

# Planning



Greens were the only party to oppose campus expansion into the green belt

## What we stand for

- A strong and effective local planning system which will protect the quality of life in our city for future generations, whilst also upholding the rights and responsibilities of individuals.
- Effective involvement of local residents in local planning decisions at all stages, with the views of local people having a genuine impact on the outcome.
- A local planning system which facilitates a sustainable future. We want our city to be able to meet the targets set out in the Community Plan for a progressive reduction of York's Eco-Footprint to 3.5 hectares per person by 2033 and by 70% over the next 50 years.
- The protection of the city's cultural, historic and natural heritage and a proper assessment of the impact of any further development on the city's special character and quality of life.
- The protection and where possible extension of wildlife areas and corridors, particularly the city's green wedges including the strays and ings which are part of the city's heritage. As well as protecting wildlife and habitat these "green lungs" also contribute to a healthier city by helping to offset the effects of traffic pollution.

## What's happening now

### **Damaging the planet; losing the special character of York**

At present York's total Eco-Footprint (the land area needed to provide us all with food, energy, water and materials, and to absorb the pollution and waste we create), is 45 times the size of the actual area of greater York, putting us in the top 10% of the world's population in terms of our impact on the environment.

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We have a target in the York Community Strategy to work towards improving this situation and yet the Local Area Agreement submitted in 2006 to the government for approval proposes maintaining the present Eco-Footprint of the city until 2011. The impression of many local people is that the building of excessive numbers of new houses and flats both on greenbelt land and on so-called in-fill sites throughout the city, has been changing the essential character of York and putting unacceptable pressures on local infrastructure, bringing into question whether we can even keep the footprint from growing.

## **Housing needs**

Many local groups including the Green Party question the target figures set by local and regional strategies for the number of new dwellings to be built in the city. Whilst it is clear that there is a need for much more affordable housing in the city, we question the overall housing targets as being inappropriate and not the best way to provide the affordable homes that are needed. In 2005 the required percentage of affordable homes on new developments over 15 dwellings was increased to the 50% we had been campaigning for, although several major schemes went through planning just before the change was made.

## **When will the Council actually implement the target of 50% affordable homes?**

We have yet to see this requirement implemented on any significant development. The much vaunted brownfield Hungate site coming in at an appalling 19.4% being affordable, whilst the total number of dwellings was increased. Hopefully, the 50% requirement will have an impact on future developments including the massive York Central and expected developments at Terry's, Nestlé and British Sugar sites.

The Green Party believes that the overall target figures for new housing are based on economic development policies which assume increasing inward migration and increased car-borne commuting around the so-called Leeds City region. These policies are environmentally unsustainable and are not focussed on the needs of local people for affordable homes and quality, long-term local jobs.

## **Capacity study**

At the same time, calls by local voluntary groups and the Green Party for a proper environmental capacity study have been sidelined and failed to get support from either major party. This would assess what levels of development the city can sustain without changing its special character, overloading its infrastructure and reducing its quality of life.

## **Over-development**

Over the last four years planning permission has been granted for large numbers of new dwellings on small and medium sized sites. It makes sense in principle to build on brownfield sites close to jobs, shops and services and public transport, walking and cycling routes. However, many people feel that this policy has been applied inappropriately, delivering paltry amounts of affordable housing whilst concreting over much needed areas of green space in the city and degrading the natural environment and the city's historical heritage.

## **Major sites – major campaigns**

Larger developments have also come forward over the last four years and most have been hotly contested by local residents and campaigners with the support of the Green Party.

The Secretary of State's decision on Housing on Germany Beck and Derwenthorpe and the University expansion plan will come shortly before the local elections in May 2007.

The Green Party objected to all these proposals on the grounds of over-development and lack of sustainability and presented substantial evidence at the public inquiries.

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## **Coppergate II - now know as Castle/Piccadilly.**

We were also part of the high profile campaign against the proposals for shops and related development next to Clifford's Tower. Following refusal at a public inquiry, a new planning brief has been prepared for the Castle Area, and includes at least a vague commitment that 'the major part' of the development will be on the Piccadilly side of the river.

The Greens have continued to argue for only a maximum of 10% of the land on the Castle side to be developed and for the rest to be a public park. A Green proposal for the Council, which owns the land, to proactively seek partners and heritage funding for this was turned down, while a major retail study of the area was commissioned to support the arguments for retail use on the site. Meanwhile any proposed developments in the Piccadilly area have been blocked by the Council's insistence that we have to wait for an overall development of the area before proceeding.

## **The planning process**

At a broader level, York is still without a publicly agreed local planning document. Having failed to formally adopt a Local Plan before the new laws came into effect we are now in the midst of the Local Development Framework (LDF) process required under these planning laws.

*In principle*, this will involve a great deal of consultation and community involvement over the next three years, but in reality the council is cutting the staffing in the community planning section. The LDF is supposed to provide the opportunity to produce a local planning framework based on environmental sustainability and suited to local needs.

## **What we will do**

- Instigate a total rethink of the city's policies on development and ensure that this is incorporated in the local planning framework via the new LDF process.
- Ensure that the LDF process fully incorporates the views of local people throughout the process and that the views expressed are fully included in the final documents.
- Put forward proposals via the LDF for environmental sustainability to be placed at the core of the assessment of all planning applications. This would mean that all planning applications would have to directly address issues such as sustainable building, energy efficiency and renewables, traffic reduction, water use, impact on run-off and overall environmental impact.
- Introduce ongoing monitoring and assessment of York's Eco-Footprint. At the city-wide level this information would be used to inform strategic policy developments. We would propose via the LDF that planning applications concerning more than two dwellings would be assessed according to their impact on the Eco-Footprint.
- In parallel to the above, commission a full environmental capacity study for York to assess the appropriate levels of development to keep York special.
- Ensure that whilst small-scale domestic applications are processed as efficiently and speedily as possible, the pressure to meet government targets on speedy processing isn't allowed to limit full and proper consultation on all applications.
- Whilst the LDF is being developed, support and extend robust local supplementary planning guidance to promote environmentally sustainable development and a strong local economy. We have pressed for guidance on sustainable construction to be as radical as possible.

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- This would include guidance on the approach to be taken to in-fill development sites which, although technically classed as 'brownfield' actually provide much valued green open space in a locality. We would establish a presumption in favour of safeguarding both open space and community facilities, including community centres, sports clubs, pubs, social clubs, youth clubs, post offices, local shops and similar venues where local people are able to meet each other and help create a safer and more vibrant community.
- Include a provision in Local Planning Guidance to require all necessary play provision and open space provision for new developments to be provided ON SITE unless there are very exceptional circumstances to the contrary.
- It would also include guidance for new developments requiring sustainable building to Eco-Homes better than excellent standard (or the new equivalent) with low car developments and water-efficient developments being a priority.
- We would also include a requirement for all new developments to include microgeneration and for a significant proportion of energy supply to be from on site renewables.
- Continue to oppose proposals for over-development adjacent to Clifford's Tower (Coppergate II / Castle Piccadilly) and negotiate with partners and funding agencies to turn the area into a public park and heritage setting.
- Promote the development of York Central for housing and possibly also educational and civic use, taking into account the additional possibilities for housing development in the city afforded by the Terry's and British Sugar sites. Ensure that local people rather than regional agencies take the lead on the development of the site; that it is developed as an exemplar of environmental sustainability and that it meets the 50% affordable housing required in the Development Brief.
- Ensure the planning framework supports and encourages the development of flats above shops as part of maximising the use of otherwise underused historic building in the city centre and maintaining the vitality of the city centre as a living city.
- Ensure the planning framework facilitates support for small businesses as far as reasonably possible, for example by lower charges for small scale applications and flexibility on allowing small businesses that do not generate traffic or noise and meet a community need to operate from premises in residential areas.
- Ensure the planning framework encourages the development of housing near to appropriate workplaces to reduce the need to travel and that all sizeable new developments include home workspace and other community facilities.
- Strive to join up and make practical use of the disparate strategic frameworks foisted on the city by Government policies including the Community Strategy, the LDF, the Regional Strategy and the Local Area Agreement.
- Protect York's Strays. These green wedges must be preserved and enhanced so that their value as 'green lungs' and corridors for wildlife is maintained. Cycle paths across them increase sustainable transport routes in the city but must be sympathetically sited and not be allowed to detract from the rural feel of the area.

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## **Green councillors have:**

- Continued the pressure opposing over development and supporting opposition groups fighting such plans eg Heslington East, Germany Beck etc...
- Pressed for eco-design as standard in major new developments.
- Supported sustainable transport initiatives such as improved cycle and walking routes, safety features near local shops and on school routes etc...
- Supported the 'Local Works' campaign to protect local shops and post offices.
- Ensured that groups such as Open Planning Forum will be consulted on the LDF.
- Supported the work of the Environment Forum responding to the Local Plan, the Local Area Agreement, regional strategy proposals and the new Local Development Framework.