

Newsletter**Autumn 2012****Issue 9****Chamberlain Lives On**

In my article for the Summer News Letter I gave modified praise for the new planning document the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Whilst not all we would have wished is in it, it is significantly better than we had feared. It was published in late April. I gave a resume of its contents in my last article.

However move on several months. Remember Chamberlain coming back from Munich waving a piece of paper proclaiming peace in our time. Well I don't remember it either as I was just a twinkle in my father's eye at the time. But it has reminded me that the planning peace is over. The battle is about to begin.

Let's continue the analogy for a little longer. A couple of years after Chamberlain's epic journey war broke out and for nine months it was classed as a phoney war with the combatants facing each other across the Maginot Line. The German Army swept all before it. France was overwhelmed and Dunkirk saved the British Army in May 1940. That really started the major conflict. I am not about to give you a continual history lesson but as I was reflecting on the Planning legislation I could not help but feel there was a similarity in what is happening now. Of course the scale is ludicrous but I feel there is a battle looming for the very heart of the countryside and particularly the greenbelt that surrounds the towns and cities of West Yorkshire

The Minister of Planning in April, who published the new planning document, was, of course, not Chamberlain but Greg Clark MP, who had actually listened to the barrage of criticism on his green paper some nine months before. On the face of it, the greenbelt is to be protected. There is a whole chapter defining its purpose and demanding that local authorities "should plan positively to enhance its use". As I wrote last summer, there were some worrying bits giving local authorities the role of guarding the boundaries.

What has happened since? Well we are now officially in a double depth recession as growth has failed to materialise. Government is under attack and advocates are urging for a major boost to build new houses, new roads, and even new railways. And I have not mentioned airports in and around London

The analogy continues. Chamberlain was sacked to make way for Winston Churchill. Greg Clark has been replaced as Minister by Mark Prisk, who has been warmly welcomed by the Home Builders Federation. "He understands the problems facing the industry" said the Chairman. However as a back bencher, before becoming a Minister, Prisk strongly opposed building on the greenbelt in his constituency - but don't all MP's!

Government ministers, including the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, are now urging a major build in infrastructure including looking at the countryside and

greenbelt. Developers are coming out of their closets with plans that potentially will devastate the greenbelt. Nor can we rely on Inspectors to be impartial. (After all they are appointed by Government). We have the example in Wakefield of a proposed development of the greenbelt to provide a home for the professional rugby league team and including hotels, shops, and restaurants. It was called in and the Inspector has given it the green light.

We know that there are sufficient planning agreements in place for house building to last for the next four to five years on existing brownfield sites and land that has been allocated for housing in UDP's etcetera. Yet house building is at an all time low. However, it has not stopped developers seeking planning permission in every part of West Yorkshire on new sites in the greenbelt. The latest I have heard of this week is such a development in Howarth.

To continue the analogy, there is no doubt that we have a major battle on our hands in each local authority area over the future of the greenbelt despite all the fine words in the NPPF. It is likely to get worse. According to press speculation, the Autumn Statement from the Chancellor may well give further greenlight to development in the countryside and in the green belt.

CPRE nationally and CPRE West Yorkshire will continue to fight for the countryside but we do need help. Our resources are extremely limited. We need help from CPRE members. Please contact our team if you think you can help. We are a friendly bunch. You do not need specialist knowledge. We have all learned as we have gone along. Our countryside is potentially under serious threat. Many localities are forming their own pressure groups to fight development and we welcome that and will help wherever we have the resource.

The planning document is still the one in place and the rest at the moment is still gossip in the press and a lot of hot air. Nevertheless it is extremely worrying. Only this week the Chancellor was talking of "improving planning legislation to speed up the process".

So we have a fight on our hands if we are going to save the greenbelt in West Yorkshire. Let the battle be joined!

John Denham

Civic Voice responds to latest planning reforms

Civic Voice – the national organisation for the civic movement - today responded to the Government's planning proposals published last week.

Paula Ridley, Chair said "For the past four days the country has been able to enjoy visits to properties and places not normally available to be seen. One million people use Heritage Open Days to learn more about the places where they live. We are concerned that after an extensive debate and a thorough review of the planning system over the past year, leading to the introduction of the new National Planning Policy Framework, the Government has chosen to make further changes on an ad-hoc basis to the system which may well result in damaging not just the green belt, but other places and settings of our most attractive buildings, ancient and modern. We welcome the increased investment in housing and infrastructure and we recognise the need to get the economy moving, but we think that short-term measures to rush proposals through the planning system will be counter-productive".

Since its formation in 2010, Civic Voice has been campaigning for a fairer planning system that balances economic, environmental and social issues more equally in order for communities to be able to secure the development that meets their needs. Civic Voice reject the notion that good planning is a brake on the economy. On the contrary the best designed places are also the most economically successful. The barrier to house building arises from borrowing restrictions and economic uncertainty, not planning. Investors need certainty and introducing uncertainty through sudden changes to planning has negative consequences.

Civic Voice's primary concern is for "everyday England" – the local neighbourhoods, buildings, town centres and views of daily life for the vast majority of people. Their interest in this is proved time and again in their interest and involvement not just in Heritage Open Days, but in the places where they live. The moratorium on planning consent on extensions will be of little economic gain but has the potential to create conflicts between neighbours and destroy any notion of the Big Society.

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Around the Districts

Southern District

Kirklees (as was) summer report.

Summer is necessarily a quiet time as many are on holiday as well as some events being cancelled due to the weather. The only event not to suffer was a trip to the Yorkshire Sculpture Park recently where Cyril Pearce showed what was being done in the wildlife area of the park as well as the sculptures. Sadly the event was very poorly attended, only 4 people turned up.

This was very disappointing as it was a most interesting tour. A wine and Cheese evening at the home of David Cove in Oulton was also very poorly attended, a pity as it was a very splendid party

To our horror Kirklees planning committee passed, by one vote, the re-applied application for the cemetery on Stirley Hill. We feel this is a very retrograde step as this is not a suitable site for a cemetery. We can only hope that sense will prevail when the re-application for a pub on nearby Castle hill comes up for consideration by the same committee, and that it is refused.

There is also deep concern about the Newmarket site on the Wakefield/ Leeds border, where all sorts of industrial, housing and various other developments are to be built under the disguise of a sports stadium for Wakefield. Wakefield passed the proposal against the wishes of Leeds and almost everyone else. As many acres of sensitive green belt are involved we can only hope that there is still time to overturn the decision.

The people of Howarth are furious about a proposal, not yet applied for, for a huge amount of housing, flats etc. threatening the only bit of greenfield in the centre of the village. We remain vigilant.

The residents of the Holme Valley are worried that Tesco are planning a supermarket on one of two possible sites in the Valley. They feel that the two, soon to be three, supermarkets in the area are quite enough.

Finally the new proposals by the government to relax the planning regulations were a hammer blow. We need to be extra vigilant and to be ready to help. To do this we need your help as the few of us who are doing our best to battle with these problems are already over stretched. Please come to meetings and help whenever you can.

The next Kirklees/West Yorks South is at John Denham's house. Ogley, Lumb Lane, Almondbury HD4 6TA. 2-00 Wed 28th September.

Susan Carter

Northern District

The inaugural meeting of the Northern District is on 31st October in Oulton. There is a lot of work to do and as the old Chinese saying goes, "Many hands make Light Work". If you are interested in getting involved please contact David Cove Tel No. 0113 282 4499 email d.j.cove@leeds.ac.uk or David Cooke 01937 573377 cookedl@tiscali.co.uk for details.

News from the Executive Committee

- We are pleased to announce that Jo Varga is joining us in October as our Branch Planning Officer. Jo will be working on various projects in both districts during his first few months in order to familiarise himself with the branch area.

On behalf of the Executive Committee I would like to welcome Jo to the Branch.

- Look out in the New Year on the internet when we will be launching our own Branch Website, details will be published in the next newsletter.

Dates for your diary

Executive Meeting

- 8th November 1:00pm – Three Nuns Pub, Mirfield
- 17th January 2013 1:00pm – Three Nuns Pub, Mirfield
- 14th March 2013 1:00pm – Three Nuns Pub, Mirfield