

Stewarding the Earth's Resources

An occasional bulletin for the church about waste

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The Town & Country Planning system: delivering essential new waste facilities

Introduction

This edition of **Stewarding the Earth's Resources** reproduces an interview with Hilary Herbert published in *Planning* on 23rd June 2006.

Hilary Herbert is the president of the Planning Officers Society. She is currently the Planning Manager of Surrey County Council and was previously Head of Minerals & Waste Planning at SCC.

Planning is the weekly journal of the Royal Town Planning Institute.

Surrey Waste Plan

The production of an effective Waste Plan by SCC has been a long and difficult process.

In the interview Hilary Herbert describes:

- The scale of public opposition to new waste incinerators in Surrey and the way in which County Councillors removed allocated sites for waste plants from the earlier Waste Local Plan.
- The difficulty of finding sites for waste facilities in Surrey because most of Surrey lies within the London Metropolitan Green Belt. Green Belt is a statutory planning designation, although the term is often used in a careless and ill-informed way to describe any piece of open land.
- The well-organised and articulate opposition to waste development in Surrey.
- The reluctance of objectors to acknowledge social responsibility, and to accept that rights also carry responsibilities.

The new planning system

The new planning system that was introduced by the Planning and Compulsory Act 2004 now replaces the old system of County-level Structure Plans and Waste Local Plans with Regional level Spatial Strategies and County level Minerals/Waste Development Frameworks.

The Surrey Waste Plan comprises four Development Plan Documents:

- Core Strategy: the spatial vision for Surrey.
- Waste Development: contains site-specific proposals for the development of waste management facilities.
- Waste Development Control Policies: contains a set of development control policies that apply across the whole of Surrey and apply to all waste development.
- Proposals map: illustrates the areas of designation identified in Core Strategy policy (eg. Green Belt) and the locations of the identified sites.

On adoption by Surrey County Council, these Development Plan Documents will be included in a portfolio of documents collectively called the Surrey Minerals and Waste Development Framework.

There will be a Public Examination of the Surrey Waste Plan in early 2007. This may result in changes to the Plan. SCC hopes to adopt the Plan in Autumn 2007.

For more on the Surrey Waste Plan go to www.surreycc.gov.uk

The interview is reproduced in full, with my addition of sub-headings.

Waste delivery chief: Planning manager Hilary Herbert contends that better public understanding of the sector is crucial to the delivery of sustainable communities, David Dewar discovers

"Making the planning system work"

"Making the planning system work" is the key theme of Planning Officers Society (POS) president Hilary Herbert's presidential year. She is in a good position to know about what helps to make it work and the challenges that it faces. As planning manager at Surrey County Council, Herbert has had to bring plans for much-needed waste facilities, including incinerators, through the system in the face of determined opposition from local residents.

It is the minerals and waste element that causes the major headaches

Herbert has spent most of her career in county planning and has been in charge of minerals and waste at Surrey since 2003, a job that she acknowledges is very challenging". Since becoming planning manager earlier this year, Herbert oversees all of Surrey's planning work, but it is still the minerals and waste element that causes the major headaches.

When she took charge of minerals and waste, Herbert inherited a situation where council members had taken allocated sites out of the local waste plan and had therefore been told by the regional government office to carry out an immediate review. This is now coming to fruition and Surrey is poised to become the first county to put a waste plan to a new-style public examination.

But it has not been plain sailing. Surrey has a "very chequered history" on providing waste sites, Herbert explains. In fact, it does not have any major incineration facilities, whereas neighbouring Hampshire has three. Part of this is due to the large groundswell of opposition such facilities invariably attract. "We had three planning applications before my time for waste-to-energy plants, but there were 32,000 objections," she recalls. "We approved one, but it got judicially reviewed and was quashed. So we are back to square one, and do not have any sites."

But she remains confident that things will be different this time. "The members are very determined now," she says. "They know that they have got to hold their nerve on this. The plan needs to be in place so that applications can come forward."

Scare tactics against waste plans

She says that opponents have used scare tactics against the waste plans. "People have been leafleting about things like zones of fallout from the incinerators," she notes. "There have been lots of misunderstandings with people producing maps and putting leaflets through doors. Some really nasty campaigns." This all makes it harder for planners who are trying to find essential waste facilities in a county that is almost three-quarters green belt.

Green belt

"Waste facilities are classed as inappropriate developments in the green belt, but of the 14 sites we have identified, 12 of them are in the green belt," says Herbert. It is a real dilemma. Members are keen to preserve the green belt, but we do not have the vast urban areas where you can locate plants and hide them easily."

People move out to the county's rural areas and they think that it is going to be preserved in aspic

Another problem is the well-organised nature of opposition to waste plans. "People in Surrey are very articulate and well-heeled," she adds. "They employ their own planning consultants to fight things and they tell us that they are going to judicially review us. You get a lot of people who move to Surrey from London and they want to locate here because it is very green. People move out to the county's rural areas and they think that it is going to be preserved in aspic. They do not accept that it has got to be a living and working countryside."

A society that is keen on rights but not so enthusiastic about its social duties

All this is a reflection, Herbert maintains, of a society that is keen on rights but not so enthusiastic about its social duties. "We have done an awful lot of work in getting people engaged, but at the end of the day everyone says that they think it is a great plan but the one thing wrong with it is the particular site allocated in their area. That is a lack of social responsibility. People are vociferous in what their rights are, but there are responsibilities to go alongside that. I feel quite strongly about that.

"There is a lot of misunderstanding about planning. People fail to understand the plan-making function and do not understand that they have a share of the responsibility for meeting the minerals and waste needs of Surrey. A big education programme is needed on this."

County planning is still very much alive and well.

In any case, all this goes to show that county planning is still very much alive and well. Herbert concedes that since the 2001 planning green paper first floated the idea of abolishing structure plans, it has been "a case of us finding our role in the new arrangements". But she reports that the regions are looking to the counties to lead on a lot of strategic planning work, particularly on monitoring and providing information.

"The counties have always had a large resource of people who have those skills," she points out. "There was a concern after the green paper that we could lose all that, but we retained the minerals and waste function and we have chosen to play a leading role in regional planning in Surrey, which is strongly supported by members." To that end, Surrey is also engaging in a planning collaboration project that brings all 11 districts in the county together and co-ordinates their work.

It is important to get a better profile of planning

In her year as POS president, Herbert wants to raise these issues and to ensure that the role of the planner is fully appreciated and understood by ministers. It is important to get a better profile of planning," she insists. It generally has increased support, but there are still concerns about a new minister coming in and not really understanding and valuing the role of planning in taking forward the sustainable communities agenda.

"Planners are very well placed to support this type of issue. They are flexible workers and good at project managing and co-ordinating things across the board. We have had the planning delivery grant, which has helped quite a lot to increase the profile of planning in local authorities. Most of that, I am pleased to see, has gone into planning departments. But it has got to be tied into either an extension or an exit strategy."

But Herbert has some concerns over the sheer plethora of documents and guidance planners are confronted with these days, and is opposed to any moves to further overhaul the system. "What we are all keen on is delivery," she says. "My job is to get waste facilities delivered in Surrey, and the fear is that too complex a system is going to frustrate that delivery if it raises the potential for legal challenge."

On that note, while Herbert is in favour of more public engagement, she fears that consultation overload, together with decisions being taken at a lower level, can all too often lead to slower delivery. "The counties have to demonstrate that they can deliver on things such as minerals and waste planning," she contends. Otherwise they will be taken up to the regions."

Career details

Age: 55

Family: Three daughters

Education: BA in economics, University of Sussex; diploma in town planning, South Bank Polytechnic.

Career: Planning officer, Surrey County Council, 1974-76; senior planning officer, Surrey transportation unit, 1976-79; career break, 1979 – 85; senior planning officer, London Borough of Sutton, 1985-87; various roles including head of minerals and waste, Surrey County Council, 1987-2006; planning manager, Surrey County Council, 2006 to date.

Interests: Travel, music, nature, conservation.

The Church of England's recent report **Sharing God's Planet** sets out the scale of humankind's responsibility for altering the planet over the last 100 years. It also provides Biblical and theological reflection and suggests a practical Christian response.

But nowhere does it acknowledge that difficult environmental decisions are being made every day by waste management businesses, and by County, District and Borough Councils as they decide planning applications, and that everyone may have a role in influencing planning decisions. Some of the most contentious planning decisions are those that concern development proposals for waste management and disposal.

Stewarding the Earth's Resources is an occasional complementary bulletin for faith communities that sets out current issues in waste planning:

- It encourages Christians to take a responsible approach to new waste developments.
- It presents a balanced summary of current ethical, practical and spiritual issues in a non-technical way.

Previous editions of Stewarding the Earth's Resources may be obtained on request:

1.	July 2005	What's happening to waste, and what can Christians conclude from this?
2.	October 2005	Sustainable Development: noble vision or national self-interest?
3.	November 2005	Incineration of municipal solid waste: a contentious issue
4.	January 2006	Rubbish tips dumped in £8bn waste revolution: UK faces 'rude shock' over cost of refuse disposal
5.	February 2006	Current issues in waste management from the standpoint of a skip hire / waste recycling company
6.	Easter 2006	Can London kick its waste export habit?
7.	Ascension Day 2006	Restoring the goodness of creation: waste as 'materials' and 'resources'

Stewarding the Earth's Resources is compiled by the Revd Jon Hale BA who is an ordained Church of England priest with a background in waste planning.

Waste Planning is the main professional journal in the field of waste planning. It is published by Mineral Planning, 2 The Greenways, Little Fencote, Northallerton DL7 0TS.

There are other waste management journals.

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