

APRIL MEETING

Buckland Mill

A talk by Allert Riepma
reported by Alan Lee

At the April AGM the talk was given by Allert Riepma, the senior development manager for the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). They are responsible for a number of mixed use schemes in Kent and Essex.

Their projects in the Dover area are at Bettshanger, Connaught Barracks, Aylesham Workshop Units and Buckland Mill.

HCA'S development partner at the Buckland Mill site is Gillcrest Homes.

The paper mill finally closed at the end of June 2000 and the site fell into disrepair. South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) acquired the site in 2002. They tidied the site up, improved the river flow, installed a fish trap and then in 2004 took the site to market.

A development agreement with Gillcrest Homes was entered into in 2006. Following the economic downturn in 2007/8 a revised planning application was proposed and was granted.

Construction work on the site continued and in early 2013 the first 56 affordable housing units were sold to Town and Country for rent. In the middle of that year Buckland House, a grade II listed building was renovated and refurbished for commercial use and placed on the market.



Allert Riepma 2014 AGM

On 1st April 2012 HCA had taken over all responsibilities from SEEDA.

HCA is a new government agency working with people and places to deliver homes, economic growth and jobs. They focus on five key areas:

- 1) Affordable housing
- 2) Market interventions
- 3) Public land
- 4) Economic Assets Programme
- 5) Regulation

In 2012/13 their land programmes in Kent and Essex attracted £143m of private sector investment. The estimated overall investment by HCA in Dover in 2012/14 on land and housing is £18.7m. HCA will also be the disposal agent for surplus public land. Between 2015/20 the government is set to sell at least £5 billion of surplus land and property. At present HCA has a land portfolio with an area of 9,400 hectares, of which 2,264 ha are in the South East. Just under 700 ha could be developed by March 2015, 1,100 between 2015/30 and the remainder has very little chance of any development before 2030. The value of their land holding in the South East is put at £200,000,000.

The average price of a house in Dover is £200,000, £53,000 below the national average. In the Buckland area the average price a house sells for is only £104,000. Since 2012 prices have risen by 12.5%. The expectation is that by 2017 prices will rise by a further 20%.

The role of HCA at Buckland Mill is as a landowner, an investor and to serve local people and businesses.

To date investment in Buckland Mill, including acquisition of the site, is £4.38m and £2.8m affordable housing grant. Private money spent on preparation and construction so far totals £2m this will rise by completion to more than £30m.

Buckland Mill. When finished will be 406 housing units. This will be spread over 4 phases.

Phase 1] A planning application has been submitted to use Buckland House for education purposes. A new Health Centre is proposed. A number of supermarket retailers have shown an interest in using the mill buildings for retail. Interest has

also been shown in setting up a Care Home on the site.

Phase 2] Will be a mix of housing and apartments. A detailed planning application is expected this year.

Phase 3] Will be a similar mix. The application is expected in March 2016.

Phase 4] Will mainly be housing. The application is expected in March 2017.

HCA/Gillcrest Homes are keen to engage with the local community at each stage of the planning application.

Risks to the scheme are low sales volumes in the area, low demand and rising construction costs.

On the plus side Allert stated that quality and good design will always sell and the flexibility of future phases will allow for future market changes. The improved transport links with High Speed1, early signs of increased development in the town and discovery park all point towards the success of the scheme.

In summing up Allert stated that after a slow and difficult start the development has now gained momentum. Both HCA and Gillcrest Homes are committed to the long term success of this project. Main challenges ahead are rising costs and reduced funding but these should be offset by the improving economic climate and increased development activity in Dover. The Buckland Mill development can act as a catalyst for regeneration in Dover and its surrounding area.

After finishing with a question and answer session Allert Riepma thanked the Society for allowing the Society him time to present details of the development to our members.