

Decision time again - this time democracy and planning. (1st Sep 2008)
Norman Cutting reports:

It's summer, so it must be consultation time. This year it's all about local democracy and the local development framework.

So what shall we start with? Well, the democracy one is needing decisions by October and the planning one has a little longer, so I suppose that democracy wins (that's a first!). The government has spotted that the electorate seem reluctant to get involved in the democratic process and has brought in the Sustainable Communities Act which allows local communities to suggest the sort of actions that national government should take. This needs the local authority to 'opt' in and set up local panels to agree on proposals or suggestions. It is not a consultation exercise - they say. As a friend of mine often says 'the best decisions are made by a committee of one'. It is not clear at the time of writing how these 'suggestions' will start, who will 'sift through' the usual raft of impractical ideas or how the 'public representatives' will actually be more representative than our current local councillor system. Personal experience has shown that the group representative system, which generally happens, tends to sway any decision making process and it's this very method which reduces the true effect of democracy. I mean, how often have you either thought or even said 'no point in voting as we know who will win'. Now that is the problem that needs addressing.

The 'Local Development Framework' is currently being formulated by the Borough Council to provide the route for the proposed 'Rejuvenating Dacorum' theme. The idea is that the Borough Council will consult on what is best for the Borough as regards long term planning - we are talking up to 2031 here - and how we are to accommodate the governments housing growth agenda, for example.

Borough planning officers are currently preparing the core strategy to be in place by March 2009 and the outcome is decisive and long term.

They are having to try and take into account everything that may happen between now and 2031 and you may have spotted the obvious flaw in just these two processes and how one may restrict the other.

As I understand it, the officers will present to Council Before the deadline, alternatives which will each be justified by evidence and/or consultation and a final decision taken which will affect our locality for the next 20+ years.

You will be surprised to know that I really don't think these decisions will be set in stone as something will happen to throw the 'cunning plan' of course. I also wonder how much all this will actually cost us. More information is available on the dacorum.gov.uk web site and I will try to expand and provide more information on the normancutting.com web site.