

Spring 2013

Issue 10

### CURATE'S EGG

### GOOD IN PARTS

The difficulty of writing a column for our quarterly newsletter is being upto date. Take this copy for example. I am writing this on 11 February and hopefully it will be with you in the next couple of weeks when Michael has received all his copies. I promised Michael that he would have my copy by yesterday and indeed had written it and only paused as I do like to reflect before I sent it to him.

I was idly going through some emails and press releases when I came across one that made me change my mind about the subject on which I had already pontificated and choose one that is of importance to us all as we, hopefully, are involved with our own LDFs

So, hot off the presses, the news that by the time you read this, the much hated regional strategy group will have ceased to exist. It will have been abolished on 22 February. Eric Pickles has finally done what the coalition promised to do some 18 months or so ago.

What does this mean?

It means that top down targets imposed on Local Authorities by government have finally vanished. In his statement, the Community Secretary stated that "people will have more control in shaping and deciding on development in the places where they live."

What does this really mean? From now on, Local Authorities will be able to decide their own housing targets in the LDF and use them to calculate the five year land supply. In theory, this should make it easier to refuse speculative and aggressive planning applications for development of provisional open land and greenbelt.

In future it will be the local plan, produced with the involvement of the local community that will be the keystone of the planning system. This will deliver the homes, jobs, and infrastructure that is needed.

Is this good news?

On the face of it –"Yes it is". Now Local Authorities will not be able to blame government for imposed targets. They will be free to consult with the local community to decide what is best for the people who live in their boundaries.

However let's turn this around a little. The government is still urging Councils to build more houses and faster. They are still there in the back ground offering financial inducements to Local Authorities who welcome new development. For example, under the New House Bonus scheme, a grant will be paid by central government to local councils for increasing the number of homes and their use each year for the next six years with extra money to build affordable homes.

Now in CPRE, we have always recognised that we need more new homes and the need to bring empty homes back into liveable accommodation to house the population. We have attempted to calculate, in the various districts the number that will be required over the period of the LDF. Obviously all such calculations are speculative but are hopefully more realistic than the alleged precision of the Councils. Amongst other techniques, we have looked at the councils record on building houses on their past development of house building, excluding the years since the financial crash, and then projected their likely level of build over the next 15 years. Our figures, along with many other organisations, who have attempted similar exercises, come up with numbers well short of the Government's top down targets.

Also we have looked at land supply and found in most districts plenty of available land to cater for development, particularly over a five year rolling period, without moving into greenfields let alone the greenbelt. We have always maintained that brownfield land should be the first to be built on, in a sequential programme of development followed by provisional open land, green field and greenbelt. We have always urged a five year rolling programme for development.

Now it is more in the hands of Local Authorities. The Secretary of State has said, "By giving people the ability to shape the places in which we live, development happens by consensus not conflict. The abolition of this regional strategy is another step in devolved powers from unelected quangos back to communities and local councils."

Whilst this move is very welcome, if the Minister thinks that it does give power to the people, he is living with the fairies. There is strong evidence that Inspectors, who are appointed by government, are pushing local authorities for more and more housing, demanding they look at the greenbelt for the supply of land. Overall we welcome the government action but lets us think that, on its own, will it save the greenbelt? It won't.

We must be on our guard to challenge each and every proposed incursion into both greenfield and greenbelt. We must bombard Local Authorities with our views that they stick to brownfield land in the five year rolling plans. Don't be put off by statements that imply there is insufficient suitable brownfield land.

I finished my autumn column with the challenge that the phoney war is over and we are starting the real fight. I have not changed my views but at last we know we can concentrate on our local authorities and do everything we can, with the help of like minded organisations, to ensure our precious countryside is protected.

Eric Pickles purports to want to save the greenbelt. Let him show that 'commitment' by calling off his 'dogs of war', the inspectorate, who seem to want to wreck our greenbelt.

John Denham

## **Forming a Neighbourhood Forum**

The Localism Act which became law at the end of last year, allows communities to have a say in their future, by drawing up a "Neighbourhood Plan". This plan can prioritise where and what type of development the community would like to see developed, as well as identifying amenities it wishes to safeguard and the resources, such as more school capacity, that would be required as a result of new developments. The Localism Act identifies Parish or Town Councils as bodies who can draw up a Neighbourhood Plan, but for areas where no such councils exist, it gives less guidance. It states that in such areas, a Neighbourhood Forum may be formed. This must have a constitution, have at least 21 members who live, work or carry out business in the area, and be open to all such people. A Neighbourhood Forum has to be recognised by the local authority, who must be satisfied that the Forum was formed after proper consultation. It will also scrutinise the proposed area to be covered by the Forum, to check that it is consistent with local boundaries and does not overlap another Forum's area.

The villages of Oulton and Woodlesford, which lie to the South East of Leeds, are in the process of setting up a Forum. The pathway we have taken began with an Open Meeting at the end of last year to discuss the Localism Act. This meeting was greatly aided by material from CPRE and served as a warm up for the community to start familiarising them with Neighbourhood Planning. The meeting was well attended and the question and answer session was valuable/ After this, I called two informal meetings of people representing various organisations within the villages, to discuss how best we should go about setting up a Forum. We recognised that it was essential to publicise the first Open Meeting as widely as possible. In the end a flyer was delivered to every dwelling in the area as well as notices being posted widely throughout the villages. A Neighbourhood Plan concerns not only those who live, work or do business in the area, but also those who use the facilities within the area and so the parents of all children attending our two primary schools also received a flyer. We made personal contact with over two thirds of the businesses in the area stressing the importance of their involvement. Meanwhile I have had meetings with those responsible for Neighbourhood Planning in the Leeds City planning department, whose advice has been invaluable. They have stressed the necessity of showing that the Forum is inclusive. It must have membership from all localities within its area as well as all age groups. Record keeping is therefore essential.

The first Open General Meeting of the Oulton and Woodlesford Neighbourhood Forum was held on November 4<sup>th</sup>. It was attended by over 130 people, including a member of the Leeds Planning Department, our local Ward councillors and representatives of nearby Parish Councils (another important consideration is that Neighbourhood Planning should not be carried out in a vacuum, so cross-talk between neighbours is important). Our local MP was unable to attend but sent a strong letter of support. At the meeting there was unanimous support for a motion to establish a Forum, and perhaps surprisingly, there was no difficulty in finding volunteers to serve on the Steering Group. We have recruited a talented team, including a retired lawyer, a retired planner, a retired architect, the local post-mistress, two others who have businesses in the area, one of our local Ward councillors and the Chairman of Governors of one of our local primary schools. This augers well for the future. Our first task is to agree a constitution. I have drafted one based on a number of Forum constitutions available on the web, and it has been looked at by experts both in CPRE and in the Leeds planning office, who have given me helpful feedback. We also need to discuss the precise boundary of the proposed Forum. Here we have to check with our neighbouring localities that our proposed mutual boundaries are acceptable. Another important input is local knowledge. Residents often have strong opinions as to which locality they reside in! Discussion with Leeds is continuing and we hope we will be ready to make a formal request for recognition soon.

Once this is given, the real hard work - drawing up the Neighbourhood Plan - begins. This is for us, an uncharted area, but our Steering Group has much talent within it, so there is every hope that progress can be made. Finance is one question that frequently surfaces. To get to where we are now has involved a lot of work but not much expense. Our only costs have been for printing and for the hire of a local hall. Although expenses are on-going, they have so far only amounted to about £200. Drafting the plan will be more costly, especially if we think it is necessary to pay professional planning consultants. Once our way ahead becomes clearer, we will attempt to identify possible sources of funding, but we are not naïve, we know this is the difficult bit!

David Cove

*Chairman, Oulton and Woodlesford Neighbourhood Forum.  
Trustee, West Yorkshire area, CPRE.*

## **Around the Districts**

### **Southern District**

We are pestered by wind turbines. What's new in that? Well the emphasis seems to have changed. Where we used to have applications for windfarms, and indeed, we are fighting one of those in the upper Dearne valley, which will overwhelm the village of Birds Edge, there now are countless smaller single turbine applications, which seem to be growing taller. The problem is that if one is passed, another nearby will be applied for, and another across the way, until there is almost a windfarm. All busy ruining the views and landscape.

Also of concern, and as feared, there is another application for a pub on Castle Hill. All have sent in letters of objection and we keep our fingers crossed that the Council will see fit to refuse it yet again.

Last summer we had several outings and interesting jaunts for the wider membership to join in and enjoy. Almost without exception nobody turned up at any of them and we are wondering why. Is it that they did not appeal to people despite a variety of topics? Are we choosing the wrong sorts of things? If so, what kind of outing would you like us to organise. We try to spread the venues around West Yorkshire realising that we are quite a widespread branch, but still nobody comes. Frankly it is very disheartening when, having arranged, what we think might be a nice thing to do, no one bothers to come. So please, some feedback from you would be nice. Let me know if you would like us to organise events this coming spring and summer. I list below some thoughts of what we might do, because unless we can be sure of some support we won't bother to fix anything. Perhaps you have ideas of your own, let me know and we will happily look at them. My email and phone are listed below. We would love to have your input.

Susan Carter

[\\_susanmcarter@aol.com\\_](mailto:susanmcarter@aol.com) (<mailto:susanmcarter@aol.com>) 01484 847439.

### **Northern District**

The recent reconfiguration of the CPRE's West Yorkshire Branch, divided responsibilities between Southern and Northern Districts. The North District comprises the Bradford, Leeds and Wakefield M.D.Cs.' areas. We now have representatives of all three districts on our North sub-committee (but that does not mean we would not welcome more volunteers!). We have

begun to meet bi-monthly and intend to bring a sharper focus on developments and policies in the region. Meanwhile we can report the following:.

**Newmarket Lane, Wakefield.** In February 2010, a planning application was submitted to Wakefield M.D.C. to build a stadium and a commercial development at Newmarket Lane in Stanley. This involved the loss of over 214 acres of Green Belt land. CPRE objected to this loss of Green Belt (as did Leeds M.D.C.), however the Secretary of State finally gave his approval to the scheme in December 2012. Wakefield's Local Development Framework now includes a freight and distribution centre on the same site. We very much regret these decisions and will do our best to prevent them being used as a precedent for further encroachment of the Green Belt.

**High Speed Rail Route.** The proposed route for the High Speed rail line between Birmingham and Leeds (with a spur to York) has recently been published. The proposed route enters West Yorkshire to the South East of Wakefield and continues north. The route to Leeds bends to the west just south of Woodlesford to enter Leeds along the existing Selby line. The spur to York continues north skirting Swillington. Although we may have strong opinions as to whether the line is necessary, we believe that such discussion is best left to CPRE's HQ. However we believe that there are modifications to the route which would reduce the impact on the environment and it is important that we consider these. The proposed route crosses or comes near to a series of wild-life sites to the East of Wakefield. In addition, the world's first Nature Reserve, Charles Waterton's Waterton Park, will be adversely affected. It is also likely that the construction of the present proposed route, will require the Winterset and Cold Hiendley reservoirs to be drained, which in turn will affect Anglers Lake, an extremely important site for birds. We will be supporting local groups in their campaign to reduce impact and hope to be able to suggest a modification of the route to avoid these sensitive areas. The construction phase will be much more disruptive than the completed line itself, and so we will be seeking to ensure that minimal damage to the environment occurs during construction. The choice of site access points is also be important and the use of small rural roads by construction traffic must be avoided.

**Local Plans.** A Core Strategy is at the heart of a Local Plan. Of our three M.D.Cs., Wakefield is the most advanced in preparing its Local Plan, its Core Strategy having been adopted in April 2009. Neither Bradford nor Leeds Core Strategies have yet been finalised and we have submitted comments on the earlier drafts. The emphasis in the Leeds' Core Strategy on local inputs by way of Neighbourhood Plans is to be welcomed as these allow local communities to have a more direct say in their future, than has been possible in the past.

**Open Cast Mining.** An application has been submitted to open cast mine for coal and fireclay at Sharlston to the east of Wakefield. We are in the process of assessing the impact of proposal, which will involve a site area of 138 hectares, most of which is at present, farm land. Coal will be transported from the site by rail, but fireclay will be removed by lorry. We are seeking to ensure that if this scheme is to go ahead, there will be minimal environmental damage and that re-instatement is achieved sensitively and promptly.

**Wind Generators.** Although there are few wind generators within the North District, there are a number of applications to build large turbines in North Yorkshire adjacent to the West Yorkshire boundary. We shall liaise with CPREs' North Yorkshire Branch to ensure that they are aware of our concerns.

David Cove

## Our New Planning Officer

Last year the Executive Committee advertised for a Part-time Planning Officer to support the work of the Branch. We had a few applicants and finally we chose Joe Varga who started in November last year and works two days a week. I asked Joe if he could give us a report on what he has accomplished in his first three months and here is his report.

Welcome on board Joe

(Michael Church Editor)

Hello. My name is Joe Varga, and I'm delighted to be working as a part-time Planning Officer for the CPRE West Yorkshire. Like you, I recognise the importance and unique beauty of the countryside in our predominantly urban county, and I want to help ensure its protection for future generations. In fact the quality of life offered by living close to attractive, accessible countryside is the main reason I returned to West Yorkshire, a decade or so ago, after living away for several years.

Planning has a major role to play in our work. Effective planning can, for example, check urban sprawl, protect the beauty and tranquillity of the countryside, and safeguard habitats for wildlife. Unfortunately, however, these outcomes don't always happen automatically, which is why it's important that CPRE get involved in planning, and contribute effectively to both the production of plans and the assessment of individual applications. As Planning Officer I'm here to help and advise our district groups in these efforts.

Since taking up the post, I've produced a report on the progress of West Yorkshire Councils in preparing their Local Plans (or Local Development Frameworks- LDFs), the documents that will guide development in each district over the next 15 years. The report lists the plans that each Council is producing, identifies each plan's current stage of production, and highlights when public consultations will take place in 2013. It shows that the first half of the year will be a busy time with consultations planned in three out of five districts and a possible Independent Examination in another.

In Spring 2012, Leeds City Council carried out consultation on the 'Publication Draft' of their Core Strategy (in normal language- the version they intend to submit for an Independent Examination). Following this, in recent weeks, the Council consulted on 'Pre-submission Changes' to the document. Taken as a whole, the document's changed little from the one we commented on in 2012 and, unfortunately, most of our suggested changes have not been made. Nevertheless our original comments will still go forward to the Examination. We did, however, have one success; and, as a result, the requirement for continued landscape protection has been made much clearer.

CPRE Yorkshire and Humber are beginning work on a regional campaign to draw attention to the negative landscape impacts of wind turbines. As part of this, they hope to identify how many existing turbines there are in the region. If we choose to take part, this will probably involve looking through lists of historical planning applications. This is a big job for a county like ours and something I possibly won't have time to do unaided. If anyone feels strongly about this issue and wants to help, then please get in touch through your branch. In the coming weeks I'll also be working on at least one objection to a proposed open cast mine.

Thanks for reading. I look forward to providing many more updates in the future.

Joe Varga

## Situations Vacant

We have two vacancies in the branch one old and the other new which we hope some of you will be tempted to come forward to fill.

### **Minutes Secretary to the Executive Committee**

Until recently Rosemary Hollins has been our Minute Secretary. She did the job for several years and due to personal reasons has stood down. We would like to thank Rosemary for the work she did on the Executive Committee and the excellent timely minutes that she took.

We now urgently need a replacement for Rosemary. This is an opportunity to get more involved with the branch. Duties are to prepare the Agenda, take the minutes of the executive meetings and the Annual General Meeting, agree them with the Chairman and send them out to members of the committee.

The Executive Committee meets six times a year for the winter months the meetings are at the Three Nuns Pub in Mirfield from 1:00pm to around 3:00pm. In the summer we vary the venue and meet in the evenings starting at 7:00pm and ending around 9:00pm.

We need somebody that has PC experience and internet access.

If you are interested please contact:

Michael Church on email [church\\_mj@yahoo.com](mailto:church_mj@yahoo.com) telephone 01924 462811 or Mobile 0777 607 7289

or

Charles Tunbridge email [charlestunbridge@btinternet.com](mailto:charlestunbridge@btinternet.com)

### **Webmaster**

The Executive Committee has decided to move into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and as our first move we are looking to set up our own website. We have received a template from national office with full instructions.

Having the tools we now need somebody with some IT experience and internet access to take the project forward.

If you are interested please contact Michael Church on email [church\\_mj@yahoo.com](mailto:church_mj@yahoo.com) telephone 01924 462811 or Mobile 0777 607 7289

## News from the Executive Committee

### Some Suggestions for Social Events

- The regeneration of the Wentworth Castle gardens
- Middleton Railway and Park reclamation, Leeds.
- The wildflower meadows near Garforth.
- East Riddlesden Hall, Keighley
- Ogden Water walk Halifax
- Salts Mill and Shipley Glen.
- The Hepworth Gallery Wakefield

Please let me know if there are any further ideas that you might have. Send an email to [church\\_mj@yahoo.com](mailto:church_mj@yahoo.com) or write to me at 58 Alexandra Crescent, Birkdale Road, Dewsbury, WF13 4HL.

We will be publishing our 2013 – 14 social program in the next issue

Michael Church – Editor

## Dates for your diary

### Executive Meeting

- 14<sup>th</sup> March 2013 1:00pm – Three Nuns Pub, Mirfield

#### **Proposed dates to be agreed at the March meeting**

- 16<sup>th</sup> May 2013 1:00pm – Three Nuns Pub, Mirfield
- 18<sup>th</sup> July 2013 7:00pm – Venue TBA
- 20<sup>th</sup> September 2013 7:00pm – Venue TBA
- 21<sup>st</sup> November 1:00pm – Three Nuns Pub, Mirfield