

West Midlands Update October / November 2005

The on going saga at Coventry Airport.

To sum up Coventry Airport used the Aviation White Paper consultation to promote growth at the airport and then announced on the day of the production of the White Paper that Thomsonfly.com would start flying out of Coventry despite having no "terminal building." Operation commenced out of a temporary building known as an Interim Passenger Facility, IPF, which the local planning authority, Warwick District Council WDC, ruled against. This was appealed by the airport company, who had now become TUI, the corporation which owns for starters Lunn Poly and Thomsonfly.com!!

This inquiry was heard from February to July 2005 with as yet no report and no determination. Meanwhile the airport company have submitted two planning applications for a passenger terminal, one of 3 000 sq metres and another of 10 000 sq meters. An inquiry will start in January 2006 into the larger application as they have withdrawn the smaller one. This they say will enable them to cater for 2 mppa only. The attitude of WDC has changed from one of opposition to this scale of development to one of compliant support for the application as long as a mitigation package is introduced. There are deeply held suspicions as to why the local planning authority has changed its views.

There is a huge amount on this issue on the web site of the Coventry Evening Telegraph

<http://iccoventry.icnetwork.co.uk/> and put Coventry Airport into the search engine

Regional Consultations Coming Up

On a regional scale we will be seeing the launch of stage 2 of the review of the RSS on November 7th. This will cover Employment, Transport, Housing and Waste so plenty for us to get our teeth into. The housing issues will not only cover numbers but location and design with FOE trying to get the most energy efficient houses as possible as well as a presumption in favour of refurbishment. This ultimately sits with Gordon Brown and his perverse lack of VAT on a new home and VAT on refurbishment. The transport issues will cover Aviation with not only Coventry going for growth but also Birmingham International Airport and to a lesser extent Wolverhampton and possibly RAF Cosford to the west of the region.

The 1st stage of the review is concentrating on the Black Country and that has resulted in many from the business community attempting to reopen the debate over the Western Orbital Motorway. This would complete an orbital motorway of the conurbation linking the M5/M42 junction in Worcestershire with the M6/ M6 Toll junction in Staffordshire. This scheme is deeply unpopular not only to local people and their planning authorities but also to toll road builders, who when previously invited to tender for such a scheme failed to submit bids while at the same time taking on the M6 Toll with enthusiasm. Other transport projects which will be discussed will include proposals for scheme between the M6 / M6 Toll junction in Staffordshire and M6 junction 19 in Cheshire. The government has instructed the highways Agency to work on two schemes; a widening of the existing M6 to 4 lanes or a parallel toll road. There will be discussions over strategic park and ride, the logistics industry and their hunger for land as well as plenty of additional miles of tarmac to the road network. The waste debates could see sites identified for large scale plant which may include mass burn incinerators of which we already have 5 in the region including one of the largest in the country at Tyseley Birmingham.

Fordhall Farm an introduction

Fordhall Farm, on the outskirts of Market Drayton, Shropshire, has launched a new and exciting project called the Fordhall Community Land Initiative.

They plan to open Fordhall to the public as an educational and enjoyable resource promoting sustainable farming and healthy living.

The hope is that the farm will be owned and run by the community for the benefit of the community, promoting sustainable farming techniques and healthy living. Their first phase is to secure the land. They have until the 1st July 2006 to raise the £800,000 required to purchase the freehold.

“We believe that Fordhall can go a long way to educating children and families on the full pasture to plate cycle, and the importance of wildlife diversity, energy efficiency and sustainability” says Charlotte. “Dad spent his life researching farming techniques that made the most of the natural world, he strongly believed as we do, that intensive farming is not the only way to farm and that there are better alternatives”.

By buying shares in the Fordhall Community Land Initiative people are really investing in their values – it is not just about saving a small farm on the edge of a market town, but about investing in the wider issues it represents. That is why the project will succeed and why the Initiative has already received share requests from Italy, France and Australia!

Shares are available at £50 each and are non-profit making. Donations are also welcomed, as are volunteers or materials. More information and share applications are available at www.fordhallfarm.com.

Getting together on Regional Issues

We have a couple of dates for your diaries 26th November and 21st January. We will by the 26th November have been inundated with consultations for our mid winter breaks. I can just see the RSS review on the top of your reading lists for those battening down the hatches winters evenings!!! So to enable us to get our responses together we have decided a twin track approach. We will have a regional get together on November 26th when we can meet up to have an overview of what is on the agenda for the early part of 2006. It will be largely informal and loosely structured but will focus on three main pieces of work, the review of the Regional Spatial Strategy, the Birmingham Airport Masterplan consultation and the Black Country study. There will also be plenty of opportunity for you to bring your local campaigns and issues to the attention of regional colleagues. This will be followed by a social. This could take the form of a meal here in the Warehouse Café or elsewhere in the City. So 15.00hrs here in the meeting room Allison Street Digbeth Birmingham. Please get in touch to say you are interested in case we need to get a larger room and also if you are interested in food so as we can again think about numbers and match them to a venue.

We will then reconvene on January 21st at a venue to be decided, any suggestions, to agree our responses to the consultations above. This will also be an opportunity for training or information sharing between local groups so any topics of interest lets hear from you.

Getting the Wind up

I know that Hinkley Point is not in our region but just to show how the battle against nukes and for wind can be hard going here is an extract from a report detailing why a wind farm in the environs of the nuclear plant was turned down recently. “Summing up on his reasons for rejecting the application, Councillor Fred Rawle's line was: Global warming is happening and leads to a warmer climate, it is less windy when it is warmer so wind farms would be obsolete in the future... (astounded looks from the floor..)

Much of the anti debate was is unbelievably and tragically hilarious, not least objections on the basis that the turbines will ruin the view of Hinkley's massive nuclear blockhouses, be noisy, devastate local wildlife and depress house prices. Eco Soundings' prize for the best excuse to stop the turbines goes to British Energy, which claims that a splinter from a broken turbine blade might travel hundreds of metres and somehow pierce their reactor.”

A very recent update from Dave Green on events on Thursday 3rd November
Dear all, two major items at last night's Economy and Environment Scrutiny panel.

1, Transport Innovation Fund.

The county have put in a bid for £480,000 from the TiF for Shrewsbury. This money would be to explore solutions to S'bury's traffic problems including congestion charging and the North West Relief Road. A bid to actually do something could be for up to £100m!

I consider this bid to be premature and a sad attempt to keep the NWRR alive. They admit that without something like congestion charging the NWRR stands very little chance of approval. However I haven't heard anyone in S'bury support congestion charging in the town and the main supporters of the NWRR have been the most vocal against charging. S'bury seems a most unlikely place for a pilot scheme given the opposition we've had to ideas of reducing car parking or making it more expensive.

Although members of the panel seemed totally unconvinced about congestion charging in S'bury unfortunately they stood firmly behind the bid. We're seriously considering sending an objection to the bid to the DfTransport.

2, Budget for 2006/7

The cabinet want to limit council tax increases next year to 4%. This would mean a cut of £888,000 from the departments budget. In addition another £250,000 available this year through changes in public transport won't be available next year. Of these savings it has been stated that £523,00 can be found without affecting services (mainly by losing 6.5 staff). Questions were raised how this can be done but the Director seemed very confident. The rest would have to be found by cuts to public transport (£235,000 or 10% of this year's spending!) and highways maintenance. The highways maintenance loss would be partly offset by the planned borrowing of £2m to do major works on the B roads in the County.

Serious concerns were expressed at these cuts. It was pointed out that £500,000 is equivalent to 0.5% increase in the council tax which would cost the average household £6 per year. The planned budget was narrowly turned down by the panel but whether the cabinet will take any notice remains to be seen.

yours, Dave Green. Shrewsbury FOE.

And from Paige Mitchell of Herefordshire FOE

Dear Friends

20's Plenty - for a fairer road network and better environments for communities

We are entering a new phase in the movement for 20mph limits. In October, Transport 2000 launched its 20's Plenty Action Pack for local groups. And with the return of Parliament, the Road Safety Bill is back in play. A default 20mph limit for streets where people 'live, work and play' has been tabled along with other Safer Streets Coalition amendments for the Third Reading of the Bill in the House of Lords in three weeks. We expect the Bill to return to the House of Commons early in the New Year.

The Slower Speeds Initiative's contribution to this phase of the campaign is an e-letter supporters can send to their MPs by visiting

<http://www.slower-speeds.org.uk/20s-Plenty>

We want as many people as possible to write to their MPs so that the Government will change its position on 20mph limits and adopt the Safer Streets Coalition amendment.

In addition to the letter writing campaign, there will be a national Day of Action on the 22nd of November, organised by Transport 2000. If you are involved in a local campaign for a 20mph limit, the day will be an ideal opportunity to raise the issue in the press and with local politicians.

You can get the Action Pack and details of the Day of Action by visiting

<http://www.transport2000.org.uk>

and clicking on Change Your Street.

I hope you will send an e-letter and participate in the day of action.

with best wishes

Paige Mitchell Coordinator Slower Speeds Initiative