



The Dever Society News

Autumn 2010

Defending Hampshire's rural heartland

A new vision for planning

Planning law is set to change radically in the next year as part of the new Government's coalition agreement. James Drewer has been looking at the national context.

Both the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives agreed that the current system of centralised planning has been ineffective and unpopular, and they have set out proposals to recreate the system to put decision-making in the hands of local communities.

As part of the Government's so called 'Big Society', this new planning system should shift the balance of power back

towards the people affected by planning proposals. It will seek to introduce ways of providing incentives for local communities to accommodate new development, rather than having it foisted upon them.

Eric Pickles, the new minister responsible for planning and local government, hopes to get the legislation for these changes through Parliament by the end of next year. He has already scrapped Regional Spatial Strategies, including the *South East Plan*, which until recently set out the wider planning framework and required local authorities to accommodate their share of centrally imposed housing targets.

... continued on page 2

Black Wood in the balance

Winchester City Council is now considering revised plans for this important local woodland.

In recent newsletters we have described our concerns over Forest Holidays' plans to build a large holiday village in Black Wood, a Forestry Commission-owned woodland of some 650 acres near Micheldever Station. In May 2009 the company's original application was refused by councillors because of concerns over the harm that would be caused to the woodland and its surroundings, and because of the potential dangers caused by the increase in traffic levels on local roads.

As anticipated in our last newsletter, Forest Holidays submitted a revised application for Black Wood in May this year. The new plans reduce the number of cabins from 130 to 98. After consulting widely on the likely impacts, the Society has once again joined with Micheldever Parish Council to oppose the plans. While we accept that Forest Holidays has made laudable efforts to address the adverse impacts of the development, the new plans have not alleviated our concerns over the irreversible effects on the wildlife and tranquillity of the protected ancient woodland, and the dangers of inadequate local roads.

As we go to press, we understand that the application will be considered



Safe for cycling? We don't think so! Our objection to the revised planning application highlights the dangers of the local roads adjoining Black Wood.

by Winchester City Council's planning committee on 16th September. The Society hopes to have the opportunity to make a verbal representation at that meeting.

Inside this issue

How national policies may affect local planning decisions

Page 2

General Election candidates debate rural issues

Page 3

Summer excursions

Page 4

... continued from page 1

Consequently, as we discuss elsewhere in these pages, Winchester City Council will now be reviewing its housing policies for the district, as well as consulting with parish councils and local residents on the amount of employment and infrastructure that should be provided in the local area.

The Coalition's planning proposals also include a reformed appeals system, which will make it easier for residents to challenge local authority decisions. Other plans include abolishing the existing housing density targets, and reversing the classification of gardens as brownfield land to limit the practice of 'garden grabbing'.

George Osborne has set out proposals for passing on a proportion of the economic benefits of major construction and development to local taxpayers, possibly through reductions in council tax and business rates. The Government hopes that this system of creating incentives will encourage local communities to develop their own ideas for solving the pressing housing needs, whilst ensuring that new developments are more acceptable to local communities.



Whilst some of the Government's proposals are welcome, concerns have been raised about the inevitable delays that will arise during the implementation of such radical changes. The appeals system could come under significant pressure, and some in the building industry are worried that the strategic planning vacuum will make it more difficult for investors to reach long term decisions about which projects to pursue.

Environmental groups have also voiced legitimate concerns following the abolition of the Regional Spatial Strategies. They have called on the Government to ensure that environmental safeguards contained within the strategies are not lost, and that mechanisms are put in place to protect biodiversity and reduce carbon emissions.

Only time will tell if the Government's proposals will succeed in getting communities more actively involved in the planning process. The Dever Society will be watching developments closely and making full use of any new opportunities that will help us to conserve, protect and celebrate Hampshire's rural heartland.

National policies, local plans

Councillor Stephen Godfrey, who represents Wonston and Micheldever on Winchester City Council, reflects on the impact of new national policies on local planning decisions.

Within days of the General Election, Eric Pickles, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, announced two significant changes of planning policy that had been heralded in the



Conservatives' manifesto. The first was the abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies, which included the South East Plan. It was the SE Plan that forced Winchester City Council to allocate land on which to build over 6,000 homes over the next few years, including at Barton Farm and other reserve sites. This change of policy gave local authorities the ability to consider housing land supply 'without the framework of regional numbers', so handing decisions about how local housing needs should be met to local authorities rather than central government.

This does not mean that there will be no more homes built over the next few years, just that local people should have a

far greater influence over how many homes are built and where. There is still a need for affordable homes in rural areas to meet local housing needs and for many more homes across Hampshire to cater for both the growing population and the increase in employment that is both expected and needed. Local authorities and local people will need to decide how to meet these local needs. This should prevent central government from imposing significant developments, such as a new town, on a community without general local support. The Local Development Framework in Winchester is now going to be revised to reflect this change in policy, although it is far too early to assess how the previously agreed policies will be altered.

The second announcement made by the Secretary of State has led to changes to Planning Policy Statement 3, removing private residential gardens from the definition of previously developed ('brownfield') land and removing the 30 dwellings per hectare minimum density limit. Both these changes should give local planning authorities, such as Winchester City Council, more flexibility to retain and enhance the character of an area. It does not prevent back garden or high density development, but just makes it easier to reflect local wishes in the planning process. The Liberal Democrat administration in Winchester has indicated that they do not expect these changes to PPS3 to alter their local planning policy.

Election fever!

After the Dever Society's AGM in March, over 100 people packed Micheldever's Northbrook Hall to question Winchester's main General Election rivals about planning and the countryside.



Chairing the debate, the BBC's Deputy Political Editor James Landale asked each of the candidates to outline their Party's rural development policies. Despite fundamental differences on many issues, all three candidates affirmed their long-standing opposition to major development at Micheldever Station.

Liberal Democrats, said Martin Tod, would devolve planning policy to local communities, whilst the Conservative Steve Brine also supported a radical decentralisation of power. Both candidates argued strongly against the Government's 'top down' approach to housebuilding targets, but Labour's Patrick Davies defended the planning system, arguing that his opponents' proposals would unleash a flood of applications in the transitional period before they came into force.

The Society's president, Khalid Aziz, asked whether the candidates would support a 'three strikes and you're out' approach to address the inherent unfairness of the current system? Steve Brine supported this approach, whilst Patrick Davies explained why a 'three strikes' system couldn't protect the countryside from every development threat.

Moving on to wider issues, the Society's chairman Douglas Paterson raised the question of badgers and bovine tuberculosis. All three candidates admitted that they had little personal knowledge of the issues, but would support a scientific approach to the problem. Steve Brine added that the Tories would introduce badger controls in high-risk areas.

Other questions ranged across topics as diverse as hunting; support for sustainable rural communities; and the impact of British Summer Time.

All to play for

In July the new Coalition Government revoked the South East Plan, the blueprint for development in the south east until 2026, with immediate effect. Tessa Robertson considers the local implications.

From now on, instead of councils in the south east having to provide a certain number of new homes approved by central government, communities will make their own decisions on issues - such as housing - that affect them. Local Development Frameworks (LDFs) will be retained, but more consultation with local communities will be needed about their views on the amount and type of development required.

As a result, Winchester City Council has decided not to finalise the LDF Core Strategy along the timetable originally envisaged, with publication in October this year. Instead, it will carry out additional research and consultation, particularly in relation to local housing requirements. This is likely to result in a 6 - 12 month delay before a draft Core Strategy can be submitted to Government.

The Dever Society is strongly in favour of the views of local communities on housing being sought and taken into account, but is only too aware that a new consultation will provide Zurich/Eagle Star with yet another opportunity to promote its plans for a new town at Micheldever. We will be combating their views in our response to the new consultations.

Delivering your newsletter

With the remorseless rise in the cost of postage, here are two ways that you can help us to save the Society's funds for campaigning.

Our postal costs have risen by 39% since the new charging system was introduced in 2006, costing us an extra £350 a year to deliver your newsletters. The good news is that twice a year, our team of dedicated volunteers hand-deliver the newsletter to almost 1,000 households, saving the Society well over £700 a year in postage and envelopes.

Nevertheless, we currently have vacancies for volunteers in Abbots Worthy, Crawley, Micheldever, Weston Colley, Winchester, Wonston and Woodmancott. The rounds can be tailored in size to suit individual volunteers. If you'd like to help us, please give David Foster a ring on 07958 241738, or e-mail admin@deversociety.org

We know that pounding the streets isn't for everyone, but you can still help us to cut costs by opting to have your newsletter delivered by e-mail. You'll get it when the paper copies leave the printers, and it will be in full colour, too!

We send a short message with a link to the on-line newsletter on our website, so there are no bulky attachments to clog up your system. To join over 520 members who already read their newsletters this way, simply e-mail your request with your postal address (for identification) to David Foster at admin@deversociety.org

Local history walks and talks

The Dever Valley Local History Society is affiliated to the Dever Society, helping us to meet our constitutional aim of celebrating and promoting the area.

The Local History Society arranges about six popular talks a year on aspects of local history in one of the village halls, as well as a visit or two. Talks are at 8pm, entry costs £3, and refreshments are served. The record attendance so far is 93!

The two summer visits were well attended. The first was to Westgate Arch and Museum in Winchester, including the ancient walls and unique views over the city.

The second trip was a double visit to historic Alresford. At River House, the visitors enjoyed a private view of one of England's earliest medieval stone bridges, followed by a guided tour of Old Alresford House and a talk by the owner and local historian Mr Mike Hall.

One of the finest mansion houses and gardens in the area, Old Alresford House has an amazing history. It was the former home of Admiral Lord Rodney, a mentor of Nelson on revolutionary naval tactics and a very 'colourful' character - when the bailiffs arrived at his front door, he rode out the back to escape his creditors!

The Local History Society's indoor season recommences on 20th October in Micheldever's Northbrook Hall, with a talk by Elizabeth Proudman entitled *Round and about the waterways of Hampshire*. Then, on Tuesday 30th November, Peter Finn will talk about *Toll roads and turnpikes in Hampshire* at the Warren Hall, Micheldever Station.

- To join the free mailing list for Local History Society events, please e-mail Hugh Sandars at hugh@sandars.org.uk or ring him on 01962 774220.



13th-century bridge under the B3046 in Alresford
Photo © Pam Lang



Summer season

Once again the Society was out and about meeting local people at village fetes in the Dever Valley.

Starting at East Stratton, the Society's stand was also on duty at Wonston and Micheldever, ending the season on August Bank Holiday at Micheldever Station.

This year marked the first appearance of our rugged new outdoor display panels, designed by Hugh Sandars after the high winds which we experienced last summer. The boards proved their worth on the Lord Rank fields, where once again we battled with a fresh breeze on the afternoon of the fete.

It was good to welcome a steady flow of visitors to our stand at these events. We signed up a total of more than 40 new recruits, boosting the Society's membership to almost 6,200.

The Dever Society, PO Box 508, Winchester, Hampshire SO23 3DQ
tel: 07958 241738 (office hours) ♦ e-mail: admin@deversociety.org ♦ web: www.deversociety.org

President: Khalid Aziz, LVO, DL, FRSA ♦ Chairman: Douglas Paterson
Vice Chairman: Tessa Robertson ♦ Hon Secretary: Charles Hobbs ♦ Hon Treasurer: Phil Dowson
Executive Committee: James Drewer, Hugh Sandars

Registered charity 1003093