

BLAG's view on current planning activity for East Kettering / September 2009

BLAG continues to monitor planning activity in the Kettering Borough area, and most recently have been involved with the East Kettering Development which is aimed at creating 5500 houses, combined with new primary and secondary schools, medical services, shops, areas for employment. In essence a new town, bigger than Burton Latimer, is to be created at the southern side of Kettering, bordered by Barton Seagrave, Warkton Lane, Cranford, and the A14.

This proposal had its inception when John Prescott and his infamous DDPM decreed that Kettering should be one of the growth towns within the North Northants area. The idea was that the area would become a new centre of economic growth which would attract people from elsewhere in the country to up sticks and move to jobs to be created here.

It should have been clear to the least intelligent politician, planner or councillor that the success of this pipe dream must depend on two things: the guarantee that the necessary infrastructure, in terms of roads and services such as sewerage, would be ensured; and that employers would be willing to set up operations in the area. Then, and only then, should the building of the new town, above ground level, be contemplated. Indeed, senior members of Kettering Borough Council have continued to reassure their residents that they still hold this view. For example, commenting on the adoption of the East Kettering Strategic Design, Cllr Alison Wiley stated in an e-mail, *'Issues on infrastructure - and jobs - remain a concern, however the adoption of this document will not prejudice the Borough council's efforts to secure the best possible outcome in these areas.'* Followed by, *'The Borough Council policy all along has been to state that we want jobs and infrastructure before houses. This has never altered, and nor will it.'*

Words are easy. Actions are what matters, and it is clear that these logical conditions are about to be ditched, if the developers and the planning authority have their way. BLAG understands that the planning application which is about to be submitted will:

1. not stipulate anything about new road networks, which would ultimately be necessary and have a big impact on traffic flows in the borough – including the closure of access to the A14 at junction 10, and the opening of a new junction 10A, which would create problems for the conservation area of Burton Latimer.
2. sanction temporary sewerage arrangements involving cess pits and the use of tankers to transport waste water if, as is likely, a mains sewerage network is not available before the houses are built. This would mean several tanker journeys per hour 7 days a week, 8 hours a day from Kettering to the Broadholme Sewage treatment works.
3. The only reference to jobs will be the allocation of an area for possible future unspecified employment, at some unspecified future time, to be taken up by some unspecified fairy godmother, without having any idea about the possible use or actual space requirements.

The reasons for creating the new development have therefore disappeared, but there is a grave danger that the development could still be sanctioned by the planning committee, not because any of the councillors believe it is the right decision, but because they do not want to incur the expense of an appeal which would almost certainly be decided in favour of the developer by a government inspector, to satisfy a government, desperate for a "good news" sound bite. Even if the government were voted out of office at the next election, which is likely, they would leave Kettering with an unholy mess of a legacy in the form of an uncompleted development which would require a string of temporary fixit measures, as it lurched from one disaster to another. No amount of 106 contributions would compensate for the future misery.

East Kettering is one embryo which should be frozen and kept as a concept, waiting for its time to come in the future, and it should certainly not be allowed to start developing now with a future abortion inevitable.

From this description of our position, it is not surprising that BLAG has become involved with a group called the East Kettering Alliance, which has representatives from Barton Seagrave, Warkton Lane and Cranford.

Our objectives are simply to try to encourage the KBC to pay attention to the wishes of residents of Kettering Borough and for councillors to examine their conscience when it comes to making decisions on this application. We will be asking for signatures on a petition to be presented to KBC well before this key planning meeting.