

## **BALLOON DEBATE PROMPT SHEET/ 1**

### **Local Councillor's Views incorporating points made by Sir Peter Hall**

*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'.*

#### **Sir Peter Hall's comments:**

#### **Should all farmland be preserved?**

The view that all farmland should be preserved rests on the belief that all rural land is needed and should not be sacrificed. But what is the land used for? Only 49% of our food is grown in the UK.

The facts might be surprising – very little of the UK's land is actually developed anyway. No more than 14% (10% in 1988) of the land area is developed (19% of England) and that amounts to only 1 in 5 hectares. What is more, significant amounts of farmland are not currently productive, suggesting that land is idle – 5% of England's farmland; 8.5% in the South East and up to 11% elsewhere. The point is made that instead of growing weeds we might consider planting houses and that much of the controversy exists in areas where most farmland is being wasted.

#### **Furthermore he pointed out that:**

Surveys consistently show that people do not like living in high density city areas. (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment and MORI). It appears that people from all backgrounds seem to have the same 'dream homes' and children regularly aspire to acquire detached homes.

Successful examples of urban extensions exist already – The Hampstons (Peterborough old brick fields) Upton (Northampton) and Ingress Park (Thames Gateway) all display well developed transit systems. These are suitable ways of providing the types of homes people want.

#### **Local Facts relating to Rackheath proposed EcoTown**

- Norwich has limited space available for new homes
- Rackheath has good public transport links to Norwich
- The designated area is not on a floodplain
- Being in the rural urban fringe it is close to jobs, services and leisure opportunities
- Some of the land is disused industrial and derelict airfield

In July 2006, Kate Barker (Economic advisor to the Government) reckoned that farmland was worth, on average, £10,000 per hectare, compared with £2.6m per hectare for housing land. It already happens that some landowners in the green belt deliberately leave their land looking as ugly as possible, in the hope that no one will object to it being developed. (The Independent 5 Dec 2006)

## BALLOON DEBATE PROMPT SHEET/ 2

### Local Resident's Views incorporating points made by Martin Crookston and Sir Peter Hall

*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*

#### Martin Crookston's comments:

##### Can urban areas provide the space?

New urban housing can occur on several relatively unused sites in city centres:

- Redevelop old housing sites
- Develop small open spaces
- Develop vacant plots that have not been allocated for any specific purpose in the past
- office conversions to homes and sub-divisions of larger houses and refurbishment of empty stock
- The Environment Agency estimates that there are 66,000 hectares (255sq miles) of available brownfield land available for development (an area as large as the entire west Midlands conurbation.)

A policy shift has encouraged these movements and led to the *renaissance of urban areas*. The promotion of inner town retail developments and a tightening of out of town permissions has helped.

Several reports have investigated how quality and quantity issues could be resolved and where the new homes should go. (Campaign to Protect Rural England) 'Untapped Potential' and 'Sustainable Residential Quality' revealed that Leeds had developed 90% on brownfield sites and Waveny on small site developments. These show how local policies and actions make a difference with greater intensity and improved relationships between people and their living space.

#### Are High Densities a Problem?

Not if you can afford them! When flats have been developed as investments and values exceed local affordability then a problem exists, but not because of the density. Investment distorts the picture and turn houses into units rather than homes. By 2008 very many of the new 2 bedroom apartments are standing empty as they have not been bought as homes. Swathes of central Leeds, Birmingham Hull and London areas contain empty flats- 40% in Manchester alone. The '**Buy-to-Let Syndrome**', where builders, developers and the financial institutions have encouraged speculative purchasers who 'buy and leave'.

Urban infill by 'grabbing the gardens' is producing densities of 30-40 units per hectare.

There is ample new brown land coming onto the market and in the future as industries retreat to other countries, as global shifts continue and technology changes old industrial sites will become available.

#### Local Facts relating to Rackheath proposed EcoTown

- Can not be free standing, with own facilities and well linked to nearby town
- Old airfields that have become available – rural brownfield sites.
- Sustainable issue seen as *in thing* – a sort of 'ECO BLING' – green credentials undermined by need to drive to them!
- Small scale counts against sustainability, too small to make any impact
- Nice idea in wrong place.

## BALLOON DEBATE PROMPT SHEET/ 3

### Representative for the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England

#### *The Green Belt must not be sacrificed – it's under too much pressure already*

- Green belt land protects the countryside from urban sprawl
- Prevents towns from merging with each other
- Protects rural setting of historic towns and cities
- Encourages the regeneration of brownfield sites within towns and cities
- 13% of England's land is Green Belt
- 4 square miles of Green Belt land is being lost each year (1997-2003 CPRE)
- Could be used to produce more food and provides land for leisure, exercise, flood mitigation and carbon storage

**Reference to the article from the daily telegraph 27<sup>th</sup> October 2008 Britain's environmental heritage at risk** -Eco-towns will eat into green belt land. Environmental standards within eco-towns, while higher than elsewhere, will be "nothing like high enough" (Tom Oliver, head of rural policy at CPRE) Colleague Kate Gordon, the CPRE's senior planner, also questioned why such standards were not being applied across the board. Ministers want to build three million homes by 2020, she said, but only around five per cent of those will be in eco-towns. She also queried the Government's insistence on eco-towns containing a minimum of 5,000 homes: "The Government is saying, 'They must be more than 5,000 homes because they won't attract the innovation below that'. But that's rubbish," she said.

#### Reference to local public opinion

- **Stewart Lindsey**, local resident, as featured in a recent [BBC Politics Show programme](#) "We do not need or want these numbers. The local authorities would be better off spending our money on developments of inner city, unoccupied or unused, derelict or second home properties in and around Norfolk and Norwich. They should also concentrate on brown field sites, rather than green field sites which should be for food and farming. This would not only ease our proposed local housing shortages for our future generations but by virtue of their locations, would lend themselves perfectly to real Eco developments... our once green and pleasant land is being turned into urban sprawls where commuters shut their front door in the morning and return to shut their front doors on their community at night."
- **Local store holders and Parish Councillors**, as featured in a recent BBC Politics Show programme are worried by scale of expansion from 800 to 5000 homes in Rackheath. Also concerned at lack of democratic consultation at a local scale. Question the view that there is a local need for so many new homes.
- **Green party Councillor** shows fears over labelling ECO town when little evidence of real sustainable strategies being employed. Sees Rackheath as tokenistic and that people will still need cars to get to work.

**Ben Fogle**, a national celebrity adds – "I like to think of myself as a good "green" citizen. I try to do my bit for the environment. I cycle and recycle, support eco-friendly initiatives, offset carbon emissions for my travel. However, like many others I have been woken from my apolitical slumber and galvanized into action. The reason is that the eco-town plans are nothing more than a con wrapped in green paper.

## **BALLOON DEBATE PROMPT SHEET/ 4**

### **Representative for the company wanting to develop Rackheath Eco Town**

*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*

### **Reference to comments made by Paul Knowles the Chairman of Building Partnerships**

#### **Why build an Eco-Community at Rackheath?**

- 25,500 new homes are expected by 2026 and the Greater Norwich Development Partnership (GNDP) earmarks 6,000-10,000 for the Rackheath area – it's going to grow anyway.
- The population appears supportive of the need to 'think green' by responding to the effects of climate change in a way that protects the environment.
- The proposed scheme will minimise the production of carbon in the development and its operation.
- Improved public transport is key to adopting a greener lifestyle; we need to encourage people to use cars less. Accordingly, the new community will include an efficient public transport network, featuring regular train or tram services into Norwich, frequent buses and integrated cycle routes.
- Rackheath will be self-sufficient, incorporating an on-site energy centre provided by a Combined Heat and Power plant fuelled by biomass (wood chip), capable of generating enough energy and heat for all the homes and buildings in the community.
- The plant will be much the same way as the groundbreaking facility currently being built at the University of East Anglia. The UEA is recognised as a world leading authority in the study of climate change and carbon reduction and is working closely with the Rackheath project.
- Rackheath Eco-Community will be a pioneering scheme, setting the standard for the rest of the UK to follow, something the people of Norfolk will rightly be proud of.

(Extracted from BBC The Politics Show 15/02/2009)

#### **Key points about Eco-Towns**

They will help create more affordable housing

They will help create more sustainable living for

Eco-towns could help to regenerate nearby areas

Eco-towns could create an example in energy-efficiency that would set an example to the rest of the country

The Government Communities Minister states:

“Eco-Towns are an exciting opportunity to provide affordable homes in pleasant environments. They will contain green spaces and provide communities for young families to live and work. It is all about providing quality not quantity and Rackheath is grade A site.” Feb 2009 BBC The Politics Show

## **BALLOON DEBATE PROMPT SHEET/ 5**

### **Growth Corridors can solve most of the problems**

*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.*

### **Using brownfield sites on the edges of London**

#### **Reference Sir Peter Halls' views:**

"There is 'nothing to be gained from overcrowding'"

The Urban Taskforce 1998 set out to push up the proportion of previously used urban land from 56% to 60% and by 2005 the quotient had reached 77%. In this period housing densities had increased from below 25 per hectare, through the recommended minimum of 30 to a norm of 40 per hectare. Developers see their financial gains diminish when building densities exceed 40/50 units per hectare because they then have to provide fixed infrastructural assets in the shape of schools and shops. Below 30ph a bonus culture exists and the cost of providing for people's needs is less. It is estimated that to have a decent public bus service a density of 30 units is required and for a tram service 60 units.

### **The MegaCity Region**

An area extending for 100 miles out from central London is called the MegaCity region. This is where most demand exists for new housing and it is an area of well connected towns and cities. Many beyond 45 miles of central London are self-contained can be seen as urban areas 'set against a background of open country'. Around 75% of the population of this area live and work within the region and would benefit from enhanced transit systems enabling them to live out the visions of the Garden Cities movement – 'social cities, compact, surrounded by the countryside and connected by high quality public transport.

#### **Other valuable points:**

- The Campaign to Protect Rural England, showed great interest in the idea of building on the Brownfield sites in the Thames Gateway as there would be less pressure on the rest of the country and the necessary houses get built.
- According to Sir Peter Hall's speech, 8.5% of farmland in the South of England is unproductive and this means there is no reason why it should not be built on.
- The support for the environmental initiative is quite large as these houses would have to be built at any rate.
- This means we do not have to build flats which people do not want anymore, to protect the countryside
- Jobs, roads, schools, and other facilities for the families living there and Less commuting needed, as the proposed towns do not require long-distance commutes to London.
- Provides 160,000 new carbon neutral, affordable homes; 80% on brownfield sites
- Does not harm the greenbelt

## **BALLOON DEBATE PROMPT SHEET/ 6**

### **Representative for The Sustainable Communities Initiatives**

#### ***Eco Towns are not the panacea to Britain's housing problems***

#### **Based on ideas presented by Wayne Hemingway (member of the government Eco Towns Advisory Panel)**

EcoTowns – should not be part of the governments housing provision targets, but are experimental projects that raise the bar above European examples. As such they should be slowly developed in order to become real eco projects. There is a need to shift people to public transport, recycle and adopt green economies.

Eco Towns are about embedding social, economic and environmental sustainability all in one place.

EcoTowns if done properly will avoid the mistakes of the past that are likely to create the 'Slums of the Future' - 80% of GB housing built since 2003 is mediocre or poor and 25% should never have been built. Mistakes of the 60s/70s repeated recently by big developers that have Wimpeyified/Barratised our housing environments.

There is a need to create a sense of place - Liveability and Sustainability go together – people need to feel comfortable and able to put down roots. Inner urban areas like *The Staiths South Bank*, *Gateshead* aimed to build a community and used school as heart of plan. The project was in a difficult area- old industrial decay and deprivation and next to heavy industry. Key features included:

- restricted car access and limited parking means built in carbon reductions
- rent a bicycle schemes
- variety, colour and harmony – avoiding repetition and providing identity
- open spaces, greenery and maturity from day one
- use of sustainable materials

#### ***Other key issues to include***

- Issues of growth and development are different in the north of UK to the south
- Eco-living is more than just providing homes- need for access to employment opportunities
- Transport issues also include personal preferences, freedom of choice, mobility and cost; so planning has to account for why people choose/need to use privately owned vehicles