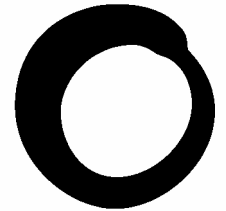


July 2006



**Friends of  
the Earth**

# Listen up!

## Community involvement in the planning system

## Seven case studies

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## Introduction: People, planning and power

**By Hugh Ellis, Planning Adviser, Friends of the Earth**

There is a powerful case for involving the public in local planning decisions. Participation can empower communities, encourage active citizenship and deliver better informed decisions that contribute to sustainable development and environmental justice. The Government itself has recognised the benefits of participation in securing greater consensus in decision making<sup>1</sup> and has announced a flood of “new localism” initiatives which are intended to put people at the heart of decision-making and public services.<sup>2</sup>

The problem, as some of the case studies in this report show, is the increasing gulf between the pledges of government and the experience of communities on the ground. Despite the promises, the voices of communities are not being heard in many planning decisions and there is growing disenchantment with the system. What is even more remarkable is that at a time when the emphasis should be on bringing communities into the system so that they are able to play their part, the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Treasury have launched a review of planning which explicitly sets out to give business even more influence in the planning process than they currently have.

The purpose of this report is to demonstrate the positive contribution that local community voices can play in the planning process. These seven case studies demonstrate that community groups are not always “nimby” protesters, negatively opposed to any kind of development. Instead they illustrate the powerful, and positive, contribution that early community participation can bring to the decision-making process. In many cases, this has led to better outcomes for all of those involved – including the developers. The case studies also illustrate that the source of delay in planning very often rests with developers and local authorities who failed to have meaningful dialogue with communities from the very beginning of the planning process. Without an effective planning system there would be no way of mediating or understanding the needs of the community. The result would be solely market-led development, unsustainable in the short term with long-term social and environmental costs.

### **Barriers to effective participation**

Local government, through planning, has a long track record of seeking to involve communities. The planning system itself is one of the most radical forms of environmental regulation in the UK because it grants local democratic control over major environmental decisions. The planning system pioneered many of the techniques for participation we now take for granted. However, the rapid decline of planning’s reputation as relevant to people’s lives is closely mirrored by the long decline of local government power: funding has been restricted and functions removed by central government.

There is no doubt that the planning system has failed to reach a whole series of social

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<sup>1</sup> ODPM (2004) Community involvement in planning: The Government’s objectives.  
[http://www.odpm.gov.uk/embedded\\_object.asp?id=1144472](http://www.odpm.gov.uk/embedded_object.asp?id=1144472)

<sup>2</sup> For example Together We Can; ODPM’s local:vision programme; David Miliband’s speech on Empowerment and the Deal for Devolution in January 2006.

groups and communities who are “planned for” but who have not been given the opportunity to be involved. There is an entrenched culture in some parts of the planning service which regards people as “problems”, in terms of too little or sometimes too much involvement. The direction of planning reform should recognise the value of local knowledge and community ownership of decision making. This requires a reaffirmation that planning is a people-centred activity, not solely a technocratic one.

There continue to be a range of barriers to effective involvement.

Practical barriers include the cost to individuals of obtaining relevant information from local authorities, and the limited extent to which local authorities are required to publicise minimum standards of publicity of planning applications. In combination this means many people are not even aware of developments at the planning stage.

There is a tangible sense of inequality, most notably because applicants for planning permission have rights of appeal which communities do not. There is also a perception that developers have unfair access to planners during pre-negotiation and the negotiation of planning gain.

The cost of seeking professional advice and access to professional expertise is another barrier.

And members of the public can be alienated by the professional norms of expression, the use of complex language, the proliferation of consultants’ reports and the failure of planners to communicate with objectors and the wider community.

The perception by planners of objectors as “nimbys” also acts as a barrier.

### **The impact of planning reform**

The reform of planning in 2003-4 was meant to provide for the early engagement of people in the plan making process, but early indications are that these measures have failed to deliver the step change needed. The clearest example is Statements of Community Involvement (SCIs). These were an important part of the 2004 Planning Compulsory Purchase Act, designed to allow planning authorities to be innovative and creative in meeting the specific needs for participation in diverse communities. However, with few exceptions many SCIs have simply restated the legal minimum requirements for consultation in the planning process. There is a very real difference between genuine community participation, where local residents are given the opportunity to be involved in the decision process from an early stage, and consultation, where they are merely asked for their views. And many of those already submitted have been sub-standard in their consultation processes according to the Planning Inspectorate.

In addition, there is no agreed system for measuring how well local planning authorities are effectively involving local communities, while planning departments are given clear targets for speed. Allocating resources for effective participation is often a low priority in local authorities and there is a lack of experience in involving communities within the planning profession.

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## **The Barker Review**

The current review of planning, being carried out by Kate Barker, is focused on examining how far the English land-use planning system impacts upon business performance in an increasingly globalised economic context. The Barker review team has been asked to assess whether or not recent reforms have improved the efficiency and speed of the system and whether this has encouraged the flexibility and transparency that enterprise requires.

The terms of reference for the inquiry focus on getting more of a business voice into the planning process and making sure economic considerations are given proper weight in the decision making process. The brief does not appear to recognise the need to integrate rather than “trade off” the economic, social and environmental principles of sustainable development. It also appears to ignore the current domination within the planning system of property and business interests. There is no question that medium and large scale business have a major influence on local plans and have access to expertise which many communities do not.

If Kate Barker’s interim report (expected as we went to press) recommends the deregulation of planning, it won’t be for the first time. Barker’s report on housing supply in 2004 was quite explicit in seeking to devise mechanisms that “would help distance land availability decisions from the political process”.<sup>3</sup> The logic was simple: local democratic control does not adequately serve market needs and will therefore ultimately damage our global competitiveness.

The report accepted that price signals should play a major role in how we make decisions on issues such as housing, a conclusion which implicitly questions the role of democratically accountable decision-making in defining the public good. The Treasury and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister welcomed the report and have set about its implementation. This suggests that the Government is not concerned with the harm to local democracy.

The fact that ideas such as “new localism” and the Barker Report can emanate from the same government is a perfect illustration of how confused public policy has become in relation to the role of individuals and communities in decision-making. On the one hand the Government is encouraging local involvement and on the other seeking to restrict rights over decisions which might impact on macro-economic policy.

This contradiction is institutionalised in the new planning framework, with its powerful new regional tiers of planning which will remain unaccountable for the foreseeable future. The contents of regional plans are examined by invitation only and the outcomes will be imposed on the local development plan framework.

Communities are quite right to ask what the point is of participating in decisions at the local level when they are merely about implementing targets which have already been agreed in arenas where they have no voice. At present there is no sign that the Government has any clear idea of how much power it wishes to see held by local communities. The perceived tension between local power and national policy should not be seen as an insurmountable problem. The Government stands to learn a great deal from local communities, as the case studies in this report show.

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<sup>3</sup> Kate Barker (2004) Review of Housing Supply. Final report – recommendations (page 40).

## **Beyond Barker: A new model of governance**

The planning system can and must play a crucial role in delivering development that is beneficial to all communities and sustainable. Barker's review should ensure it examines the vital role that communities play in delivering development that is good for business, good for the environment and good for communities themselves. There is huge potential for building on the positive relationships between individuals, community groups, planners and elected officials that are already generating good results, as these case studies show.,

In bringing about better community involvement, the Government must avoid alienating local people with a plethora of fragmented initiatives from different departments and agencies. The solution is for the Government to adopt a simple model for governance which should apply in all decision-making arenas. This model should be based on the right to live in a clean and healthy environment. It should provide a framework for effective participation by guaranteeing democratic accountability and rights of redress when the process goes wrong. The governance model should have three components:

- a new model of democratic decision-making which makes clear the relationship between participative and representative democracy, valuing both as important aspects of vibrant local politics;
- a genuine shift in power from central to local;
- robust, legally enforceable rights to protect the interests of individuals and minorities.

The model would need to be underpinned by robust enabling measures to encourage communities to get involved and to understand their rights to do so. So there must be resources for community participation and for skilling up professionals. The system should value the community voice as much as the business voice and should ensure that the community has the resources it needs to be heard equally.

Ultimately, social and environmental justice is served by open, representative government where communities have a real say in decision-making.

### **The case studies: Involvement matters**

The seven case studies in this report vividly illustrate that public participation is part of a vibrant, open and participative democracy which delivers better developments.

The **Skelmersdale Landfill** case taught planners that unnecessary conflict and cost can be avoided when local people are brought in early to the decision making process.

In **Calderdale**, local people knew exactly what kind of development was suitable for the valley and creative thinking by them and local planners challenged the perceived need to build on green-field land.

In **Bath Southgate**, participation had an educative role for all participants. Bath Friends of the Earth were able to suggest a more radical, carbon efficient development that will benefit the community as well as the business sector.

Participation promotes social cohesion by making real connections. In **Saffron Walden**, local residents and businesses joined together to express concern about the health of the town centre. In **South Hams**, six community and residents groups took part in a decision

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making forum with local authorities, landowners and developers.

And the **Doe Lea** case powerfully demonstrates that when major changes are planned to regenerate a deprived and shattered community, local residents must have a say in the results, or environmental justice will not be done.

**Friends of the Earth would like to thank all the community groups and individuals who helped put this report together and donated their time and photographs to the project.**

**Their voices are, after all, the most powerful expression we have of the current challenges in the planning system and of the great opportunity it offers people to have a say in the decisions that affect their lives.**

## Bath Southgate development

**By David Beasley, Bath Friends of the Earth**

Bath and North East Somerset Council (B&NES) has at last given the go ahead to the massive scheme for the redevelopment of the Southgate area. This means that Bath can look forward to some radical changes to its shopping and transport facilities, including a new bus station and some major alterations to the railway station. There will be improvements for cyclists and pedestrians. The provision of good shopping facilities in close proximity to good public transport will give people a greener alternative to out-of-town shopping centres.

David Beasley surveys Bath's Southgate Mall.  
Photo: Scott Morrison, Bath Friends of the Earth.



Back in 1997, developers first applied to the council for a major redevelopment at Southgate in the City of Bath. Southgate at that time was an unattractive area with a 1970s shopping centre, multi-storey car park, 1960s bus station and some rundown old industrial sites. The first application was refused but five revised applications followed. At an early stage, Bath Friends of the Earth drew the developer's and the planners' attention to significant inadequacies in the Environment Statement, which the developer has to provide as part of the planning application under European law.

Bath Friends of the Earth's objections to the redevelopment proposal covered issues like the amount of car parking planned and the fact that cyclists were ignored. The plans to change the bus station would mean that fewer buses would be able to come in and out and the waiting areas for passengers left much to be desired.

The first scheme had only 12 houses, which we thought missed a big opportunity. At that time the Government was already making noises about getting more people living in city centres and using brownfield sites. Over the period of the various re-applications, Government advice became crystallised into Planning Policy Guidance 3 on Housing and our pressure for more houses in the development was vindicated.

Each time the developer submitted a revised scheme we countered it by setting out the community's concerns. Meanwhile B&NES Council showed very little interest. The planners provided virtually no support to us as we struggled to understand the enormously complex planning process. They were slow to recognise that the changes we were putting forward would benefit everyone.

There were consistent problems with the Environmental Statements. The developers and their consultants had not taken on board the level of detail that is required by law. They ignored the recommendations of the Government's Good Practice Guidelines. But while B&NES Council continued to be fairly indifferent, the developer initiated discussions with Bath Friends of the Earth. After some very positive meetings, the developers began to see that the

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process had some merit and could even produce benefits for them. They even said that they would apply the lessons learnt in Bath to other schemes.

During this time the challenges of climate change were rising up the agenda. The growing realisation that developments should reduce their environmental impact and make a contribution to emissions reductions made our arguments even stronger. Bath Friends of the Earth proposed cutting down the number of car parking spaces and increasing the number of city centre homes to reduce the carbon footprint of the project. We also pushed the developers to look more seriously at issues such as energy use, climate change, solar energy, CHP, the use of grey water, bus station capacity, ozone-friendly refrigeration systems, alternative housing layouts, the recycling of demolition materials and building design to minimise the need for heating and cooling. Our submissions were praised as "substantial" and "inventive" by B&NES planning officers and councillors. In the end, the Council picked up the initiative, and pushed the developers to make further environmental improvements to the scheme.

All along, we had argued that since this development would dominate the centre of Bath for many decades to come, so the city should not rush into it. But many of the delays in the process could have been avoided if planning officers and the developer had been more geared up to the statutory process from the start. It seems as if the local authority was initially not clear about the need for an environmental assessment, and had not requested one from the developer. The developer seemed to be vaguely aware that the application had to deal with environmental impacts and they had made a half-hearted attempt at an environmental

statement, based on a completely inadequate scoping study. This confusion and poor grounding for the whole environmental impact process hampered the scheme for the following five years. The only reason we were able to make our points was that the planning framework for participation, such as the Act of 1991 and Planning Policy Guidance Note 12, were there to be used. We didn't get everything we wanted. But the changes we did get are significant. What Bath will now be getting is a development that will be of greater benefit to the local community.

#### **The improvements we brought about**

- We argued for a reduction in car parking. The developers originally proposed a 23% increase. Now, we'll have a 12% decrease.
- We argued for more housing. The developers originally proposed 12 houses, now we'll have 92.
- We argued for a quadrupling of cycle parking spaces. They originally proposed a reduction of 40%. Now they've agreed to the quadrupling.
- We argued for good cycle routes and crossings to link the riverside path to the railway station. These weren't in the first plans, but they are now.
- We argued there should be adequate space for passengers waiting for buses. The space has been increased considerably.

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## Doe Lea regeneration

**By Tony Trafford, Ault Hucknall Parish Council**

Doe Lea, like other villages in the Derbyshire coalfields, used to be a prosperous area because of its connections with mining, industry and manufacturing. From the 1970s onwards mining began to decline and this process speeded up after the 1984 strike. The closure of the mines wiped out the economic purpose of many communities and led to widespread unemployment and a wide range of social problems. Glapwell colliery, which served the people of Doe Lea, finally closed in 1974 with the loss of over 3000 jobs. The village itself was sold by the Coal Board to the local council for £1.

Conditions declined rapidly in the village: houses were left unrepaired and shops began to close. Attempts were made to modernise the houses with inside toilets and new windows, but then a decision was taken to demolish the village instead. By 1977, the village was flattened. At the time many residents moved to other villages and there was a strong feeling that the tight-knit sense of community had been shattered with little or no consideration of the consequences.

The village was left with just two of its original terraced houses and the Miners' Welfare building. One street of houses was rebuilt before the local authority ran out of money and around 120 residents moved back in. The street plan and even the street lights of the old village were left in place. We knew the village was in serious need of regeneration if the community services were going to survive. The local primary school struggled when the number of children dropped by half. The local post office closed but the Miners' Welfare has clung on despite needing refurbishment. Almost everyone

who still lived in the village wanted to see new housing built.

In 2005 a proposal for housing was made with no public consultation. The proposal was seriously divisive. 210 new houses were going to be built completely disconnected from the rest of the village, with separate road access. They were even going to face inwards, away from the existing houses. This made residents very angry and there was large scale opposition. Bolsover District Council had a strong interest in the sale of the site which they owned and which would yield a very significant sum. They also happened to be the planning authority which would make a decision as to how the site would be developed.

At a public meeting in Nina January 2006 residents made clear how they felt. 120 local people from Doe Lea and nearby village Bramley came to the event and there was a very strong sense of anger that no one was listening to the views of the residents. Many villagers wanted new housing but they wanted the new village integrated properly with the old village. They also wanted to use the old street pattern and to see better footpaths and cycleways. They wanted good links between the river and the village including corridors for wildlife to support the existing river conservation project. In short, residents wanted social and environmental improvements in the area and more social housing. As members of the Ault Hucknall Parish Council we supported these objections and even though the Parish Council stood to gain financially from the approval of the site we were determined to see a scheme that would not result in lasting social problems.

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After the public meeting, residents and the Parish Council managed to build a positive relationship with the planning officers and councillors at Bolsover District Council. We achieved this by starting with a series of smaller meetings, facilitated by a community development worker where both parties discussed their concerns. As residents we produced a one-page document which set out our objectives in a way that was useful to both the planners and developers. As a result the council made it clear to the developers that the first plan would not be acceptable and that they should talk directly to local residents to develop a better scheme.

**“The planning system gives us a way of getting involved. If it hadn’t, then Doe Lea would be a divided community by now, with old and new residents living in separate ghettos and a total lack of community spirit.”**

Six months went by since the original plan was presented to the community. The developers had still not held a meeting with local residents. However, after it became clear that their original plan would not be approved, the developers did set up a meeting with residents in May 2006. At this meeting a new plan was presented which took on board the majority of our views. We were pleased to see that it used the existing street pattern. The meeting was cordial and constructive and

the developers seemed to be surprised at the positive attitude of the residents. Overall the new plan is much better integrated with the old village.

Everyone is much happier with this solution. Even though the story hasn’t ended yet, because the detail of the scheme has yet to be approved, the villagers feel listened to now. The community has a long history of trying to be involved in decisions which have affected it - from the village being demolished, to a landfill campaign, right up to this housing development. This is one of the few times where we can say that there has been a positive outcome, where the community feels optimistic about the future.

Getting involved with the planning system wasn’t easy because many people find it complicated and not relevant to their everyday lives. But it is important in giving people a voice in local decisions. The planning system gives us a way of getting involved. If it hadn’t, then Doe Lea would be a divided community by now, with old and new residents living in separate ghettos and a total lack of community spirit. Instead, we can look forward to a better future with more local services.

## **Contact**

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## Sherford settlement, South Hams

**By Steve Melia, SHARD**

“There’s no point in trying to fight it. They’ll do whatever they want.” The man who called me to say this, several years ago, had fought, unsuccessfully, against the expansion of Ivybridge in the 1980s. The week after that conversation, he emigrated to New Zealand.

His reaction may have been a little extreme, but in the years since we formed SHARD (South Hams Against Rural Destruction) I have heard many variations on the same theme, and at times, I have been tempted to agree with them.

SHARD started in 1998, when Devon County Council, ignoring all public concerns, approved plans for a new settlement of 3,500 homes and a further 4,200 houses across the villages and towns east of Plymouth. Beyond 2011, even more new homes were expected. Most of the houses were, and still are, intended to address the housing needs of Plymouth’s existing population. That original plan was based on two assumptions: that Plymouth was essentially ‘full’, and a new town in open countryside was better than extending Plymouth’s suburbs. SHARD formed to convince the authorities that both of these assumptions were wrong.

Since we have been involved, we have seen a gradual change in attitude in Plymouth. There is a growing emphasis on regeneration, as enthusiasm for overspill has begun to wane. The council’s housing allocation has been increased twice since 1998. 4,000 homes which would have been built on green fields will now help to regenerate the city instead.

South Hams Council’s first plans for

Sherford on the eastern edge of Plymouth were a good example of how to make a bad situation worse. Instead of a new town, four new villages were proposed that would sprawl into each other, creating a concrete valley from the A38 to Chittleburn, between Brixton and Elburton.



Residents take their concerns to the town hall  
Photo: Neil Cooper, SHARD

In 2003 the council surprised us all by extending an olive branch to the community. The Prince’s Foundation was invited to run a series of workshops to involve the community in re-designing the plans. With Brixton Parish Council and Elburton Residents Association, SHARD’s priority in these workshops was to prevent ribbon development along the Elburton – Brixton road. The Government’s Planning Policy Guidance Note 3, which recommends higher densities for housing, supported our arguments.

So far so good, until we saw the list of workshop participants. 25 were from the council or Government, 12 were landowners or companies, 7 were facilitators. There were 3 assorted others and just 2 from community groups: SHARD and Brixton Parish Council. I

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thought of my Ivybridge friend smiling on his beach in New Zealand: "They'll do whatever they want...". I was under instruction from my committee to walk out if the promised community involvement wasn't happening in practice.

By the end of the first meeting in July, it seemed we had already arrived at that point. There was opposition from land owners and developers who were keen to capitalise on big increases in values. There was little that two of us could do in a group of 49. But we put pressure on the council to get our voices heard and gradually it worked. Four more community groups were brought in to the workshops: Chaddlewood Farm Community Association, Elburton Residents Association, Plympton St Maurice Civic Association and Plymstock Community Forum.

Much of the debate centred on technical arguments, particularly over transport, including where to run new roads and how to encourage use of the planned High Capacity Transport System - a kind of space age bus with some separated routes, like a tram. The week before the final sessions, all six community groups agreed a declaration of principles, and we understand this did influence the ultimate outcome.

Young Plymouth residents protest against the housing plans. Photo: Neil Cooper, SHARD



From the workshops emerged plans for Sherford, a sustainable urban extension instead of the separate new settlement originally proposed. About 4000 dwellings will be built in three walkable neighbourhoods, each with a local centre.

I don't suppose the final plans will delight everyone, but they do reflect some of the communities' concerns. On the whole we are pleased with the changes that have happened so far. Overspill is no longer the default position for Plymouth and the city is healthier for it. The big shift of new houses to the city has benefited everyone. Schools, sports centres, churches, and other community facilities all form part of the plan.

This is not the end of the process. The Local Development Framework will be started soon, with an examination in public in the autumn of 2007. Many issues for Sherford are yet to be resolved, particularly around traffic and transport. But after all the contacts with the council officers, councillors and developers, they know that a lot of effort on all sides has been invested in a solution we can all live with. We are promised ongoing community involvement and we know we have an important voice in shaping these plans to benefit both the old and the new community.

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## Skelmersdale landfill

**By Nicola Escott and Del Ellis, Action to Reduce and Recycle Our Waste**

Skelmersdale new town is in the middle of an old mining and quarrying area which began to provide 'overspill' for Merseyside. But instead of decamping to a rural paradise, many people in Skelmersdale and the surrounding villages found themselves living next to smelly, polluting tips because the old quarries made perfect places to dump rubbish. In 1995 Lancashire County Council decided that 12 landfills surrounding our town were not enough. They wanted another one to take 3 million tonnes of waste. Round O Quarry was 150 metres from a school and 250 metres from land zoned for housing.

It would have been Skelmersdale's 13<sup>th</sup> landfill site within a 5 mile radius of the town and local residents had had enough. Too many of us had been forced to live with the smell, traffic noise and worries about our health from being so close to waste dumps.

Round O Quarry appeared in the Minerals and Waste Local Plan, so ARROW (Action to Reduce and Recycle Our Waste) was set up to challenge this plan. Local plans don't tend to get people too excited so one of our first jobs was to tell people about the threat of another landfill site. We alerted people through a massive leafleting campaign, press coverage and public meetings. 2,000 responded, many of whom had had bad experiences with other tips. They included pensioners groups, schools, 22 local doctors, other health workers, our MP, county and district councillors, parish councillors, trades unions, the district council, geologists, naturalists, chemists, engineers, children, parents - people from every walk of life. The protest march around the site brought out mothers with pushchairs, children on bikes and the

elderly with their walking sticks under the watchful eye of the media.



ARROW demonstrates at County Hall, Preston in April 2001. Photo: ARROW

While this was going on a waste company submitted a separate planning application. In 1999 one hundred volunteers spoke at the two public inquiries into the local plan and the planning application. Every one of them had a very different story of how the tip would affect their lives. Local residents had horror stories tell about the existing tips and felt that that the Environment Agency had failed to protect them. Statutory consultees are meant to speak on behalf of residents, but householders had no faith in the Agency because they were poorly informed about local issues. Our research into the files showed missing and inaccurate records.

The planning system is vital for giving communities a voice. Skelmersdale has a tradition of poorly paid manufacturing industry and had a history of high unemployment. Social indicators place three of the seven wards in the 5 per cent most deprived category. Disability and sickness rates are high in those wards. In deprived areas planners and other professionals often live outside the area in which they work and can be out of touch. Lancashire County Council planners were not aware of the suffering experienced by people living near landfill sites until they

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heard our evidence. You hear lots of complaints about the planning system, but when local people began to experience the system at work they can see what it does for them and their neighbours.

**“It is not perfect, but they have stopped a 40 year practice of using the Skelmersdale area as a dustbin.”**

ARROW wasn't just a protest campaign. We wanted to get to the root of the problem and reduce the amount of waste that has to be thrown away. Recycling had barely got going in our area, so the rubbish still had to go somewhere. Cutting down, re-using and recycling more was the positive half of our argument.

The planning inspectors did listen to our objections to the landfill, and we achieved some of what we were calling for. The Round O Quarry planning application was refused and it was removed from the local waste plan. Since then the County Council has made moves towards higher composting and recycling rates, but there is still a long way to go. At least now Skelmersdale is viewed differently from County Hall. It is not perfect, but they have stopped a 40 year practice of using the Skelmersdale area as a dustbin.

So the story doesn't stop there. After that victory and with our subsequent campaigns against incineration and refuse derived fuel the County Council realised that our public movement wasn't going to disappear. They also realised that the views of local people could be useful. For the new Local Development Framework we have actually been encouraged to give our views early on in the process. The Council is using the planning system as it should be used. Parish Councils, community interest groups and

environmental organisations have all been consulted before the drafting was finished. We hope this will avoid the time-wasting confrontations that all of us, the County and the community groups, had to put up with over Round O Quarry.

We hope that other officials will listen to us too. County waste planners are only interested in the way land is used, not why it is used. Different officers organise recycling collections and they seem more worried about the equipment, their vehicles and the ease of their own operations rather than making things easier for the householder. Recycling in many Lancashire districts is too centralised, with a one size fits all approach that doesn't work for the people in the street, resulting in antagonism.

At the beginning and end of all these systems are people. It is residents who have to store the materials to be recycled and who have to put up with stinking landfill sites next their homes. Maybe the experience of ARROW will help to make the District, County and Regional Authorities understand that communities are part of the system and in the long run it will be quicker to ask us what we think. Participation and consultation is an example of democracy in action. In our case it resulted in a huge change in policy because our community was given a voice.

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## Saffron Walden Tesco

**By Pat Dale, Saffron Walden and District Friends of the Earth**

Saffron Walden is a small market town on the Essex-Suffolk border, with an ancient town centre made up of a network of pretty medieval streets. But the health of the town centre has been suffering since Tesco built its edge-of-town supermarket in 1991. Two small grocers, a fruit and veg shop and two butchers closed during the next few years. So when Tesco applied in 1998 to extend their store at Uttlesford, residents and town centre retailers were extremely concerned.

We first heard about the proposal when Tesco started handing out forms, asking customers whether they'd like more choice of products and a bigger store. This was hardly a proper consultation but it did tip us off. It helps that Saffron Walden Friends of the Earth gets automatically notified of all planning applications, so we knew exactly when the store extension was applied for. We have more than 100 members throughout the district of Uttlesford and we raised awareness amongst other residents by writing to the local newspaper and canvassing on the road to Tesco where extra traffic would be generated. Councillors don't always know the ins and outs of all the areas they represent, so by making sure local people are involved they can actually find out what is happening and what impact a development could have.

The Chamber of Commerce was fairly inactive at the time, but a group of independent retailers from the town centre got together and paid for a solicitor to represent their concerns to the council. Friends of the Earth worked with them, with the local branch of Council to Protect Rural Essex (CPRE) and other concerned people in the town. We put in formal

objections to application based on our concerns about the health of the town centre and the extra traffic that would be generated. We were delighted when Uttlesford District Council turned the application down on the grounds that the retail health of the town was already rather precarious. In particular, Tesco wanted to include financial services, a pharmacy, more clothing, more electrical and household goods in their bigger store. This meant that even more retailers would have been affected. The retailers themselves surveyed the town and proved that there had been a declining independent retail presence since Tesco first opened.



By 1996 the decline in town centres had become alarming. Photo: Corporate Watch

Tesco appealed against the council's decision and the proposal went to public inquiry in 2000. Saffron Walden Friends of the Earth gave verbal evidence at the inquiry about the threat to the town centre and the traffic problems. The road leading to Tesco is one of the most polluted roads in the town. Nitrogen oxides are monitored and levels were already hovering around the legal limit. Using Tesco's own traffic figures as well as the results of our own traffic count, we demonstrated that the

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extra vehicles generated would cause higher levels of pollution. Unfortunately, this was not accepted as a valid objection by the Inspector because Tesco claimed said that new EU regulations on exhaust gases meant that in five years time traffic would be less polluting. Since then, Tesco have been proved wrong. Emissions levels have continued to increase in the area and it's now on the cards to become an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA).

The Inspector did listen, however, and he accepted our other argument that the health of the town centre would be affected. It helped that local residents and retailers were all working together and putting across the same views. By sharing evidence and arguments, we each strengthened our case. By the time of the inquiry, new national planning policy (PPG 6 on Town Centres) stated that land within town centres must be developed before land at the edge of towns, called the sequential approach. This change in Government policy was brought about because the decline in town centres had become so alarming across the country and we were seeing it in Saffron Walden too. The new policy was a great help to us and enabled the Inspector to take account of the store's edge of town location.



Over the past 10 years Tesco has become a giant among the world's retailers. Photo: Corporate Watch

As a result of the Inspector's report, the Secretary of State turned down the appeal in 2000 on the grounds that further expansion would have a detrimental effect on retail provision in the town centre. So far, Tesco hasn't responded to this although rumours continue to circulate that another application is planned, either for a new store or a mezzanine floor.

We are still hopeful that Tesco will realise they are on to a loser and, in the meantime, the town centre has gained an enormous amount. Planning gets a bad press, but it worked for us because everyone acted together. When local people's views are supported by national planning guidance, it makes a very strong case. The public inquiry system generally works well when Inspectors listen properly to local residents, not just to the paid barristers. The move towards less formal public inquiries is really helping. It's never easy as a local person to take part in courtroom style event where you can be aggressively cross-examined by professional legal experts. But when local residents and community groups do get involved, it can really pay off by bringing about a better result for the community.

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## Calderdale Housing Campaign

**By Anthony Rae, Calderdale Friends of the Earth**

Calderdale has matured since its nineteenth century industrial boom into a favourite place for people to live in West Yorkshire. There are high moors on each side of the Upper Calder valley and we have a heritage of fine, sturdily built mills which happen to convert rather well into housing.

Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council has to plan where new housing should go. The pressure from developers and from people wanting to live in the valley had reached a point in 2000 when local communities were getting worried that new housing was encroaching too much onto greenfield sites, ruining the very thing that make this an attractive place to live. Because the valley is so narrow, there is also just no space for widening roads or even making bus priority lanes.

Hebden Bridge, one of Calderdale's valley villages.  
Photo: Hebden Bridge web



It's not just a question of existing residents wanting to protect what we had; we knew that the district could only sustain so many new developments. When the mills were at their busiest they'd provided jobs all the way up the valley. People could walk to work. But those jobs have gone, replaced by others further afield in Leeds or Manchester, and often down the M62. This is putting an increasing strain on our

roads and the public transport is getting uncomfortably crowded. There are strains also on local facilities, including schools and doctors' practices.

When Planning Policy Guidance 3 on Housing was published in March 2000, there was a great deal of good sense in this advice to local authorities on how they should decide where new houses should go. Calderdale Friends of the Earth made it our job to make sure that the local planning officers responded to that advice. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister had proposed a national target of 60 per cent housing to be built on brownfield sites. According to the plan in our region Calderdale was expected to provide 74 per cent of new housing on brownfield between 2004 and 2016. But as soon as our local planners started looking at actual sites they came up with a figure that surprised us all. They found that, at least for the next 10 years, **all** the new housing could be comfortably fitted on to previously developed sites. The green fields could stay.

But the early successes proved to be a false dawn. Developers started making ever more applications as the market rose, and met the housing allocations in double quick time. In recent years completions have been running at double the rate of our regional allocation of 450 per annum, such that by 2005, our 2016 target had already been met – more than 10 years early. So, when the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) public inquiry started Calderdale Friends of the Earth asked that, if the numbers of houses required to be provided had been met sooner than the plan, Calderdale Council should be allowed to hold back any more increases. We didn't do this to keep

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people out but to ensure that the area could actually cope sustainably with continued development. If the housing in Calderdale grows as fast the developers want it to, it may generate emissions from too much car commuting, or inadequately enforced energy efficiency standards. Local employment sites may be lost. There is no guarantee that more development will solve our growing problem of affordability. Many of the new developments are so small that they don't have to include a quota of affordable housing. The gap in the supply of housing for poorer people will not be closed.

**“Whilst the Council are looking into implementing change, it may be sensible to hold over or delay applications for large new developments, particularly as there are few flat, viable sites for development, left in the Valley.”**

**Chris McCafferty MP**

At the public inquiry, the Inspector agreed with us and concluded that the Council should be given the power in its local plan to refuse excessive housing applications. If that plan is adopted shortly it will be a great help but now we're no longer confident that Calderdale Council will be able to limit the number of houses or make sure that new homes meet truly sustainable building standards. We have another, imposed and external pressure. The Northern Way, a regional plan produced with no local accountability or regard for sustainability, is proposing further economic growth for the region, which will result in increasing housing development. If this goes ahead Calderdale will be faced with a worse situation that we thought we'd averted, and a return to greenfield development.

Looking back over the last few years we realise we've experienced the planning system working as it is meant to. As local people, we brought local knowledge and experience into the process. The planning officers could see that our arguments were rational and if anything they welcomed us joining in.

These good relations with Calderdale Council give us moments of encouragement for what we are calling Phase 2 of the process: the continuing outside pressures from the regional plan and from developers wanting to benefit from big increases in house prices. Because we were successful in changing things in Phase 1, we hope more local people will understand that the longer term threat of excessive development, damaged sustainability and threatened local environments can be challenged, using a planning system that is responsive to local needs.

Overall we have no doubt that the planning system – including government advice, the process of deciding plans which automatically included the public inquiry and so on – has benefited everyone. The perfectly understandable short-term motives of developers have to be set in the context of the wider impacts that growth and development have. Even they, in the end, have an interest in making the whole area work effectively. But the whole community needs a voice and a local, controlling and accountable influence: officials, elected members and the rest of us. The planning system, at its best, makes this happen.

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## Dibden Bay

**By John Walker, Residents Against Dibden Bay Port**

Dibden Bay is an area of reclaimed marshland between Marchwood and Hythe on the west bank of Southampton Water. It is one of the few undeveloped areas that link Southampton Water and the New Forest, which became a National Park in 2005. Associated British Ports (ABP) applied to build a massive container terminal at Dibden Bay in 2000. The development would have had a huge effect on the surrounding area.

Most of the local authorities around Dibden Bay were against the proposal and local residents were deeply alarmed. Residents Against Dibden Bay Port (RADBP) is a consortium of local interests including residents associations, parish councils in the Waterside area and organisations such as RSPB, CPRE, the Wildlife Trusts and Friends of the Earth. Together we made objections on a wide range of issues. We thought there would be unacceptable increases in traffic on the already overcrowded A326, a big increase from a few freight trains per day in the area to two every hour and significant effects from noise, light and visual intrusion on local residents.

We also learned through the wildlife organisations that the development would threaten important habitats. The RSPB was particularly concerned by the effect the proposals would have on areas of land designated for their wildlife value. The land for development included a Special Protection Area, a Ramsar site, a candidate Special Area of Conservation, and several Sites of Special Scientific Interest. These designations show how important the site is for international wildlife, including the large numbers of waterfowl it supports during the winter. There were also concerns about the

impacts from dredging and hydrological changes within the estuary.



Dibden Bay as it is now. Photo: RADBP

The huge volume of objections to the proposal led to a public inquiry being called in 2001 which took over 12 months to be completed. This inquiry meant that the Government's Inspector could hear the enormous range of objections and problems that surrounded the plan. The massive public concern allowed RADBP to raise about £130,000 which meant we could pay for independent expert advice and top quality legal representation.

**“Does the community voice count in the planning system? Our experience is that it most certainly does, but with the adversarial planning system as it stands this can only be at the expenditure of considerable cost and time.”**

When the Inspector set out his decision on the container terminal, his chief argument balanced the needs of wildlife and habitats against the public interest. He concluded that to go ahead with the project there had to be overriding public interest in it, or else the project would not meet the Habitats Regulations. His decision reflected

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Government policy on the protection of internationally designated sites.

As the Government later reported, the Inspector considered that any shortfall in the UK's container handling capacity would only be short-lived. So there were no strong reasons of overriding public interest to support the Dibden project that would outweigh its adverse impacts. Following the Inspector's conclusions, the Minister for Transport Tony McNulty announced in April 2004 that the application had been refused.



Paul Vickers, Chairman of RADBP with Dr Julian Lewis MP celebrating victory. Photo: New Forest East Constituency Office

Without the planning system, Dibden Bay Container Terminal would now be half built. Instead, the public inquiry allowed a detailed test of the merits of the proposal. However, the development was proposed in isolation. Looking at individual sites one by one is clearly the wrong way to go forward. If other options had been looked at together, issues such as the differences between the regions in employment prospects, their transport networks and the location of markets could have been taken into account. It was left to the objectors and local residents to do this.

RADBP realised very early that we must get to understand the entire planning process and collaborate with many like minded people and organisations. The involvement of parish, district and county councillors and our MP, Dr Julian Lewis, was crucial. We also approached members of the European Parliament and the European Commissioner for the Environment. We made lasting contacts which are already proving of value for the future.

Does the community voice count in the planning system? Our experience is that it most certainly does, but with the adversarial planning system as it stands this can only be at the expenditure of considerable cost and time. The development of government planning policy must ensure that local communities are brought in as of right at the earliest stages of the planning process. However, we are not waiting for this to happen.

Even though we won, we cannot assume that developers will not try again. We are keeping a close eye on developments, including the Government's current Ports Policy Review. We will be ready to take community action if this proves to be necessary.

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