

*The work of the*

# PLANNING

*Sub-Committee*

Reported by JACK WOOLFORD, Chairman

In a Green Paper the DTLR (Dept of Transport, Local Govt & Regions) proposes fundamental changes in planning to speed up development, especially for business, by abolishing County Structure Plans and Local Plans, increasing the powers of the Secretary of State and planning inspectors and reducing those of statutory consultees including environmental and water authorities. Planning power goes to the new English Regions (eg the South East Region) whose assemblies are nominated and composed of members whose officers in Regional Development Agencies (SEEDA and GOSE) are government appointees. Below these will be Local Development Frameworks (including 'real community participation') with annual statements and 3-year Reviews of Core Policies. The DTLR also proposes to speed up and cheapen planning for 'major infrastructure projects' by restricting local inquiries to matters of detail only. The Secretary of State will designate them for debate in both Houses of Parliament, after which the inquiry will be time-tabled. The existing system can admittedly be faulted. After six years of preparation the Dover Local Plan, already outdated, is still not adopted. However, obstruction is no less likely in Parliament, and Local Planning Frameworks, which are to include action plans for town centres, neighbourhoods and villages, may be

slowed down by staff shortages and financial deficits, not to mention barristers and extra-legal protesters on site. 'Swampy' is not dead.

Meanwhile we wonder how many more amusement centres the local market will bear and if the Western Heights Residents' Association will defeat revived housing proposals at Breeden. We wonder if the Heathfield Home Zone, which has KCC

backing, will succeed in closing the rat-run but force existing residents to park elsewhere. Dover Town Council and the Dover Society support the opponents of the scheme. We also support the Town Council's determination to maintain a Dover Town Guide and not merge it into a District Guide. The proposed improvement to Oswald Passage is admirable.

We welcome the District Council's decision to transform the White Cliffs Experience into a discovery centre because it will primarily benefit the local community (and strengthen the case for the return of bus services to the Market Square) as will also the extension of the Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme. We are also involved in the Community Strategy Regeneration Scheme, applauding its objectives but somewhat sceptical about the achievement of its targets given the District's financial straits, not to mention possible clashes with the forthcoming Local Development Framework.

We note the availability of SEEDA resources for a combined housing and industrial redevelopment of the (non-listed) Buckland Paper Mill and await results, as we do also from the new proposals to reduce congestion in Townwall Street and the promised five developers' schemes for St. James and York Street.