



Transition Town Berkhamsted

News Bulletin No 1, July 2011

This Bulletin is an exciting new initiative to get the TTB news out to people. So if you have any ideas or news you want to distribute that contribute to our local sustainability and community, please send it to bridgetwilkins@btinternet.com for inclusion in the next bulletin which will be issued in the Autumn. The Bulletin consists of what is sent to me,
Bridget

Monthly Meetings

TTB meet on the 2nd Thursday of every month at 8pm in the Rising Sun, George Street. So the next meeting will be 14th July. This is an open meeting where we discuss projects, ideas and news. Everyone is welcome.

Energy Group update

The energy group has been busy focusing on two particular projects in the town. The first has been to work with homeowners in the town to help support efforts to improve energy efficiency. This involved leafleting homes around the town and following up with interested homeowners to conduct home energy audits and advising on ways to improve home energy efficiency. We are now looking to work with estate agents in the town to target energy efficiency support to new homeowners - a time when people typically are most open to undertaking retrofit work on their homes.

We have also continued to explore the potential to establish a major renewable energy initiative on a public building in the town. We are currently in discussions with the Berkhamsted Cricket Club to explore renewable energy options for them, but would be interested to hear from readers about other ideas for a visible, flagship project in or around the town.

If you would like a home energy audit or have ideas for locations for flagship renewables projects please contact **Seb Beloe** at beloe@live.co.uk .



TTB Website

I will shortly be starting to build the TTB website (finally! Sorry it's taken so long my work has been so busy) and I would love your input. If you have any thoughts on what you would like to see on the website, in terms of content, images or interactive tools please do let me know and I will try and incorporate them.

Thanks. Claire cpaszkievicz@yahoo.com

Local Food

There have been several exciting developments on the local food front in Dacorum this year. TTB has been working with other local food groups to develop the Dacorum Sustainable Food Strategy as well as helping to organise a Local Food Workshop at Ashridge Management College. As a result of the workshop, several projects are now in progress e.g. mapping of all local food growing spaces and outlets in Dacorum and seeking funding to employ a full time local food coordinator for Dacorum.

Transport

Car Free Weekend (16-18 September) – three days of free fun activities and information looking at finding an alternative to getting into the car. The weekend starts with Car Free Day on Friday 16th focussing on schools and businesses; followed by a sustainable shopping day in the town centre with offers of free bike-courier service to take your shopping to your door and local producers invited to the regular market. The weekend will culminate on Sunday with the annual Berko Bike Fest in partnership with Tring & Berkhamsted Cycling Campaign at Canal Fields with lots of fun activities for all the family.

Emma emman72@hotmail.com

TTB Food Group

The next meeting of the TTB Food group will be at the Rising Sun pub, George Street, Weds 10th August at 8pm. Everyone is welcome. If you'd like more details of the meeting or anything else to do with the Dacorum Local Food Initiative please ring Marion on 01442 874732 or email MARIONB@DSL.PIPEX.COM

Developer meeting and the Localism bill

A couple of themes running parallel in the life of TTB seem to have suddenly become intertwined; the discussions we've been having with a developer group



(we're calling the Max Fordham group), and the arrival of Annemarie De Boom and the Localism Bill.

To the former - we were first approached by this group a year ago, by Max Fordham the consultant, on behalf of a developer called Grand Union Investments. They own several parcels of land along the southern edge of the town, between the A41 and Hall Park, Thomas Coram School, Ashlyns, Kingshill Way and Shootersway.

We decided that although we had lots of reservations about 'development' in general, we could discuss their proposal, hopefully improve it, and if at some point we could see they were offering something truly exemplary from a sustainability point of view, we might even support it.

We've had three meetings now, and at the last one we had a bit of a change of heart after realising that whatever the intentions of the group that sat before us (and I am sure that some have very good intentions) the way that the planning system works, there would be no guarantee of any of these good intentions ever seeing the light of day.

This is because once any kind of approval in principle was given (such as the land being allocated for development in the Core Strategy, or it being taken out of Green Belt), any commitment to sustainability could be lost, before any committing plans would have been put on the table. To demonstrate this, even if a verbal guarantee was given by GUI about the super levels of sustainability they would build to, as soon as that first planning acceptance was given to any kind of development, the land price would shoot up, GUI could sell, and any guarantees could be lost. Even if GUI stayed involved, if there were no binding commitments in the planning documents, the detailed planning applications that would later follow might bear very little resemblance to anything being discussed right now. We know this, as we've already seen it happen on the Egerton Rothsay site, where 100 houses originally discussed has become 200, and on a minor scale at the Berkhamsted School where the "native species" to be planted alongside the Bulbourne River have materialised as Azaleas!

So, although we'd have liked to continue our discussions to improve the offering from GUI before it is submitted in competition to the Core Strategy, two things have swayed us from that, and are causing us to withdraw. Firstly, (this first bit has 2 parts to it) we've not seen anything close to "truly exemplary" in the presentations to date, and we have a concern that our continuing engagement might be seen as some kind of implicit endorsement of the proposals. So this worries us.



Secondly, even if we did think that the proposals were looking good and something radical might be coming our way, the risks to the sustainability of the town if this did not transpire are too great. This is because one of the great assets of this town, and one of the key attributes of a resilient and sustainable town in the future is the connection with the productive land around it.

The land that the GUI own includes some productive arable land to the south of Hall Park, and once built upon, this land would not be returned to food production in the foreseeable future. Further, the land is not well connected to the town centre and the market, and in all likelihood, unless the developer produced a truly radical solution to transport needs, all we'd achieve would be urban sprawl and traffic generation, without the very ambitious improvement to average sustainability that we were looking for*(see illustration at the end).

After this last meeting, our discussions centred on how could we be more pro-active to see the kind of development that we'd want, rather than just waiting for developers to come along with proposals that (through no sinister intent) would be designed to maximise profits, rather than to meet the needs of the town. In particular we were discussing how we did not feel that the town needed more development on Green Belt land, or on the periphery of the town. If the town does need new development, it would include employment opportunities, and it would certainly include affordable housing. In particular, this would be aimed to allow those who grow up in the town to stay in the town, whereas presently they have to move out to somewhere cheaper.

It became clear that we will never achieve these aims if we sit back and wait for developers to bring the proposals to us.

So, now to the happy coincidence of the talk delivered on the 7th June at Victoria School by Annemarie DeBoom on the Localism Bill. (Note - The Bill has not been finalised, so there is an element of assumption in what follows).

The Bill offers local communities the chance to form a group who will consult with the wider community and form a vision of what they want (in planning terms) for their neighbourhood – known in the Bill as a Neighbourhood Plan. In Berkhamsted, as in other areas, the Bill specifies that the Parish or Town Council must lead on the



development of these plans. There are certain minimum requirements, so it will not be possible to produce a plan which says “we want NO development in our neighbourhood”. That is not an option.

However, the process should result in a development strategy for the neighbourhood which sits within the Core Strategy and spells out what the community wants out of development in its area. When the Plans are developed they will then be voted on by the local community. If accepted, this Plan will set the long-term goals for planning in the community, covering infrastructure, housing, business, leisure, etc. Clearly it will need to be realistic, deliverable, popular, and funded. Much of this was discussed at our meeting at Victoria School, and you can get more detail either from me or, better still, from Annemarie.

So in summary, we think what GUI are doing in terms of consultation with key stakeholder groups in the community is a good way to approach their ambitions for the land, but we are withdrawing from the process as we don't really expect it to deliver the very high environmental standards that we're after, and possibly, with the best will in the world, it never could in that location. We support the idea (in principle) of using the Localism Bill to allow this community to be vastly more proactive than at present, and to direct our own future. Wendy Conian is leading from TTB on investigating the options presented by the Bill for us.

Danny Bonnett

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27/6/11.

*This point needs some further explanation as it is a radical concept. I will illustrate it here with an example about transport, but it could relate to domestic energy consumption, or to food production, or to water use, etc.

With the opportunity for investment that a large new development brings, it is theoretically possible for the addition of new people to bring down the average 'carbon footprint' of the whole.

An example might be that the new development is the catalyst for setting up a round-the-town bus, setting up car share schemes, and increasing the frequency of the existing bus services in the area. These measures, in conjunction with 'carrot-type' demand management solutions, such as incentives for residents to buy properties with no parking spaces, and a council tax discount for residents in the



Conservation Area for those who opt out of the residents parking scheme, might mean that the average transport footprint of the 1000 new residents is a very commendable 1 tonne of CO₂ equivalent per year.

The availability of the other measures to all residents, and the pro-active attitude of the local council (town and borough) mean that for 2000 of the existing residents, their transport footprints fall by 0.75 tonnes of CO₂ per year, resulting in a net carbon saving of 50 tonnes per year for the town as a whole