

Civic Matters
Issue No. 6
March 2010



There is a lot packed into this issue of Civic Matters. You can pick and choose the articles that interest you by clicking on the relevant contents below to get straight to the items of interest.

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GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

Tories unveil radical planning overhaul

Speculation grows on Government planning guidance for historic environment

Far sighted report sheds new lights on shifting land use

Manifesto for Churches published

Transport campaigners unveil manifesto

City of Culture shortlist announced

Fewer World Heritage Site bids

Politicians search for civic vote

The Conservative's long awaited Green Paper on the planning system was launched by David Cameron on 22 February. It contains much of interest to the civic movement, including:

- Abolition of regional spatial strategies and house building targets
- A stronger role for Local Plans with restriction on appeal rights and a commitment to "collaborative democracy" in drawing up plans from the "ground level"; that would put civic societies centre stage
- Removing the final say over Local Plans from Planning Inspectors
- New incentives in which neighbourhoods receive a share of any local tariff raised from development
- Abolition of the Infrastructure Planning Commission and the final say on major new developments to be with the Secretary of State following public inquiries
- Introduction of a "presumption in favour of sustainable development"
- Strategic authorities to prepare "Infrastructure Plans" on issues like transport, minerals and waste and be under a "duty to co-operate" across boundaries
- Removing gardens from the definition of Brownfield development
- Readopting the "needs test" so councils can require developers to make the case for out-of-town development consent to rectifying genuine mistakes
- A "third party" right of appeal for residents against the granting of planning permission

Tony Burton is meeting Shadow Minister John Howell MP who is the principle author of the Green Paper

Copies of the Green Paper can be downloaded at <http://tinyurl.com/y8hravn> . Let us have your view by feeding back to jan.harvey@civicsocietyinitiative.org.uk or by joining the discussion forum thread on the Green Paper here <http://tinyurl.com/yzaw8tr>

Speculation grows on Government planning guidance for historic environment

The long awaited and much disputed new Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 15 on the historic environment may be squeezed through just before the General Election. The Civic Society Initiative was one of the leading critics of the draft PPS. Our concerns were widely shared and helped trigger a rare letter from a House of Commons Select Committee threatening to mount an inquiry unless there was a visible response by the Government to the concerns being raised. Planning Minister John Healey MP let it be known through newspaper comments that a rethink was underway and a strengthened PPS may make it through the Government machine towards the end of March - with 22 March being touted as a likely launch date. The PPS may also be accompanied by the Government's "vision" for the historic environment - the first strategic statement since 2001 and just weeks before an election.

Tony Burton met Shadow Culture Minister Ed Vaizey MP recently to reiterate our concerns for effective planning guidance on heritage

Far sighted report sheds new light on shifting land use

After two years of intensive study the Government's Foresight Unit has published what is sure to be an influential report on future land use change. The report highlights the stresses likely to arise from trends in new development and farming alongside a growing desire for green space from the public and the impact of climate change and pressure on natural resources. It highlights some key choices which we will face in the future and demonstrates why "business as usual" will result in serious stresses on the environment and land values. The three main stresses identified are the pressure on land in the South East of England, the implications of climate change and the challenge of meeting society's needs for beautiful, accessible, wildlife rich landscapes that also manage water resources, protect soils and store carbon. In a joint statement CPRE and the RSPB welcomed the report but highlighted concerns about a narrow economic perspective on the issue of development in the South East which runs the risk of ignoring the importance of "*beauty, tranquillity, birdsong, a sense of place - these all have a value which is not captured by the market*"

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/yjil9k4> and <http://tinyurl.com/ya934nr>

Manifesto for churches published

A short manifesto of key priorities to care for historic places of worship has been published by the national forum for organisations involved in these important parts of our heritage. Places of Worship @ Heritage Link is calling for continuation of current grant support and an end to the freeze on DCMS grant-in-aid schemes as well as efforts to raise public awareness of the number of historic places of worship at risk.

There is more information on POWlink at <http://www.heritagelink.org.uk/places-of-worship/>

Transport campaigners unveil manifesto

With one eye on the impending General Election a group of major national transport and environmental groups has launched a manifesto for *Improving everyday transport*. Led by the Campaign for Better Transport (previously Transport 2000) and involving groups like CPRE, Cyclists Touring Club and Friends of the Earth it includes proposals to make 20mph the default speed limit in areas where people live and work. Download the manifesto <http://tinyurl.com/yzyvzh7>

[Return to start of Government and Politics](#)

City of culture shortlist announced

Birmingham, Sheffield and Norwich will fight it out with Derry to be the UK's first City of Culture in 2013 following an announcement by Culture Minister Margaret Hodge MP. This aims to bring social and economic benefits through a step change in cultural activity in the

successful city.

More information is available at

http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/media_releases/6705.aspx

Fewer World Heritage Site bids

The Government has announced a new approach to considering the case for World Heritage Sites which will filter out more bids early on. A competition to draw up a new "tentative list" has been announced - read more at <http://tinyurl.com/yzvbo8w>

PLANNING NEWS

Taking control in Conservation Areas

Brownfield development continues to rise

Are gardens being grabbed?

Local papers to keep carrying planning applications

Design and access statement explained

Digital screens in your neighbourhood

Planning for economic growth

Taking control in Conservation Areas

Local council have powers to remove some of the freedoms from planning control which can make a real difference in Conservation Areas. They can issue "Article 4 Directions" which restrict "permitted development rights" and many civic societies have successfully campaigned for their use.

There is now useful guidance from English Heritage on the procedures - so why not download it at <http://tinyurl.com/yz3m33b> and ask your local authority to take action where you have concerns.

Brownfield development continues to rise

Encouraging new statistics show that 80% of all new housing is now on previously developed land and the higher density of new building delivered in recent years continues to be maintained. This is helpful for securing sustainable cities and regenerating run down areas, although concerns remain over the quality of the design of new building. The full results of the Government survey can be

Are gardens being grabbed?

New research from the Government suggests that some local authorities are overstating the amount of development taking place on back gardens. This has long been a cause for concern because gardens are included in the definition of brownfield land and so a target for new development.

Councils are urged to put effective policies into their development plans where there are concerns. The results are sure to be disputed but they show less than half of local authorities believe "garden grabbing" is an issue and of those who reported a problem only 5% have specific policies in place.

Planning Minister John Healey MP says "*Over time, so-called 'garden grabbing' can change the look and feel of a community without giving local people a choice, so it is good news that councils have told our independent experts that it is not a problem in the large majority of areas. I am determined to keep it that way and to see tougher action in a small number of garden grabbing hotspots.*

"For my part, I am changing the official guidance for planners to make it crystal clear that previously developed or former garden land is not necessarily suitable for development, and that the impact on the surrounding area should be considered."

Read more at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/news/corporate/1440002>

Local papers to keep carrying planning applications

Despite strong contrary pressure the Government has decided to continue to require planning applications to be publicised through local newspapers as well as on websites. Site notices for applications for conservation area and listed building consent must now also be for 21 days. There is more information [here](#)

Design and access statements explained

A growing number of planning applications are accompanied by information about both design and access. These statements can make a real difference to the success of new development and this useful briefing from the Urban Design Group explains what's involved.

Read it at <http://tinyurl.com/yzg57pl>

Digital screens in your neighbourhood

With events like the football World Cup and Olympics 2012 on the way there is a need for clear guidance on the location of large digital screens for public display. This has now been provided by CABI and English Heritage and can be seen at <http://tinyurl.com/yzh8nce>

Planning for economic growth

The Government has published a new Planning Policy Statement 4 *Planning for sustainable economic growth* which provides the framework for planning policies on business. It retains the sequential test which requires out of town developers to show there is no preferable town centre or edge of centre site while also promoting a "flexible" approach.

The new PPS4 can be downloaded at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/news/corporate/1422880>

Research, reports and campaigns

- Good foundations report published by the new economics foundation
- Green belt could be greener
- Refurbishing historic schools
- Involving young people in shaping places
- Wish list for public spaces
- Clean your street online
- West End stripped naked
- 20's plenty

Good Foundations report published by new economics foundation

A new report from pioneering charity the new economics foundations (nef) presents a challenge to the conventions for planning and designing new development. Drawing on practical experience in Peckham, south London nef proposes an approach which takes account of what communities think as well as the economics of development. It defines two key contributors to well-being - place happiness and place sustainability and supports an approach to planning which values the knowledge and skills of the local community as much as the professionals. Civic societies looking for ideas or evidence that there are alternatives to the current approaches to planning will find much to support them in the report.

Good Foundations can be downloaded from <http://www.neweconomics.org/publications/good-foundations>

Green Belt could be greener

The Green Belt is frequently seen as one of the most successful of all planning policies - preventing urban sprawl and helping regenerate towns and cities. It was introduced by the Civic Trust's founder, Duncan Sandys, when Planning Minister in the 1950s. In an important new report CPRE has joined with Natural England (the Government's adviser on the natural environment, access and landscape) to produce new research which shows how much people value these landscapes and the potential for it to do more by way of providing food or havens for nature.

Read the report at <http://tinyurl.com/ykexeok>

Refurbishing historic schools

There has been an intense debate in recent years about the impact of new school development and the priority being given to caring for and making better use of existing school buildings. English Heritage has now produced important guidance making the case for refurbishment and it can be downloaded at <http://tinyurl.com/yfc9hof>. People's priority is clear from the survey undertaken for the research. Two thirds think that refurbishing and extending old schools is more environmentally friendly than demolishing them and rebuilding new ones and 83% of respondents feel that local councils should do more to find new uses for old, empty schools,. Almost half feel that schools with historic character provide a more inspiring educational environment than modern ones. Three in four also say that historic schools contribute to the identity of a local area

Involving young people in shaping places

Civic societies may be interested in an initiative from CABE to involve 9 - 14 year olds in "place shaping". There is further information at <http://www.cabe.org.uk/news/young-people-shape-spaces-too> and your local architecture centre may well be able to help if you are interested in following things up. You can find yours at <http://www.architecturecentre.net/docs/home/>

Wish list for public spaces

CABE kicked off the 2010s with the publication of an exciting "wish list" for public spaces which mirrors many of the issues raised by the civic movement. CABE's wishes include street furniture to be designed and not out of a catalogue and for derelict sites to be used for allotments. Check out the wish list at <http://tinyurl.com/yjma99n>

Clean your street online

A new interactive website has been launched to help people take action against graffiti, overflowing rubbish bins, skips and litter - www.lovecleanstreets.org. This follows the success of www.fixmystreet.com which has revolutionised the way people can get local authorities to take action on broken pavements, pot holes and other street problems. Try them and see what impact it has on your local council.

This follows the release of new figures from Keep Britain Tidy that show a small reduction in the amount of litter found in streets, parks and public spaces. There is more information at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/news/2010/100211a.htm>

The political importance of clearing up "eyesore rubbish" has been widely reported, including in the Guardian at <http://tinyurl.com/y1gyaoo>

West End stripped naked

In a major boost for our Street Pride campaign (see www.streetpride.org.uk) Westminster City Council has announced a major initiative to rid its streets of clutter in time for the 2012 Olympics.

More information at

20s plenty

The campaign to reduce speed limits has received a major boost with the publication of new guidance from the Department for Transport which encourages councils to think about introducing 20mph zones and not just reducing limits on individual streets. This follows a successful pilot in Portsmouth reported in a previous Civic Matters. There is more information at <http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/roadsafety/speed-limits/>

There is a lot more useful information from the campaign group 20s Plenty For Us at <http://www.20splentyforus.org.uk/> - why not encourage your local authority to join the campaign?

Key Links

The Heritage Alliance promotes the role of the voluntary movement in the heritage sector

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

Public Realm advice for civic societies

http://www.publicrealm.info/prian_civic_societies.html

The Planning Portal - your one-stop-shop for planning information online

<http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/>