



Cedric Thomas, Vice Chairman
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CAUSE – LOOKING AHEAD

It is now fourteen months since the CAUSE working group met – not because we had gone to sleep and forgotten the campaign. Rather it was as a result of zero progress on the Local Plan Review until the back-end of last year. Why? Firstly, because there was doubt about its validity after the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill became Law. Then in February 2003 the County Council published the Draft Version of Structure Plan Alterations 2001-2016; however, on advice from the Government Office for the Eastern Region this Plan was put on hold. The Stansted/M11 Corridor Study (to which we responded with objections), the forthcoming Regional Planning Guidance (RPG14) for the East of England and the Government's consultation of the future of aviation all tended to add to the delay.

Our chairman, Philip Rowley, and I decided that now would be an appropriate time to put you all in the picture on all the developments to date and to look ahead.

Local Plan – the Housing Chapter

Towards the end of last year the District Council decided to go ahead on the basis of the 1998 adopted Structure Plan. It was proposed to deal with objections to and revision of the Deposit Version of the Local Plan in four meetings, starting 25th November 2003, with the Consolidated Revised Deposit Version being approved on 23rd March 2004. The third meeting of the Panel on 23rd February only considered the Housing Chapter, the seventh of the eighteen chapters in the Plan. So we can expect a considerable delay in the Plan's publication, possibly until early autumn. Then there will be a six week period for lodging objections followed by a Public Inquiry in spring 2005, with adoption following in 2006.

There were 2,863 comments on the Housing Chapter of the December 2000 version, about half of them from Bishop's Stortford. Unfortunately little notice has been taken to objections from local organisations or townspeople, the housing distribution strategy remains unchanged and the Areas of Special Restraint have not been converted to Green Belt. Neither has the matter of airport related housing been dropped.

There is, however, a crumb of comfort in the cancelling of Policy HSG1 – Apportionment of Housing to Settlements and Control of Development. Not that the apportionment method has been dropped, it is now contained in an Appendix 1a. The new Policy HSG1 is titled Phased Release of Housing Land, and has a section on Stansted Airport related development, worded as follows: -

"Areas of Special Restraint 1 and 2 at Bishop's Stortford will only be released for Stansted Airport related housing development, post 2006, if monitoring shows that the 692 airport related dwellings are unable to be accommodated on other Bishop's Stortford Phases 1 and 2 allocated and windfall sites."

Meeting this requirement should not be difficult as the table to Appendix 1a shows 766 allocated sites as at April 2003. Three of these sites have very low estimates of the number of dwellings they can accommodate: -

Riverside/Adderley Road	40 quoted, outline consent granted for 150
Goods Yard/John Dyde Training College	200 quoted, capacity in excess of 600
Herts & Essex Hospital	165 quoted, consent granted for 270

In addition I have identified at least 250 dwellings in the windfall category. Thus the total rises to about 1,630, more than adequate to satisfy the plan requirement plus the 692 airport related dwellings, thus obviating the need to build on ASRs 1 and 2.

It will still be necessary to challenge the requirement for airport related housing, and we have good grounds on which to do so! The ratio of passengers per employee as estimated by the Airports Inquiry Inspector in 1985 was about 660. In 2003 the passenger throughput had risen to 18 million with 10,500 employees, a ratio of 1,700 passengers per employee. As the rapid and tremendous growth of the airport's passenger throughput has not generated the number of employees originally planned for it is

difficult to see any justification for retaining the airport related housing as an addition specifically to Bishop's Stortford's allocation rather than distributing them throughout the District. This is especially so in the light of a letter, dated 29 Feb. 2000, from Chris Mullin, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, DETR, to Bowen Wells, MP.

The following extracts from that letter are relevant: -

"Current evidence suggests that housing demand generated by the expansion of Stansted Airport is less than was originally anticipated,

"..... the allocation in each plan is based on the conclusion of the 1981-1983 public inquiry Inspector that the dwelling requirement attributable to such expansion would not exceed 10,000. In accepting the Inspector's conclusion, the then Secretary of State also made it clear that the extent of the development needed and its precise location should be established through the statutory planning process.

"I can tell you that both Structure Plans will be reviewed over the next two years or so to take account of the emerging revised Regional Planning Guidance for the South East, and this will provide an opportunity for the Stansted-related housing provision to be reassessed."

So far there has been no evidence that any reassessment has been contemplated, rather that the County Council looks upon the Inspector's 1985 assessment as set in tablets of stone.

Whilst the Structure Plan reviews have not progressed Mullin's comments still hold good, although the final outcome of the extra runway battle may have an effect.

RPG14 – Regional Planning Guidance for the East of England

The draft RPG will be submitted to the Deputy Prime Minister late February/early March 2004, but further studies have to be undertaken to inform a submission to the Government in June on major infrastructure and any other significant public funding needs, and to inform a revision of the draft. The final draft RPG will then be published in September for a twelve week consultation period, leading to a Public Examination in mid-2005, and approval of the final RPG in 2006.

After approval Local Authorities in the region will have three years in which to prepare Local Development Documents (the successors to Local Plans). In order to be in conformity with the new RPG, East Herts. will have to start preparing this document straight after adopting their Local Plan! It is almost certain that there will be no County Structure Plans in the future.

The draft has been prepared on the basis that Stansted Airport will only develop to the full capacity of the existing runway. Should consent for a second runway be approved, and it will have to be by Government, an early review of the RPG will have to be undertaken.

Hertfordshire will be required to provide 3,600 dwellings a year up to 2021, an increase from the 3,280 currently required by RPG9. The figure will be subject to further technical work to test how this could be delivered, reviewing urban capacity, density assumptions and green field development needs.

East Hertfordshire's share is to be 485 dwellings per year (about 13.5% of the County total) compared with 555 a year (17.1%) under the current Structure Plan.

Referring to Bishop's Stortford RPG14 states: -

"The ASR at Bishop's Stortford North would be released to provide for at least 2,000 new dwellings and associated development. It is likely that new approaches to design, layout, and density will enable an increase over this historic assessment of the area's development capacity."

There is one unknown, for Lord Rooker, Minister for the Growth Areas has demanded 18,000 new houses be found in the M11 Corridor up to 2016. At the same time he has widened the definition of the M11 Corridor to include Stevenage, Peterborough, Huntingdon and the Cambridge Sub-region. No information is available on the effects of this addition – it may, hopefully, have none for East Herts.

Stansted/M11 Corridor Development Options Study

This study has its origins in the RPG9 for the South East which identified four growth areas, one of which was the London/Stansted/Cambridge Corridor. Now that Hertfordshire, Essex and Bedfordshire have been moved into the Eastern Region the Stansted/M11 Corridor Study is one of several intended to inform the preparation of RPG14. The study considered *"the potential urbanisation impacts that might result from proposals to increase the airport capacity of Stansted Airport (as presented within the SERAS consultation Document)."*

The Draft Final Report (consultation draft, September 2003) proposed that 2,000 dwellings should be built, post 2011, on land to the north of Bishop's Stortford (the ASRs) by 2021. Thereafter it made no further demands on the town. It also proposed that Stansted Mountfitchet would expand to the west of the B1383 (old A11) extending south towards Bishop's Stortford leading to virtual coalescence of the two settlements. This expansion would be by 4,200 by 2021 and 7,300 by 2036. There is, however, no mention of them in Draft RPG14. Elsenham was also proposed as a location for a 'new' Settlement. On the 'Impacts on settlements to 2036' the study blithely states – *"Existing problems of urban traffic congestion compounded."* For both Stansted Mountfitchet and Elsenham it states – *"Growth will compound the problems of traffic congestion within Bishop's Stortford and along the northern bypass."*

Despite our strong objection there has been no change in the Final Report, December 2003, and it seems that planners could not care less about the environmental capacity of the town. Under the heading of Urban Congestion, contained in a table on Settlement Growth Suitability, it is admitted that there will be *"Severe urban congestion. Northern bypass requires either major junction improvements or dualling. The A120 (West) needs improvements with bypasses at Little Hadham and Standon."*

Conclusions

From its formation in 1998 CAUSE has held to the agreed aim – to prevent further peripheral expansion of Stortford, and to have the Areas of Special Restraint reclassified as Green Belt. To the extent that the District Council no longer insist that the remaining airport related housing will be provided on ASR land we have been successful.

New demands coming, as a result of decisions in Whitehall, from the East of England Regional Assembly will mean we have to fight on at least two fronts in the coming months – but fight we will !! We will object to Local Plan Policies where necessary and to the demands in the Regional Planning Guidance (RPG14).

We firmly believe that Bishop's Stortford has grown to the extent that it has reached its environmental capacity, and that even more major growth would be completely unsustainable. Consequently we will continue to attack the housing distribution strategy, airport related housing numbers, and proposals for the ASRs – they must be Green Belt.

We thank all our member organisations for their support in the past, and hope you will all continue to give your support. CAUSE will keep you updated on developments as they emerge.