

ELECTED MEMBERS SCHOOL AT THE UNIVERSITY OF KENT
CANTERBURY. 1-5 SEPTEMBER 2006.

Scholars M A Mc VEIGH, W SOUTHWARD.

After a long journey of some seven hours we arrived in Canterbury and then took another hour to find the University. I hasten to add the navigator was probably feeling a little tired now so we can forgive him for maybe being a little slow in the final part of such a trail. It is fair to say the driver was still quite perky.

We had one cup of tea on the way the reason being we thought the price of £1.85 a cup was putting it a little pricey for our budgetary demands so being the men we are we didn't have another drink until we got to Canterbury, such is life!

We were given very nice simple rooms which were more than adequate. The blocks are set in some lovely grounds with an abundance of wild life roaming freely such as squirrels, rabbits, and also a solitary Fox was wandering around without a care in the world. The university is set on higher ground giving a beautiful vista of the Cathedral and Canterbury itself. It really is a fantastic setting.

Canterbury, like most city's is rather pricey. A pint of beer was £2.70, a rather shabby looking garage for £7000 and a modest simple one bedroom flat was advertised in need of extensive refurbishment for £100.000, so I am sure you get the picture what the housing prices are like generally. We were walking past a gentlemen's hairdressers the price was £25.00 for a restyle and cut, a cut and blow dry was £15.00 but I am sure all the male members of the panel would have got a spit and polish for a couple of quid being that there is not that much hair to be found !

On the Friday evening we had a wine reception hosted by the Town & Country Planning Association; it was very nice and gave one a chance to meet other Members.

Saturday was a full program so William and I chose to go to different sessions in the morning and afternoon. I am not going to bore you with the details of all the sessions as all transcripts can be found on the web at www.planningsummerschool.org All the papers can be accessed there but we will give you a rundown on a few of the more interesting sessions. Do's & Don'ts of Making a Planning Decision was such a one. It was presented by two young barristers, Mr Richard Honey and Mr Gregory Jones, both these young men specialise in planning appeals, planning law matters, enforcement, compulsory purchase and local government law, Etc. I just hope that we are never cross examined by them as I think the prospect would be daunting to say the least.

Both of the gentlemen were of the opinion that five mins was too short to let someone speak at a planning meeting and you should be looking to ten to

fifteen minutes and also you should not be shutting some one down when they do speak. I am sure we will have some discussion on this sort of item in the near future. They also said that site visits are an integral part of the planning system. The reason I highlight this point is that at breakfast we sat with the chair of planning from a Cornwall authority who was boasting how he had eliminated site visits from their agendas. We both disagreed strongly with his comments and said so to him.

It is fair to say that there were others who did not see the relevance of site visits so it was nice to hear two barristers endorse our opinions and I am sure all our members feel the same? Overall we are pretty well up to date with the correct do's and don'ts.

Saturday afternoon and evening gave us the opportunity for two classes. The first was "night time economy". It was probably more aligned to city people where there is a large population to access and use later opening hours for a more demand led shopping market, café use and restaurant etc. We didn't really think our towns would have the population requirements to really make the night time economy a viable project but nevertheless it was very interesting if you lived in a city. There is no doubt that we do need to be up to date on the requirements of the scale of night time users so it is something for future discussion

Saturday night part two was a presentation given by Paul Wookey the chief exec of locate Kent. This really was all about the investment success of the council. I think the first thing that sprang to my mind was that its seven hours to get to Kent from Cumbria, if you are coming from London but it is only one hour and if you are coming from Paris it is three hours. The point of this being the general European market is much easier to access than anything we could hope for.

Sunday's first session was "involving members in the pre application process". This presentation was given by Cllr Patrick Haveron of Waverley Borough Council. Cllr Haveron is the chair of planning for the council, he was assisted with his presentation by the head of development services John Anderson who is also from the council.

This was a completely new thing to all members and was received with a mixed bag of opinions! The theme of this exercise is that prior to major development applications the council has what they call the Development Control Consultative Forum. What they basically do is get all vested party's together to have a video cam record the full forum sifting through problems before they get to the planning process decision point. It was a very interesting forum but a number of us thought it bordered on a near pre determination scenario, never the less we would have liked to have been at a full presentation live to see how it worked out.

Sunday's second session was "Gypsies & Travellers" this was presented by Cllr Richard Bennett, of the LGA Gypsies & Travellers Task Group, this group is empowered to get constructive dialogue between residents local councils and bona fida travellers. The scale of the problem was somewhat foreign to

us because of the size of the sites was something we don't get as far north as our countryside but nevertheless it was a very interesting presentation.

Sunday's third session "Planning Law – Props and Pitfalls" presented by a solicitor Mr Peter Wilbraham of Wilbraham & Co, this gentleman introduced great wit into his presentation with the use of audience participation. I think most members found that it is probably time for a refresher course training wise and we were no exception. Overall a very witty presentation.

Sunday afternoon was study tour day. This is the field day and a chance to go and see the site of your choice. William chose the tour of East Kent Coalfield, for which the original intention was for this coalfield to become a large coal mining area with steel works and new settlements, but the closure of the coalfields in the 80s brought social and economic issues not normally associated with the South East region. This tour looked at contrasting approaches to regeneration at the three principal pits at Snowdown, Tilmanstone and Betteshanger. Betteshanger was the main focus point showing how the regeneration scheme involves a mix of business development at the pithead area and nature conservation, educational and recreational uses, including a cycle track of international standard at the pit area, all in all a very interesting tour.

My choice of tour was the walking tour of Canterbury; this was a wonderful opportunity to see this beautiful city with the help of a very capable guide who is the head of development services for the council of Canterbury. This tour showed how a major development can be successfully accommodated in a vibrant historic city centre. The development of the White Friar's shopping centre is truly a commendable scheme and to give it justice one has to see the finished job the written word cannot do it.

Canterbury can boast the fact they have some 70 houses per hectare but it is fair to say that the terrace is very much a part of the housing makeup of Canterbury so with some very clever design brief small gardens front and back mix and match they have achieved this.

We had a look at a former tannery site that was being redeveloped. This was a major project on health grounds because of the toxins and poison that had been left in the ground. The men who are clearing the site wear protective clothing and respiratory masks so this was a very challenging project. On my walk about I came across the small church of St Dunstons. In this church is the family vault of Margert Roper who is the daughter of Thomas More who was martyred by King Henry VII in 1574. I am sure historians among us remember that Thomas More was beheaded on the king's instruction. The story is that the head in the vault is that of he, unbeknown to me is that he is the patron saint of politicians so when I was in the church I said a prayer to him, so if all of a sudden the planning panel at Copeland Borough Council becomes totally enlightened we all know my prayers have been answered, maybe I really needed more than one prayer when I think about it.

Monday we had two very interesting presentations, the first one was "The view from the Inspectorate" which was given by Wendy Burden Inspector Manager of the planning inspectorate, it is fair to say nearly every member of the audience was a martyr in waiting and we all duly gave her our terrible injustices that had been meted out to us from her colleagues. She took it all in good humour and gave her perspective on cases she had to intervene in and some of the results. Overall a very interesting class.

Second session was given by a female barrister called Celina Colquhoun. This was on the legal minefields associated with Enforcement and the caution required to deal with this very sensitive part of the legal process. It was a rather technical presentation so best left to our legal department.

The closing session was given from Nick Raynsford M P. Nick Raynsford was minister for local and regional government in the office of the deputy prime minister from 2001-2005. He was made a privy councillor in 2001's new year's honours list. He left government in 2005. The theme of his forty minute presentation was covering all aspects of planning from his own start in local government through to being a member of government with responsibility for local and regional government he was aware of the pressure of such an important decision making body for councillors and generous in his praise too us all.

Then it was homeward bound. After a slight navigational problem we ended up in the city of London which can only be classed as total bedlam. We looked for any roadsigns signposted north and headed this direction. The less said about London the better. After this small diversion we made our way safely back to Cumbria, definitely one of the nicest parts of the world.

In conclusion we would like to thank the council for the chance to have attended a very worthwhile seminar.

Yours,
Councillors M A Mc Veigh & W Southward