

WMRSS GETS A BLAST IN WOLVERHAMPTON

Geoff Southgate and Gillian McGivern on behalf of BLAST went to Wolverhampton on 27th January 2009, to attend the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy Phase 2 Review Preliminary Meeting, and you will gather from that title that we found it a very hard going atmosphere, full of very self important government types, smarmy developers and far too much government speak! Geoff and Gillian certainly didn't feel that the ordinary man in the street was represented by that lot but we must remain, as we say, positive!

The key thing we got out of this meeting, was that any submission we make must be examined by the 'independent panel' whose findings will be given in report form to 'the Minister'. We were led to believe from other small independent pressure groups that if there is no mention in the report of our submission (regarding allotment protection, provision and green belt in North Leamington) which was sent in last autumn during the submission process, subsequently WDC can say they are NOT obliged to do anything because we 'are not mentioned in the report'. We will endeavour yet again to make sure that our submissions are noted AND examined, to which end Geoff has emailed the Panel Secretary who has replied that our email has been submitted to the Panel Chairman - see link to meeting minutes below.

Geoff did put a question to the Chairman, Alan Richardson, who was a very pleasant man. explaining that although he couldn't speak their planning language in simple terms he wanted to request that allotment provision and protection etc need to be included in the 'matters to be examined' as outlined in our submission, particularly as the national waiting list for allotments is said to be 100,000. He thanked Geoff and noted his question so it should be in the Minutes. The Chairman then asked the Director of Policy for the WMRA, Mark Middleton, for any comment on Geoff's question to which Mr Middleton replied with an emphatic 'NO' - which we felt summed up the WMRA's attitude to allotments and why allotments are not mentioned in their report. This comment from Mr Middleton will be recollected and repeated many times over the next few months by BLAST.

We got the impression that Mark Middleton and Ian Smith (Government Office for the WM) had already made up their minds, in fact the Chairman specifically asked 'are the Government's points, made in other areas discussed, a directive' to which they replied 'no it was for consideration' (big yawn all round).

There was one person there from 'Warwickshire' - Andy Cowan, who we believe is a Senior Officer at Warwickshire County Council. He made the point that when they come to examine Coventry, Warwickshire and Middle Quinton that these should be separate sessions because Warwickshire will be receiving extra attention!

Phase 3 of this revision is planned for 2010 when it could all change - that is the Regional Assembly -according to the Chairman and he said that in regard to my question that it may be more relevant to Phase 3. This could mean that no decisions will be made for years to come - perhaps we'll be too old to dig by the time a decision is made but we will still campaign for the next generation.

There will be a series of Examination Days during March – June and we will attempt to attend those relevant to BLAST and our supporters. Please contact us if you can offer any pertinent information or advice for these future meetings.

The link for the Minutes of this meeting can be viewed on the following link:

http://www.planning-inspectorate.gov.uk/pins/rss/west_midlands_phase_two/documents/WMRSS_Minutes_First_Prelim_Meeting_27_Jan.pdf