

Morning Q & A Session:

- *Cllr Helen Powell, South Kesteven District Council/Lincolnshire County Council:* **Self set trees and hedges overhanging roads. Could farmers take on more responsibility for felling and trimming?**
Mike Greetham: All farmers need is to be told. Many are now prohibited from doing anything in ditches and waterways, eg taking out a fallen tree, because they are told it could cause flooding further downstream. They are subsidised via environmental schemes not to cut hedges more often than every two years. In addition there's not much time left because as from today (1st March) any farmer cutting a hedge is breaking the law till July due to the protection afforded to nesting birds. Furthermore when working from the highway there are also road traffic movement issues which have to be dealt with. But ultimately it's all about effective communication with the farmer.
- **The Government sees Grade 1 and 2 arable land as building land, but national housing policy doesn't take into account a county's own economy and character. Protecting small hamlets from becoming built-up, and putting houses where they are actually needed, are important.**
Jeffery Kenyon: Speaking purely from NKDC's perspective – planners are between a rock and a hard place as the Government pushes for more house building. In response planning authorities are now forced into developing in the 'most suitable manner in the area' but it's a fine line to tread. In Central Lincolnshire, 64% of new housing is to be in Greater Lincoln, but the question is where to where to put them as the best sites are taken? If anyone has any thoughts, then let us know.
- *Marie Chapman, Firsby Group Parish Council in East Lindsey:* **Small villages face issues around the definition of "sustainability", leading to very small villages dying. Increased numbers of incoming retired people push out young working people who can't afford to live there.**
Gary Bosworth: 'Sustainable development' is a contradiction – if you build something it brings change with it by definition. The Dutch talk about 'liveability' which includes cohesiveness and ready access to services. Without more houses, will small hamlets still be viable in 10-20 years' time?

- The emphasis in development is always on providing larger properties which are rarely suitable for local people. Many would like to downsize but the smaller properties just aren't there locally to move into.**

Ian Biddulph: So how can local planning authorities control the location and mix of housing types?

Jeffery Kenyon: A developer won't build what he can't sell. The planning authority can only try to match developments in a coherent way with the communities they are destined for. The Neighbourhood Planning process will certainly play a part, saying what the mix is that the *community* believes should happen.

Gary Bosworth: I used to work for a firm of land agents/surveyors. Although the demand is there for smaller homes it is more profitable for developers to build larger houses. Furthermore most landowners want the highest return when selling their land which in turn encourages larger properties to be built.
- Cllr Marianne Overton MBE, Leader of the Lincolnshire Independents: The Government appears to believe that the only way to grow the economy is to build houses. The data on which Local Plans have to accept the targets for new houses is faulty. When you ask where the jobs are to come from, they're all in sectors set for reduction apart from construction! Also home ownership seems to be the only acceptable model, at the expense of other forms of stakeholding. So this conference is welcome and it is good to hear such positive ideas.**
- Cllr William Grover, East Lindsey District Council: I recently read an article about a proposal some 25 years ago to create an East of England motorway by extending the M11 northwards through the County to connect with the Humber Bridge. If investment could be found, would such a proposal be the answer or would it just make more problems?**

Mike Greetham: A study in 2009 paid for by the County Council interviewed 30 businesses in Lincolnshire, most of whom said better roads would bring money into the County. The produce we grow has to go somewhere! It's a fact that Lincolnshire Cooperative Society finds it easier to service its shops in Nottinghamshire than the ones it has in Lincolnshire due to the County's poor road network.
- Ian Macalpine-Leny: Gary Bosworth, why didn't you mention the *natural environment* asset? Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership commissioned Leeds Beckett University to put a value on visitors walking a dog or enjoying the countryside in some other way and the resulting figure was £325 million per year. Those who come to Lincolnshire to engage with an aspect of nature (eg to see seals) equate to 60,000 people per year. Birdwatching is a huge draw, particularly if a rare bird is seen and publicised. Visitors to the County use our local shops, eateries, B&Bs etc.**

Gary Bosworth: It's about how businesses can respond to opportunities, either through nature tourism or more creatively. The message is to sell your business so that it can contribute in other ways rather than just tourism.

- *Eileen Gilliatt, Fleet Parish Council:* **When will we persuade farmers to change set-a-side land and field verges to traditional meadow, and the general public to accept farm produce that looks less than perfect?**
Mike Greetham: 'Wonky veg' is hitting the news at the moment. All my life we have been threatened with a starving world. It's too easy to put imperfect produce into anaerobic digesters because so much of what is bought is being wasted by households. There is no danger of us running out of land as Lincolnshire is actually growing due to new land being formed in The Wash due to natural deposition. This will eventually become high grade agricultural land. When it comes to field verges then someone in power needs to make a decision, ie create a Directive, and farmers will simply get on with it.
- *Andrew Bell, Deeping St James Parish Council:* **This year Lincolnshire County Council came very close to withdrawing its subsidy for public transport.**
Eileen Gilliatt (see above): Rural transitional funding from the Government was allocated by the County to public transport: £5 million this year, £2.5 million next year, then £0 after that.
- *Lindsey Cawrey, North Kesteven District Council:* **I'm very interested in what Gary Bosworth said about 'liveability' – please send more information! Is there a way to make it work in this country?**
Gary Bosworth: Yes I can share information from my Dutch colleagues. However there are cultural differences in that the Dutch have a different attitude which is more communal orientated by nature. But some aspects will surely be applicable here.

Afternoon Q & A Session:

- *Nick Sandford, The Woodland Trust:* **I wanted to hear more about the link between the natural environment and rural productivity.**
Alastair Paton: The DEFRA strategy contains a strand relating to the environment and another on our rural objectives; the two go hand in hand. The last Natural Capital Committee (NCC) report made the link between the importance of ensuring a healthy natural environment at the same time as securing economic growth and the new NCC will no doubt consider taking this forward. Defra's 25-year environment plan will take a 'natural capital' approach. Businesses need to look at *natural assets* in the same light as *economic assets*.

- Geoff Hirst, Keelby Council: Thinking about our Community Library & Resource Centre: volunteers are increasingly being expected to run public services rather than paid council staff. When managing volunteers, councils need to realise a former business managing director won't take petty rules lying down. Will this policy go any further? What about 10-15 years' time?**

Eliska Cheeseman: Volunteers should not just be expected to do that, rather they should be supported to do it. Help is needed to build capacity, eg to enable the voluntary sector to make applications for funding.
- Cllr Helen Powell (see above): I have attended London meetings about LEPs, and have been told that most investment in future is going to come through the LEPs. How do local elected members get represented on LEPs? Business people seem to be deciding where money is spent. Where are the views of the public, where exactly is the access point?**

Jon Burgess: A LEP is a company limited by guarantee. Governance structures are designed to increase engagement with local authorities but they can always be improved. Within a LEP it is usual for advisory boards to address specific topic areas.
- Marie Chapman (see above): Volunteers and community enterprises / groups seem to be looked on as part of the delivery process. However they pull in £millions per year for local employment. The community along with the Third Sector is overlooked at our peril because without them there can be no community resilience.**
- Fiona White, Community Lincs: Having no Superfast Broadband is impacting on very small communities like mine. Because of my job I know how vital that is, so what is being doing about it? In addition, once you have Broadband there is a lack of a co-ordinated approach to demonstrating how to use it to open up markets, ie no strategic leadership or practical support for people to get on board.**

Alistair Paton: A lot of this is industry led, so in rural areas making the economic case for installing infrastructure can be difficult, the Government's role is to help where there is market failure. The target is to go from 90% superfast broadband coverage to 95% of UK premises by the end of 2017 and we are on track for that.

Jon Burgess: We did have a project in North Lincolnshire that proved difficult to progress. Mobile phone reception is also a problem. So we are lobbying on both fronts. EU money is available for this but it is difficult to obtain.

Eliska Cheeseman: The last 10% to achieve broadband coverage were the key concern in our communities. We introduced a voucher scheme to purchase their own solutions using different technologies. Norfolk has EFRA-funding, going through the LEP and DEFRA funds the gaps once they know where those gaps actually are.

- *Ian Biddulph, CPRE East Mids Region: **When the Government sets the target, who ensures it's delivered?***
Alastair Paton: Broadband Delivery UK is responsible for progress and monitoring how the Government's roll out programme is going.
- *Fiona White (see above): **How do you get businesses to make best use of high speed broadband?***
Eliska Cheeseman: Some of the European Regional Development Fund is allocated to businesses to make sure they know how to make the best of their broadband. I know of one 100 year old business that is now doing most of its work online thanks to broadband.
- *Tony Stott, CPRE Leicestershire: **In CPRE there is concern that LEPs put the environment low down on their agendas. Is your LEP doing more than the others? If so, how can we get other LEPs to follow suit?***
Jon Burgess: There are Strategic Advisory Groups including one on Local Environment. I could offer to start conversations with other LEPs and perhaps suggest a case study approach.
- *Ian Lings, CPRE Lincolnshire: **Do you believe that Neighbourhood Plans will carry a lot of weight in the future?***
Eliska Cheeseman: Neighbourhood Plans are an unused resource at the moment and are an important starting point for building sustainable thriving communities.
Jon Burgess: As well as Neighbourhood Plans you also need direct involvement with your Local Planning Authority.
- *Susanna Matthan, North Kesteven District Council: **I am grateful for this forum, which has produced more questions than answers. How can we simplify the system and get more accountability? What's going on seems very far away from the electors' wishes with more layers of separation being created. We need a system for accountability rather than the principles expressed by this afternoon's speakers. Who Do People Talk To?***
- *Tony Cox, Anderby Parish Council, Lincolnshire County Access Forum: **The former London Employer Accord, getting people off benefits and into work, wouldn't have worked without brokerage and funding schemes as well as apprenticeship providers. Employers aren't being incentivised to go looking on the internet for apprentices. What role does brokerage play in the new apprenticeship scheme?***
Alastair Paton: Responsibility for apprenticeship policy rests with the Department for Business innovation and skill. I don't know the answer to that particular question, but will find out.

- **Will the 10 point plan work?**

Alastair Paton: It was developed to increase rural productivity. Its broad, encompassing nature means yes it will help to do that. We have already started to implement it.

- *Cllr Valery Gemmell, Fleet/Holbeach Parish Council:* **Thanks for a very informative conference. I would like delegates to know that there is a petition available if you object to funding cuts to Lincolnshire.**
- *An East Lindsey delegate:* Eastern Lincolnshire switched off streetlights as a response to austerity. I'm not sure the Government understands how it's affecting rural areas and the motivation of young people. Everything has to be done online to save cost yet the broadband isn't good enough to do that. The 10 Point Plan does not reflect what it is actually like on our patch.
- **Regarding connectivity to broadband, at a recent event I was told there are 10% of properties you'll never reach. In Norway, because of difficulties caused by mountains, special kit costing £200 has been made available that enables anyone to get high speed broadband.**
- *Another delegate:* 5% of the County's population are unlikely to be reached by high speed broadband in the short term. Also bear in mind the dilemma that every slide mentions "importance" and "massive demand for superfast broadband" but ours went live two years ago and so far there has only been a 23% take-up. Fiona White mentioned support to help businesses to adapt but we had two ERDF funded projects for 500 SMEs and even then, with publicity, it was difficult to attract SMEs to events and larger companies were not eligible anyway. The infrastructure seems more or less there and mobile provision is improving too, but a small % of the County will not be serviced in the short term. Local authority cuts are also having an impact on investment.

The Chair thanked all delegates and speakers for their contributions throughout the day.

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