CPRE Avonside Branch AGM Nov 14th 2009 The Sawmill, Tyntesfield

Summary of Talk by **Bob Brown**:

Best and Most Versatile Land (BMV)

The Agricultural Land Classification system (ALC) was devised in the 1960s and revised in 1988. The productive capacity of land for farming is graded from 1 (best) to 5 (worst) on the basis of soil type and thickness/drainage/ topography and climate. In England there is about 2.7% grade 1 and 14.2% grade 2 land with the highest concentration being in the Fens and parts of Kent, Herefordshire and Lancashire. Good quality farm land is scarce in the SW. There has been a weakening of policy in planning since the late 1980s as regards land quality although PPS7 does allow this to be taken into account when planning applications are made. Quality of 3b, 4 and 5 (where soils may be thin, land badly drained, steep or of adverse climate) can be developed unless the particular agriculture on it adds significantly to the landscape, local economy and character of the area (as in the Lake District). The classification refers to the potential of the land not the actual farm system currently in place: e.g. grade 1 land may be being grazed by sheep whilst being capable of supporting horticulture. With the likely future need to be more food self- sufficient, we should be fighting to save more of the grade 1,2,3a land from development. Loss of peat through oxidation and the need for managed retreat due to sealevel rise will reduce the amount of good quality land available in the Fens. Local examples include the fertile strip to the west of Frenchay along the M32 where some horticulture is practised and planning for a Trusthouse Forte Hotel was turned down, whilst Gordano Rugby FC did gain permission for use of grade 1 land. Yeovil has good quality land to the south which would indicate that new housing developments should be placed to the north or west. However landscape quality also needs to be considered.

Summary of Talk by **Richard Spalding**:

Feeding Avonside-Moving Towards Food Security in Uncertain Times

Cuba was forced to become self-sufficient and to farm sustainably when Russian support and oil supplies were withdrawn. A parallel could be drawn in Avonside (the other C.U.B.A!). At present we are locked into the global economy with food being supplied cheaply from around the world. Despite local initiatives such as allotment gardening and farmers' markets, it is not economically viable under current conditions for Bristol farmers to be concentrating on market gardening. However when we have gone past the 'peak oil' situation and cutting down on carbon emissions forces us to reduce food miles, we may need to return to the 'Isolated State' model of Von Thunen (1826). Developed in the days before industrialisation with a city centrally located within its region, this model shows a pattern of agriculture in concentric circles with highly intensive market gardening immediately next to the city and less intensive farming further away. Cities such as Bristol should aim to identify and map its best quality green land ('Blue Fingers' -grade 1 and 2 land is shown in blue on the ALC) within and around the city and campaign to use this for food production. Case studies of cities feeding themselves can be found in the book: 'Continuous Productive Urban Landscapes' by Viljoen and Bohn, 2005. Green corridors stretching out beyond the city could also be used for sustainable recreation such as walking and cycling as well as providing food. However, the intensive production of food in these areas could lead to a sea of polytunnels which would conflict with recreation and the landscape value of the green land outside the city.