

South Gloucestershire District CPRE

Chairman's Annual Report November 2009 to March 2011

Another busy period with several large consultation documents to peruse!

In January 2010 Maximus Strategic Land submitted plans for a large development at land East of St John's Way, Chipping Sodbury. This started a "Save our Sodburys" campaign group and the plans were withdrawn when South Gloucestershire Council was inundated with letters of objection from local residents. South Gloucestershire Council decided that the plans were not acceptable and would not be part of the draft Core Strategy, so the plans were withdrawn.

This illustrated the importance of having a Core Strategy so that future development is properly planned following environment impact and sustainability assessments and not on a piece meal basis wherever a developer decides that he would like to build.

Also in January we had the first consultation on the Draft National Policy Statement – Energy. This included proposals for a new Oldbury Power Station with four 200m high cooling towers. We objected on grounds of the visual impact of the cooling towers on the sensitive Severn Estuary. We said that if there is insufficient cooling water available at the Oldbury site then another site should be considered, because the cooling towers would be completely unacceptable at that location.

In March 2010 South Gloucestershire Council's Draft Core Strategy consultation was launched. Because of the uncertainty around the Regional Spatial Strategy, the document sought to accommodate 21,500 dwellings and not the 32,500 houses that the Labour Government was seeking. This resulted in less of a threat to the Green Belt.

During May and June, Jill Kempshall represented CPRE at the Inquiry examining Bristol City Council's Core Strategy. The Inspector was primarily concerned with housing numbers and the Inquiry was deferred until September because the new Coalition government made it clear that they would be abolishing the Regional Spatial Strategy.

In July we submitted our response to the S Glos Core Strategy. We broadly supported the Council's strategy for development. We welcome the fact that the Council has reverted to the development figure of 21,500 homes for the period 2006-2026. We were totally opposed to the former Secretary of State's proposals for 32,800 homes which would have resulted in the loss of large areas of Green Belt land through the development of urban extensions. However, we asked the Council to give consideration to further reducing the development figure as the Council was no longer being forced by the Government to build.

We expressed concern about the loss of Green Belt between Harry Stoke and the M32 motorway for the development of 2,000 homes and the Stoke Gifford Transport Link. With the reduced housing numbers we considered that an alternative site could be found that was not Green Belt. The particular site has landscape value and is currently agricultural land. The pylons across the site make much of it unsuitable for housing. The A4174 Avon Ring Road is already heavily congested in this area at peak times and we questioned whether there was capacity for additional traffic.

We are grateful that there is no longer any reference in the Core Strategy to development between Chipping Sodbury and Old Sodbury. We support the preferred option of a north Yate new neighbourhood but consider that a development of 3000 houses is far too many. The existing infrastructure in Yate, in particular the roads in and out of the town, could not take this scale of development. The development will also result in a loss of access to the countryside.

We considered it was essential that the landscape setting and special separate identity of Yate Rocks is protected. We also continued to support an extension of the Green Belt north of Yate so that the town cannot continue to sprawl once any proposed new development is completed.

We accepted the argument that Thornbury would benefit from some additional housing in order to revitalise the town, but we were not wholly convinced that the preferred option for development to the north of Thornbury is the right site as we are concerned about the effect of the development on the setting of the medieval ponds.

Over the past year we have received applications for wind turbines at Hill (four turbines) and Cold Ashton (1). After meeting and speaking to objectors to both applications and following much debate among ourselves we objected to both. With regard to the Hill application we objected due to landscape intrusion and the removal of hedges and trees. The Cold Ashton application was within the Cotswold AONB.

Whilst CPRE recognises that wind energy can make an important contribution towards providing electricity in the UK, we also believe that sensitive areas of landscape should be protected from adverse impacts. The CPRE view is that the erection of wind turbines in a nationally designated area of landscape value is unacceptable – save in exceptional circumstances.

Jill Kempshall spent much time sitting through Bristol City Council debates on the Village Green application, the proposed new Stadium for Bristol City FC and the Sainsbury's application at Ashton Gate. She also took part in the various area forum meetings looking at the Council's policies on Parks & Open Spaces and the Area Green Spaces Plans.

Continuing with the Inspection into Bristol's Core Strategy, the Council said that their deliverable housing numbers were 26,400 with an aspirational figure of 30,000 and this was much challenged by the Inspector.

In South Gloucestershire we have supported local residents at Old Sodbury by objecting to a gypsy site which could be seen from the National Trail. Also for an application at Pucklechurch which was in the Green Belt. We objected to the erection of a Gospel Hall at Hortham Lane, Almondsbury in the Green Belt. Officers recommended refusal but to our dismay councillors voted in favour (6:5). Some seemed to think that because the site was derelict, a nice big building would tidy it up! The Green Belt isn't always pretty landscape but it still performs an important function and the reasoning used by the councillors is disturbing.

In October we had a stand at Yate's first Environmental Festival held at the Leisure Centre on 16 October.

In December South Gloucestershire Council agreed to changes to their Core Strategy before submitting it to the Secretary of State. We supported the proposed change no. 60, welcoming the commitment to examine the scope to extend Green Belt designation to other areas to compensate for the loss of Green Belt due to the proposed Stoke Gifford Link Road.

So, my thanks to our small, hardworking committee. Jill has done sterling work in single-handedly representing CPRE in Bristol. Hilary has, among other things, played a role in the South Gloucestershire Local Foods Partnership. Les (as well as running the Village of the Year competition) has made us think hard and debated with us the pros and cons of various applications, whilst Gerry has been our Sodbury and Yate expert attending planning workshops etc on our behalf. My sincere thanks to them all, not forgetting Les Whittock for his loyal and invaluable support.

