



17th Annual Conference

Withersdane Hall, Wye. 16 & 17 September 1989

HIGH SPEED KENT: RAIL, HOUSES, LAND

Michael Burchell - Countryside Strategy for Kent

We were very favourably impressed by Mr. Burchell - Chief Environmental and Business Manager K.C.C.

He said there would be major changes both from Channel Tunnel and motorway pressures and from agricultural competition with new members of the E.E.C. A survey was needed to mark landscape changes and to record surviving woodland - changes of land use from agriculture should not be irreversible: there might again be food shortages. Government was, however, regrettably reducing planning controls.

Professor Bryn Green - Conservation and Countryside Management

Prof. of Countryside Management at Wye College, London University, Bryn Green, said it was economic forces which through farming hand shaped the landscape since the 2nd World War. Planners had concentrated on towns leaving the countryside to the farmers. The current favourite image of the countryside was the product of low input - low output dog and stick farms of the 30s. Since these days home food production had increased from 30% to 80% but at great environmental cost. Farmers must now reduce surplus and produce less. With a stable population, 2.5% annual increases in productivity would result in a million spare hectares of land by the year 2000. The great challenge to amenity organisations was to say what kind of countryside they wanted to see and to work out how to achieve and pay for it.

Mary Allwood - Village Homes for Village People

Mary Allwood of the National Agricultural Centre Rural Trust, talked on the problems of housing in the rural community. Conversion of redundant buildings was generally more expensive than new building. Small numbers of houses available to local residents only and in perpetuity could receive exceptional consents for land in Local Plans and could be made available for renting and for shared ownership.

A Conference Discussion Group reported on the need for

- Sensitive design for changes of use of redundant farm buildings and the exclusion of inappropriate uses.
- The insistence that planning permission should be required for medium sized agricultural buildings with reference to sighting, design and materials.
- Tighter control of shopfront and garage forecourt design in and between villages.

Bob Dunn MP for Dartford, spoke on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link chiefly as it affected North West Kent. Dartford was already badly affected by motorways and bridges and he was critical of British Rails "high handed" attitude. It was pointed out that the House of Lords Select Committee could be powerful in securing amendments and that we should be in close contact with Kent members.

Harry Roberts - Rail Freight Through Kent

As External Affairs Manager British Rail Board, Mr Roberts said British Rail plan an 8% return on investment given the threefold increase in traffic expected by 1994/5-mainly of manufactured and tertiary goods. Traffic would be taken off the roads by better integration of rail and road facilities, with B.R. concentrating on swapbody intermodal containers. Trains would be assembled at Crewe and Willesden. Thus Kent will be a conduit for business generated North and West of London. Classic freight would not use the Channel Tunnel High Speed Rail Link because of gradients, axle loading, etc.

John Dean - Town Improvements

The Leicester City Planning Officer and Professor of Planning at Nottingham University gave an illustrated talk on what had been achieved in Leicester. The City spends up to £2.5m a year on car parking, cleaning buildings and maintaining and enhancing its 8 mile-long, wardened, riverside parkland largely created from industrial wasteland.

IMPACT: In Gravesend and Ramsgate

Kent County Council has organised impact schemes for urban renewal in Gravesend - now complete, and Ramsgate - in progress. Local societies reported on how they viewed their respective schemes. In Gravesend publicity for impact has used excellent on site notices. It was suggested that a shop window exhibiting a rolling programme of everything completed, being tackled and projected would be useful together with a suggestion box.

In Ramsgate representatives of local societies met the Impact Manager, the Assistant Planning Director, whose main concern is conservation and any interested councillors - to thrash out matters of mutual interest. Called FORS for Forum of Ramsgate Societies - it sends representatives to the decision making committee of Impact comprising members of Thanet District Council, Kent County Council and National Trust.

Planning Matters

Martin Bacon, Canterbury City Council's Technical Director, spoke about Local Plans. With the January 1989 streamlining proposals structure Plans were to be replaced by county planning policy statements which would be final without further reference to the Secretary of State. He repeated Nicholas Ridley's view that houses were not pollution but that they do need space, and that concentration may be more appropriate than pepper pot development.

Conference discussion group on Local Plans thought main pressures in order of importance, housing, infilling, employment and shopping.

Lack of houses to rent - Price of land - High tech businesses employing few people - Pressures of hypermarkets & supermarkets.

Brian Briscoe - County Planning Officer said the Revised County Struction Plan had been completed though not yet passed by the Secretary of State.

Expenditure on the Environmental programme which included the White Cliffs Country Project would be £100,000 higher this year. Demand for building materials was exceeding forecasts and new extraction permissions would be needed for brick, clay and chalk. Dept. of Transport traffic forecasts for the County were high-140% plus in 10 years - a good reason for maximising rail freight.

Michael Odling - Chairman of the Development Planning and Transportation Committee K.C.C. said his aim was to ensure that decision making was local. Judgement of the right balance was better made in County Hall and Town Hall than in Whitehall. Speaking on British Rails plans he said Kent needs environmental protection from the impact of noise on communities next to existing lines and K.C.C. would initiate a campaign to change the law to achieve this.

Ken Wraight Committee Member

DOVER FILM FESTIVAL

12-15 March, Dover Town Hall

The annual film festival will take place this year as a tribute to the late Ray Warner.

The Dover District 1989 will be shown along with Ray's marvellous film of the River Dour. Ivan Green will be presenting "Then and Now". and Dover Film Society will be showing a film of their choice. The exhibition by Dover Library and Dover Museum will feature the history of tourism in the area.

Make a date in your diary! Matinee performance on Wednesday 14th.