

Concreting the Countryside

Teachers' notes: This lesson focuses on the proposal for an Eco Town at Rackheath, Norfolk.

Lesson2: Where should the concrete go? Balloon Debate

East Anglia should take an increased share of the housing and growth burden

"It's a debate about how we can support a growing economy and changing society. It's a debate about what our communities will look like in ten, twenty, fifty years. It's a debate about the kind of places we want our children to be living in, and the kind of places we want to grow old in."

The Rt Hon Caroline Flint MP Minister of State Minister for Housing (January – October 2008)

This exercise is about possible solutions to the UK housing problem and the potential role to be played by Eco Towns like Rackheath, Norfolk.

There are several solutions to the housing problem, but the most serious debate revolves around how the countryside is perceived and treated in the context of providing adequate housing. The UK has a projected shortfall of 3 million homes over the next 11 years and there is a crisis as to where these new homes are to be built.

Some solutions are better than others and in this exercise a number of people have to argue their case to stay in a hypothetical hot air balloon. The balloon is losing height and the only way it can stay airborne is to lose some of the passengers. The people with the weakest argument are voted out and those with the strongest arguments are safe.

Balloon Debate instructions:

- The members of the teaching group need to be divided into speakers and the audience.
- Speakers can be individuals, or pairs depending on class size.
- There need to be 5 speakers in total representing 5 of the 6 viewpoints - viewpoints are listed below – and each speaker is allocated the role and the viewpoints which they have to defend.
- Speakers will have time to familiarise themselves with the arguments before the debate begins.
- The debate begins and Speakers have just 2 minutes to justify their case (10mins in total)
- After each viewpoint has been heard it is time for the audience (class members not speaking) to vote. One viewpoint is then ejected from the balloon.
- The remaining speakers are then cross-questioned by the audience in 3-5 minute rounds.
- After each round another viewpoint has to be voted out/ejected.
- The viewpoint with the strongest argument/most persuasive content becomes the last person/pair aboard and their view is the one accepted by the teaching group.

Plenary/Follow-up

Each person needs to produce the following:

1. A short overview of the individual arguments given in the first round
2. A ranked list of the arguments based on the order people were ejected
3. An outline of the weaknesses in each argument/ reasons for ejection
4. What they think about the final solution
5. How they might appeal against the final solution

The Viewpoints – any 5 of the following can be used to make a decent debate. More than 5 can lead to repetition and difficulties with lesson time management.

(See separate document: Balloon Debate prompt Sheets)

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| <p>Local Councillor’s Views incorporating points made by Sir Peter Hall <i>The Countryside is over rated and need not be preserved- there is a need to add concrete to the countryside if future generations are to acquire ‘liveable communities’.</i></p> |
| <p>Local Resident’s Views incorporating points made by Martin Crookston and Sir Peter Hall <i>There is no need to sacrifice green field sites when so much urban land still exists. Urban Infill and Previously Developed Land hold the answers</i></p> |
| <p>Representative for the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England <i>The Green Belt must not be sacrificed – it’s under too much pressure already</i></p> |
| <p>Representative for the company wanting to develop Rackheath Eco Town <i>The government agenda for growth in the Eastern region requires around 35,000 new homes to be built in and around Norwich. EcoTowns like Rackheath help to solve the housing problem</i></p> |
| <p>Representative from the Growth Corridors Initiative <i>The Thames Gateway goes a long way in fulfilling the needs of the population in the South Eastern area of Britain and can be developed along sustainable lines.</i></p> |
| <p>Representative for The Sustainable Communities Initiatives Based on ideas presented by Wayne Hemigway (member of the government Eco Towns Advisory Panel) <i>Eco Towns are not the panacea to Britain’s housing problems</i></p> |

Lesson Structure and timing guidelines:

- 10 minutes Selected sound bites for start of lesson to give some basis for the views.
- 7-10 minutes Give people to construct basic argument
- 10 minutes first round of views
- Vote leaves 4
- 3 mins cross questions
- Vote leaves 3
- 3 mins cross questions **PLUS** add [video tour of Staiths, Gateshead](#) from Wayne Hemingway ;
- Vote leaves 2
- 3 mins cross questions
- Vote leaves 1
- Winner

Introductory briefing/Background (this is available on the **Fact Sheet**)

East Anglia should take an increased share of the housing and growth burden: Avoiding a Concrete Corridor

In June 2008 The National Housing and Planning Advice Unit (NHPAU) advised the Government that between 2.96 and 3.48 million new homes may need to be built by 2020 in order for property to become more affordable. NHPAU believed that the greatest number of new homes would be needed in the South East. They suggested the following regional expansions by 2020:

- South East - between 486,200 and 622,500
- London - between 428,500 and 529,100
- East Anglia - up to 486,300
- The North East - between 87,800 and 97,300
- West Midlands - up to 283,700

The Government has previously set a target for three million new homes to be built by 2020.

These figures corresponded with earlier predictions of 478,000 for the East of England announced in 2005 that brought about outcries from the County Councils concerned. Hertfordshire and Essex were expected to take the brunt of this expansion with the M1, A1, M11 and A12 corridors absorbing most of the new housing. By 2006 the figures for the East of England had been revised upwards to 505,000 with 58,000 earmarked for Suffolk and 123,000 for Essex.

In January 2009 The East of England Regional assembly published revised estimates over and above those of June 2008. The East of England will have to accommodate an extra 508,000. Members of the assembly claim - "The impact of the development now proposed in the East of England and the lack of planned improvements to the transport infrastructure are likely to result in unacceptable conditions on the road

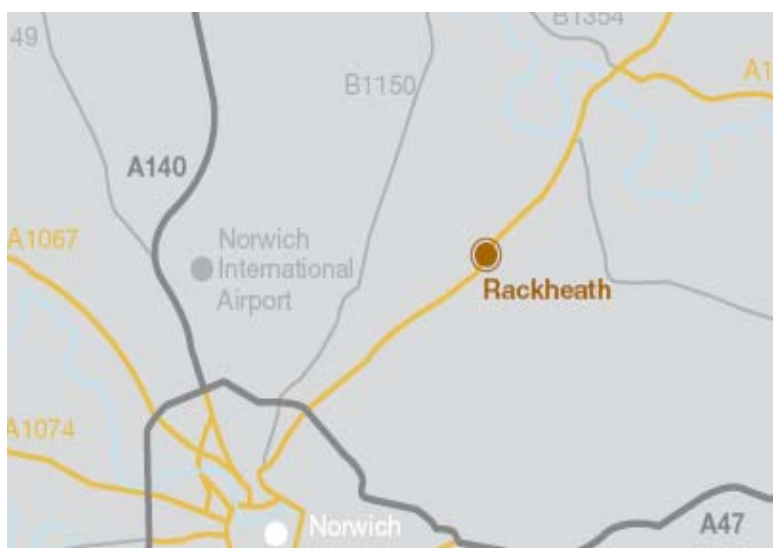
and rail network towards the end of the plan period, seriously hindering the movement of people and goods and holding back the economic development of the region.”

Three East Anglian towns are to be redefined as ‘Key Centres’ for housing growth – Colchester (20,000) Ipswich (15,400) and Bury St Edmunds (8,000)

In addition to these proposals have been the announcements on two major schemes:

- **Eco Towns Initiative** – with proposed sites in the East of England with Norfolk’s Rackheath the most favoured location [see web page](#)
- **Growth Corridors** – of which the Thames Gateway affects the Easter region [see web page](#)

RACKHEATH ECO-TOWN? (Accompanied by Rackheath PowerPoint)



LOCATION

5 MILES FROM Norwich city centre with good road and rail links in place.
Close to Rackheath and Broadland Business parks, on the edge of Norwich, providing employment opportunities.
Close to UEA Climatic Research Centre and well placed to collaborate with the university meaning that Rackheath has a realistic opportunity to become a benchmark scheme for future residential Eco-Communities.
Also located in an area rich in natural building resources so reduces need for transporting aggregates
Natural heath lands can be fully restored to complement the development.
Next to a disused/derelict airfield.

The aim is produce a vibrant community that draws on Norfolk’s heritage whilst meeting the standards of sustainable living. By reducing dependency on the car it will promote low carbon living and enable people to get around on foot, cycles and public transport. By making use of local materials the site will blend in with the surrounding landscape.

The needs of the area are being served because there is a definite housing shortage.

Reports from Shelter UK show:

- There is a housing shortage throughout the UK, including Norfolk. The government has earmarked 35,000 new homes for the Norwich area of which 6,000-10,000 are in the north east sector, which includes Rackheath.
- In March 2007, there were approximately 12,260 households on local housing waiting lists
- The number of affordable homes is nowhere near local need.
- House prices have risen far more quickly than earnings in Greater Norwich, in 2007, an average-priced home in Broadland District cost almost nine times average earnings. Although house prices are falling, mortgages are harder to secure and more expensive, and the situation has not improved.

- The proposed eco-community in Rackheath would provide around 3,400 homes, of which between 30 and 40 per cent (or 1,020–1,360 homes) would be affordable, including social rented homes and properties for low-cost home ownership.
- The number of households in Greater Norwich has been growing steadily, mainly due to an increase in life expectancy, people choosing to live alone, smaller family sizes, and in-migration.
- Greater Norwich has been declared a growth point by the Government, and the East of England Plan requires at least 37,500 homes from 2001–2021. Around 42,000 additional homes may be required or 2,100 new homes per year. 75% of these homes should be located centrally in the city plus the first ring of villages around it as well – this area includes Rackheath, therefore, the eco-community would help achieve this target.
- The Housing Market Assessment 2006/07 estimated that, of all new homes provided to meet growth over the next five years, approximately 43 per cent should be affordable.