**Planning Application 15/10519/OUT (Redcliffe) - Land at Bradford Road, Corsham**

The Northern Area Planning Committee met on Wednesday 17th February 2016. Amongst the items on the agenda was the subject planning application, a resubmittal of application 14/04179/OUT.

Permission on 14/04179/OUT was refused by Wiltshire Council on ecological grounds (bats) and the subsequent appeal was dismissed by the planning inspector in his Appeal Decision APP/Y3940/W/15/3002731 dated 18th August 2015 which concluded "*there is not sufficient information to conclude that there would be no significant effect when the appeal scheme is considered in combination with other projects or development in the vicinity. In which case it is necessary to require an appropriate assessment for the appeal scheme to be carried out before a decision can be made as to whether the scheme would have an unacceptable effect on the Bath and Bradford on Avon Bats Special Area of Conservation*".

The resubmitted application introduced mitigation measures for the site and an Appropriate Assessment was carried out by the county ecologist. However, neither the measures nor the assessment took account of the issue highlighted by the planning inspector - "the in combination effects when considered with other plans or projects in the vicinity". As this was the crux of the planning inspector's decision, all three members of the public opposing the application concentrated their arguments on this issue. My 'speech' concluded with the following: "*In spite of the Planning Inspector’s ruling, no attempt whatsoever has been made to correlate one planning application with another. There****is****no report on in-combination effects*".

However, the very essence of the planning inspector's decision and our three arguments were not even brushed aside, no further mention of them was made! The planning officer's required (by the Planning Code of Good Practice) response to the issues raised concentrated solely, and apparently deliberately, on minor points. Similarly the following 'debate' by members of the planning committee avoided the heart of the matter, the in-combination effects.

This leaves the impression that genuine discussion of the planning inspector's decision and in-combination effects would have proved just too awkward and would have diverted from the apparently preordained, headlong charge into the precipice of 'approval in the absence of a 5-year housing land supply'.

A committee member did raise the point that they appeared powerless, as every possible point or argument was 'trumped' by the absence of this mystical 5-year supply - so what was the point of the committee? I would agree. I asked the planning officer, by email, a number of questions, following the meeting, as follows:

* What is the 5-year housing land supply (amount, perhaps in hectares) we are aiming to achieve?
* If we don't know what it is, how will we know when we have achieved it?
* And again, if we don't know what it is, it seems that planning committees will have to go on granting permissions for just about every proposed development ad infinitum. True?
* And once all the current proposed developments, the 700-odd in west Corsham for example, have been built, how can we continue to find further land for a 5-year supply? The year-on-year requirement for a 5-year land supply would have us build on every last vestige of countryside would it not? When could we say that we have reached a limit of development?

I appreciate that, to planners and perhaps planning committees, these are simplistic questions but to members of the public it appears that this system is deeply flawed. Or to use a much over-used word ... the continued granting of permissions for **sustainable** development is **not sustainable**!

But not only that, this 'headlong charge' is unsound and misguided according to many sources. There are many examples of this unsoundness in Danny Dorling's *All that is Solid*(2014). He says "*Today, advocates of building our way out of the current crisis say that five years after the 1929 crash almost 300,000 homes were built in the UK and over £100 million of mortgages were being issued every year, a huge sum for those times. The majority of housing media pundits today call for a similarly aggressive increase in home-building and lending now. But what they almost all ignore is that in the 1920s and 30s, building was coupled with growing income equality. Simply building new housing in isolation did not alleviate the housing crisis; more and more people had to come to be able to afford to bu*y *that housing*".

In the winter 2015/16 issue of*The Land*, an article 'Tackling our Housing Crisis' is subtitled 'Why building more homes is not the answer'. The article gives an analogy: "*In his seminal work on famine, Amartya Sen showed that lack of supply was a minor factor in comparison with the ability to buy. In the great Bengal famine, people died in the streets in front of shops bulging with grain*". The article goes on to say "*Similarly in situations of wealth inequality, a segment of the population may not be able to afford the market price of housing, no matter how many houses are built*". I have scanned the article (four separate pages) and attach it for information.

Income equality is at the heart of the crisis. In the 2011 Census, 1,570,228 people in England and Wales said they had a second address in England and Wales outside the local authority of their primary residence, that they used for 30 days or more each year.

The Land article mentioned above states that (as practised in Denmark) foreign investors should be deterred. Little does more to encapsulate the sorry state of the British housing market than pull-outs such as The Times ‘Bricks and Mortar’. Full page ads enlighten the reader “Thirty Casson Square”, “Studio prices from £650,000”, “Three bed prices from £3.6M”; “Leinster Square”, “Apartments from £4,450,000”, “Townhouses from £6,250,000”. Just who is this supplement aimed at? How many of The Times 400,000 readers are in this market?

And the influence of these prices cascades down into the suburbs and then on into the countryside.

Anyway, back to the main issue ... **why did the 17th February meeting of the Northern Area Planning Committee ignore the heart of the matter regarding planning application 15/10519/OUT - the planning inspector's 'in combination effects'**?

Sincerely

Paul Turner