQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.bgs.ac.uk%2Fdownloads%2Fstart.cfm%3Fid%3D1366&ei=RKcpUrW7ELTb7AaM0oCoDw&usq=AFQjCNGP4IoBLCbmC68wKwU9_HL9Sm3Yiw&bvm=bv.51773540,d.ZGU

- **Planning Guidance (3) – Waste Management**

DCLG's consultation on *Planning for sustainable waste management* runs to 23 September 2013. The document proposes a number of changes, including a shift in emphasis on the issue of locating waste processing facilities in the green belt.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/225581/Updated_national_waste_planning_policy_-_Planning_for_sustainable_waste_management_-_Consultation.pdf

Elsewhere in planning.....

- **'Muscular localism' at work: Hertfordshire among poorly performing Local Authorities likely to be placed in 'special measures'**

In the spirit of Pickles' 'muscular localism' the Government released tables showing poor performing local authorities when it comes to planning – including Hertfordshire. The final decision will be taken by DCLG in October.

<http://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/local-authorities-facing-planning-special-measures-revealed/8651493.article>

- **Homelessness increases by 6% in East of England**

According to the homelessness charity Crisis, homelessness rose by 6% in the East of England in the year 2012/13, while the number of households in bed and breakfast accommodation doubled.

<http://www.crisis.org.uk/pressreleases.php/547/homelessness-rises-by-six-per-cent-in-the-east-of-england-while-number-of-households-in-bbs-doubles>

- **Judge overturns refusal to allow new homes in Hertfordshire green belt**

Earlier this month the High Court brought back to life plans for 116 new homes and a care home in the green belt outside St Albans. In overturning the inspector's refusal, the judge ruled that the inspector was wrong to base her assessment of housing need in the area on the old regional strategy and that she had misconstrued and misapplied the NPPF. DCLG will now look at the proposals afresh.

<http://www.planningresource.co.uk/news/1210763/judge-overturns-116-home-st-albans-green-belt-refusal/>

- **2030 Vision for the Cambridge sub-region**

In July a group including Cambridge Past Present and Future, Cambridgeshire Chamber of Commerce and the University of Cambridge published their Vision for the 'sub-region' which also incorporates parts of neighbouring counties. The issue of housing and development is, briefly, addressed.

<http://www.cambridgeppf.org/vision/>

- **Abandonment of plans for 3,600 homes west of Stevenage**

House-builder Taylor Wimpey withdrew two planning applications concerning major development west of Stevenage. First proposed by Stevenage Borough Council some 12 years ago, they were eventually opposed by neighbouring North Hertfordshire which successfully challenged the then Government's decision to approve the plans in 2009. Earlier this year DCLG signalled that there would be a new public inquiry. <http://www.out-law.com/en/articles/2013/august/plans-for-3600-stevenage-west-homes-withdrawn/> Nonetheless, threats remain.....

- **RSPB produce report highlighting nature friendly planning projects**

In July the RSPB published *Planning Naturally*. It provides "12 principles of good spatial planning" backed up with a range of examples of good practice from local authorities. These include Breckland District Council's core strategy which was modified as a result of a habitat regulations assessment designed to protect local stone curlews without affecting the local authorities' housing targets.

While the report emphasises biodiversity, it also recognises that spatial planning should unite all issues affecting development and the use of land, both in terms of its immediate bounds and the wider area. The extent to which the report signals a deeper engagement of the RSPB with wider planning issues remains to be seen.

http://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/planningnaturally_tcm9-349413.pdf

- **An end to *Diversity and Equality in Planning***

In July Local Government Minister Brandon Lewis announced that the previous Government's planning guidance document, *Diversity and Equality in Planning* (issued in 2005) had been cancelled. He argued that the document was "*outdated, excessive in length (186 pages) and sends unhelpful signals about the planning process*". <http://www.planningresource.co.uk/bulletin/planningdaily/article/1188812/pickles-personally-decide-traveller-site-green-belt-appeals/>

- **Progress of Core Strategies**

Planning has published a useful, interactive, map of Local Authorities' progress in developing Core Strategies: http://www.planningresource.co.uk/go/localplan_maps
Detail is also given of local plan progress month by month.

Neighbourhood Planning: eastern apathy

As at July 2013 there were 617 Neighbourhood Planning Areas in England – an increase from 548 from earlier in the year. There are a mere 23 located in the East of England; a map of where and what they are is located at http://dclgexamples.mywebcommunity.org/npf/npanodes_osm.html

The region's Historic Environment Forum received a presentation on neighbourhood plans. The experience from this region and beyond is that the process is a daunting one. Anecdotal evidence may suggest that were communities are opting for neighbourhood plans it may be because they feel that development will be foisted upon them in any event so they may as well opt to get something from it. It also noted that the take up for neighbourhood planning is extremely limited: Herefordshire alone has 32 neighbourhood plans whereas the whole of the East of England has a mere 23.

Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs)

- **LEPs: how the Government sees them fitting into the planning system**

In June the Smith Institute and Regional Studies Association published a report entitled '*Where next for local enterprise partnerships?*' It recognised a number of key issues arising from the early life of LEPs. Among them was the relationship between LEPs and the planning system. It recognised that the experience of regional strategies and RDAs was that "*transferring even limited control over the land use planning system away from elected local government was deeply unpopular*".

In the context of LEPs, the paper argues that the Government's ambitions for greater localism in planning and for '*a development industry hungry for valuable sites in the economically buoyant south-east*' are 'irreconcilable' <http://www.smith-institute.org.uk/file/Where%20next%20for%20Local%20Enterprise%20Partnerships%20.pdf>

Still, the Government seem determined to involve LEPs in the wider planning process. For instance in August DCLG released its statistics on house-building in the June quarter 2013. Rather than report on figures at a regional level, the report details house-building at LEP level https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/232108/House_Building_release_-_June_Qtr_2013.pdf

- **South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) – lower Thames Crossing**

SELEP, the LEP straddling Kent, Essex and part of Sussex, has come out strongly in favour of a new Thames crossing between Kent and Essex. It advocates 'option c' - connecting the M2 with the A13 and the M25 between junctions 29 and 30. <http://www.southeastlep.com/news/press-releases/279-se-lep-makes-strong-submission-on-lower-thames-crossing>

- **Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough LEP – new plans for A14 upgrade published “unlocking housing developments”**

The Highways Agency recently published plans for the A14 upgrade, including a bypass round Huntingdon. GCGP LEP has been a major advocate of the proposal, arguing that amongst its benefits the upgraded A14 will “*deliver a vital boost to the economy, unlocking housing developments*”. Highways Agency’s proposals can be accessed at http://www.highways.gov.uk/news/press-releases/new-plans-for-a14-upgrade-published/?utm_source=dvr.it&utm_medium=twitter and <http://www.yourlocalenterprisepartnership.co.uk/?s=housing>

- **Hertfordshire LEP – European funding**

In addition to working towards producing its Growth Strategy, the Hertfordshire LEP has just been awarded £60 million of European funding in order to aid economic growth in the county. <http://www.hertfordshirelep.com/news/eu-funding-boost.aspx>

- **South East Midlands LEP (SEMLEP):**

SEMLEP published its Green Economy Report in August: <http://www.semlep.com/news/2013/green-economy-report-launched-by-semlep/>

Energy

- **Rookery South, Bedfordshire**

Having pioneered obtaining the necessary consents, US energy giant Covanta put their UK subsidiary on the market in May. It appears that the development will only take place if a buyer is found. Opponents of the scheme should not yet sleep comfortably as it appears that potential buyers of the energy from waste (EFW) facility may be out there. <http://mmetag.wordpress.com/covanta-proposal/previous-updates/>

- **King’s Lynn incinerator application: future on hold**

Before a plastic bag has been torched, the application for a new EFW incinerator at Kings Lynn poisoned the political atmosphere. Opposition to the proposal contributed to the Conservatives losing Norfolk County council. The Labour/Lib Dem/UKIP coalition were to vote in mid-June on scrapping the proposal. However the vote was delayed as consideration is being given to the cost of abandonment – compensation of some £90 million to the developer Cory Wheelabrator has been suggested. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-norfolk-22941595>

In the meantime, the Secretary of State’s decision following the public inquiry is anticipated at the start of 2014.

- **New Barnfield, Hertfordshire**

The Public Inquiry into this 380,000 tonnes per year proposal begins this month. The Public Inquiry website is at <http://www.persona.uk.com/barnfield/>. Opponents of the proposals appear to be running a strong campaign <http://www.hatfield-anti-incineration.co.uk/>

- **Solar energy: 94 acre solar park refused at Tattingstone, Suffolk**

Following local authority refusal in June, developer Hive Energy signalled that they are likely to appeal the decision. The refusal reflected concerns over loss of agricultural land, landscape impact and a view that the relatively small amount of energy produced did not justify the “*devastation of this beautiful area*”.
http://www.eadt.co.uk/news/tattingstone_solar_farm_proposals_thrown_out_1_2233709

- **Map of Renewable and Alternative Energy Projects in the UK**
<http://www.renewables-map.co.uk/?Status=1>

Energy infrastructure

- **Bramford and Twinstead power lines – National Grid announce that their preferred site for a new substation**

On 28 August National Grid announced their preferred site, near Sudbury.
http://s258888288.websitehome.co.uk/NG%20News%20Release_28%20August%202013.pdf Campaigners Stour Valley Underground noted that the preferred site was exactly the same as the site National Grid identified in 2011 – before the public consultation. <http://www.stourvalleyunderground.org.uk/>

- **National Infrastructure Planning**

Eighteen projects from the East of England have been before the IPC/Planning Inspectorate; not all of which have progressed to a full application. A full list of the applications is at <http://infrastructure.planningportal.gov.uk/projects/eastern/>

National Trust: Regional Business Plan 2014-17

This month the Trust is due to complete their new Regional Business Plan. It is understood that The Trust’s overarching aim remains to make the East of England the destination of choice for tourists, residents and anyone seeking to engage with landscape, history and nature.

It is interesting to note that the Business Plan sees a *‘valuable role for [the Trust] in contributing to important discussions about the challenges and opportunities which arise from predicted population growth, the associated infrastructure and changing climate’*.

English Heritage: changes afoot

The most recent Historic Environment Forum received news of imminent changes to English Heritage. It is intended that the organisation will be split into two bodies; one of which will be charged with looking after the organisation’s 400 odd properties and the other, distinct, body will take charge of English Heritage’s regulatory functions. The likelihood of the properties being hived off to, for example, the National Trust is slim because of the web of legal obligations that tend to affect each and every property.

- **Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs)**

Updated to July 2013, a contact list for LNPs in the East of England and beyond has been produced at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/194096/Web_list_of_LNPs_with_contact_details_-_April_2013_4_.pdf

- **Wild Anglia LNP** (Norfolk and Suffolk): <http://www.wildanglia.org/>

On 18 September Wild Anglia is due to launch its manifesto. It will call for “a surge in investment in the natural environment to strengthen the natural asset that underpins economic growth as well as the health of our communities”.

- **DEFRA consultation on biodiversity off-setting**

This month DEFRA launched its consultation on the controversial idea bio-diversity off-setting in the sphere of development and planning. Accompanied by the Government’s Green Paper, biodiversity offsetting is summed up by DEFRA as:

“a measurable way to ensure we make good the residual damage to nature caused by development which cannot be avoided or mitigated. This guarantees there is no net loss to biodiversity from development and can often lead to net gain for nature. It will not change existing safeguards in the planning system, but makes it quicker and simpler to agree a development’s impacts to ensure losses are properly compensated for.”

The critics of biodiversity offsetting may not be reassured by the Orwellian claim that “offsetting can also help create a ready market to supply compensation for residual damage to nature.”

The deadline for responses is 7 November 2013. https://consult.defra.gov.uk/biodiversity/biodiversity_offsetting

- **Ash dieback**

Research produced by the Forestry Commission as 9 September 2013 confirmed *Chalara fraxinea* at 563 sites – an increase from 502 sites on 28 May. The disease appears widespread in both planted and established woodlands throughout the East of England. <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/chalara>

Jeremy Hill

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