

Why do so many of us ritually groan, when we hear about population growth? Why, when it is proposed to devolve 'planning' to the truly local level, do the cynics say that such devolution is a recipe for stagnation? Why, is it that with so many of us, public 'consultation' on local development has lost credibility?

Why is it that 'urban growth' is not felt to be a healthy, welcome thing. Why is it not thought of as increasing our prosperity and improving our lives?

The coalition government has made an open invitation for us all to engage in a 'real debate', with nothing to be taken for granted. This 'presentation', is a contribution to that debate. Any new localism will need to see the devolution of considerable power, but it has to be informed and with access to real money, if it is to work.

It could be that we just don't get growth, urban or economic, right enough, enough of the time. In terms of town planning, the baby is lost with the bathwater as over-bureaucratic, the system approaches entropic meltdown. Development policies where they exist, have lost sight of real targets. I am talking planning: not education or health and safety! Most urban 'growth', as we experience it diminishes most of us in some way – if only by making getting around more difficult and the school run take longer. Why?

A very brief analysis of some aspects of the modern 'growth' of Norfolk follows. It extracts some lessons from the past and relates them to the present proposals in the current Joint Core Strategy. The JCS is but the most recent in a line of previous and very similar such strategies, the results of which are quite apparent to us all. Do we want these tired and depressing old trends to continue? Is there maybe, a better way, that will allow more of us to surrender the negative, NIMBY role?

The Joint Core Strategy (JCS), published at the end of 2009, noted that the 'grand challenge' (those were the words, but most hearts sank!) facing Norfolk was to find space for 37,000 additional homes, and 27,000 additional jobs, in the areas administered by the Broadland and South Norfolk District Councils, and the Norwich City Council. The Joint Core Strategy was produced in order to satisfy numerical targets imposed by Regional Government that were never publicly debated, or explained. Although regional government has now been abandoned; this Strategy is stalled, but not yet dead.

Do different, and do better - debating Norfolk's future

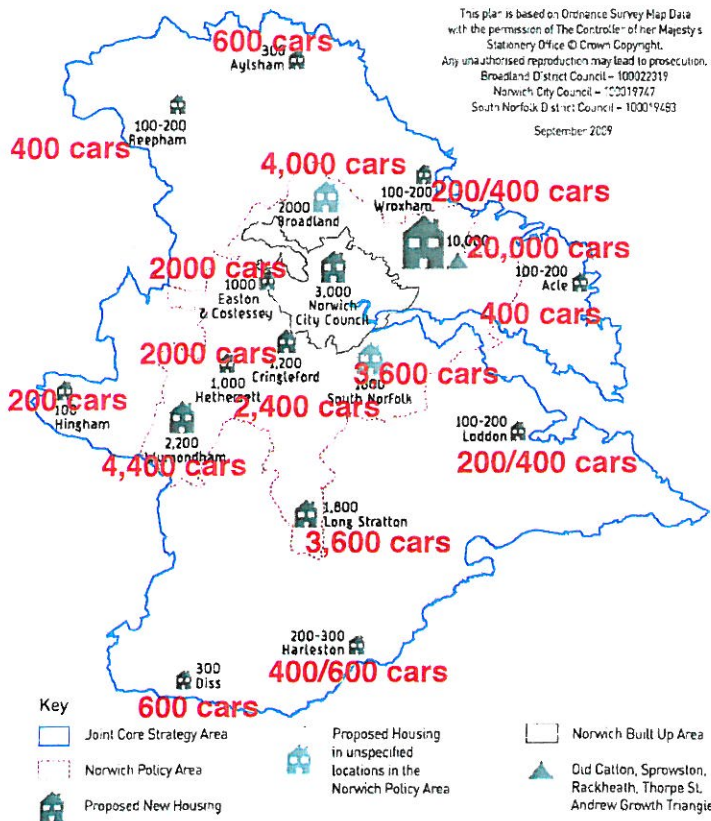
*NIMBY - not in my backyard

*JCS - The Joint Core Strategy for Broadland, Norwich and South Norfolk - by the Greater Norwich Development Partnership

Should the numbers be considered exaggerated for the short term, they will likely grow to this eventually: pressures for growth are such that the tendencies will endure. This argues for better strategies, now, whatever the future. The tactical plan should be discussed, agreed and put in place now, when the market is all slowed down.



Main Housing Allocations



JOINT CORE STRATEGY allocations overlaid for possible car ownerships

OUTSIDE NORWICH say, 2 CARS per dwelling

additional cars outside Norwich @ 2 per dwelling av. = 45,600 cars

present total of all Norwich park and ride = 4,912 places

total of all present Norwich public parking = 12,500 places

This diagram, translates numbers of dwellings into possible additional car numbers.

The numbers are large and should signal the pressing need for new ways of dealing with the problems arising from scattered distributions: including social problems and those of growing congestion and transportation. The needlessly scattered nature of the allocations make this a formidable task.



introduction general causes

The illogical and so often unwanted shape of solutions providing for growth, such as the JCS, are typically not derived from the views of local citizens, councillors, and planners. It comes from the centre. Governments in Whitehall in recent years have enjoyed an ever closer relationship with the 'City and its markets'. Numbers, rather than conceptions for real communities, are easier for them both. Numbers are readily expressed as targets, to be monitored and measured. To achieve the number is to win. To fail, can be expressed as a 'crisis' that can be argued to make the next short term target. Politicians have been solving one housing 'crisis' after another for decades, so often failing to recognise that they continue towards creating a larger one, ever-growing all the while.

Policies over the years, have been leading us towards a ubiquitous, advancing, 'look-increasingly-alike' environment, with its nationally shared congestions, faceless housing projects, and other well-known consequences. This has all been rationalised as being economic in cost to the buyers and necessary to producing the numbers and affordability. It has led to the general disengagement of local planning from the forward planning of anything much more complicated than the simple allocation of sites and the minutiae of their exploitation. Governance at any level has been generally evasive in matters of infrastructure and community. There are shining exceptions, but they are just that, and the underlying general influences continues to create a deteriorating environment and works against the evolution of any truly local character. A swallow or two has not yet made it summer.

The analysis and discussion of the first part, (1-9) is followed by an exemplar sketch idea, (10-14) which will provide a realistic basis for a wide discussion of principle. The writer has no vested interest of any kind in the locations dealt with in the paper.

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We, in Norfolk, should start to 'do different' as soon as next we can, or we'll get committed to *another* 20 years of the same again, and after that, again?again?

(p7)

'Owner occupier', would be a first preference for many. 'The Englishman's Castle'. Probing this, might give way to 'own home' and could encompass 'renting' under reasonable and secure terms. Some would like a garden, and others positively not. Some would like detachment, others would be easy about it. All would like variety, and to be located in convenient situations, well related to work and play.

Increasingly, the 'Englishman's Castle' has a moat separating it from the wider world, sometimes even a gate! This moat takes the form of dozens of near-identical housing 'units, comprising the often large 'estate': At whatever level of society, too many houses of a common size, over too large an area, make for social monotony. Huge swathes of estates everywhere, are nowhere close to anywhere, let alone their town centres. More often than not, poorly served by public transport or none at all, the choice is either to suffer relative isolation, or buy a necessary car. In many places, particularly in Norfolk, 2 & 3 cars per household.

An attractive example of more organic growth is to be found in Norwich, in the area around Heigham Grove. This, to its entire advantage, adjoins the city centre and a main road, and offers a good historical example of mixed uses and densities - church, hotel, flats, as well as houses. Villas and their gardens are cheek by jowl with what were once low cost workers cottages. Now bijou residences, the cottages have moved up-market in their old age. Had they not been sited in a mixed area they would probably have been demolished, (as happened in nearby West Pottergate and many another place).



The recent insistence on a component of affordable housing in developments has done something to avoid the ghetto, to mix things up a bit. Though to mix housing with other appropriate uses, as used to happen naturally, would make for an even more varied life.



- **Should we, in Norfolk still be continuing with patterns for growth that will have such known and predictable consequences?**
- **Is it too much to hope for solutions that will give greater economy, amenity, and sustainability?**

*estates
and the way we live*

The growing impact of home working increases the pressure for houses to be sited in relationships that offer social interaction, not isolation, as well as larger houses, that allow space for working. This argues for more 'grain' and complexity of location and more integrated forms for development than the 'estate'. Much modern business does not need to be in isolated business parks, and could contribute a welcome variety of scale to any housing scene. Houses have in fact been getting smaller, fuelled by market needs rather than intelligently structured to respond to real needs. Responding to real needs, were space to become a building regulation, would mean lower prices for land!

Estates are monocultural. This generates the need for travel elsewhere for social purposes, a lack of mix for local schools, or travel afar to another school, additional costs for social services; a degree of isolation for individuals, - especially those with mobility problems. Estates are more vulnerable to shifts in fortune and, as is particularly evident in the public sector, have less appeal when fashions and markets change. They create social categories, and at worst, stigmatise. When housing estates do fall out of favour for design, economic, social or technical reasons, it is but a small step from ghetto' to 'sink'. Heigham Grove, as already quoted, is the local exemplar for a form for mixed development that will make for a better life

Direct consequences of a car orientated society have been the out of town supermarkets, shopping centres, car sales, furniture and much else. In the case of food retail, the strain caused in established centres by such large out of town challenges, has invoked a reaction. We now have the 'metro concept', and an eased out of town pressure. Similar effects - particularly those commonly requiring dependence on the car, arise from the other uses. Scant regard is had for the local environments created. The notion, of business 'villages' and science 'parks', indicates a discontent with this other kind of 'estate', and note the unconscious irony in the terminology. There is a hunger for a more interesting 'place' everywhere!

Many other exurban building uses, including hospitals, require significant access for the public as well as those working there. Usually, disposed over large areas and with large car parks, they mostly have had scant regard for public transport. Essentially car orientated, they are major contributors to congestion. Moreover, they are often sited in isolation, or at such low densities that public transport is very hard to organise for the resulting complex matrix of spread demand.

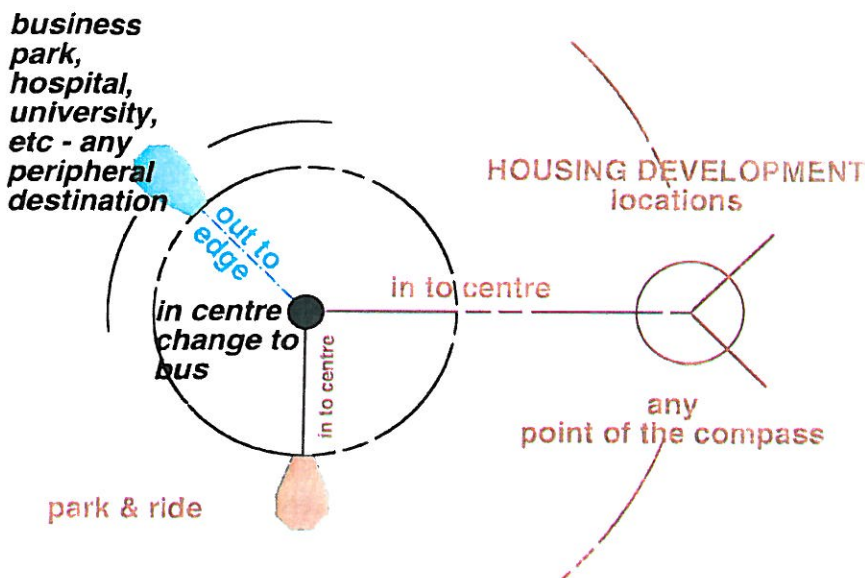
Consider the case of Norwich and its hinterland. Unless you happen to be located on the right radial access road for your intended destination on the edge of the city, using public transport means travelling

to the centre by bus or train and changing to a taxi or bus to get where you finally want to be. It is a two stage journey and made expensive by the wide separation of the housing of people from their required destinations. Usually, car is the choice by default.

Stage 1, bus or train to the centre of Norwich

Stage 2, bus or taxi to the peripheral destination.

When heading for the city centre, the choice may be to 'Park and Ride' - in which case, car and then bus.



edge of town
getting to and fro

Infrastructures, at least in terms of roads and transport, have mainly been dealt with by means of short term, often ingenious, local fixes: trouble shooting, and stress relieving, increasingly trading off the back of the occasions that gave rise to the need in the first place: thus, often sowing the seed for added stress somewhere else: hardly ever pro-active.

Long Stratton is yet to get its by-pass. A sad and coercive thing is that, in order to achieve this under the JCS, Long Stratton has to accept development to add 3,600 or so more cars. Ironically, funding, for the by-pass seems to depend upon a planning gain deriving from the style of development creating the problem in the first place.

Park and Ride, is a 'fix' that works well for a short while, and then will surely be unable to cope with the additional pressures arising from all the extra cars that predictably, will arise from such 'traditional' policies as the Joint Core Strategy? Meanwhile, Park and Ride places a sticking plaster on the failure of the logic.

Priority bus routes, another fix also may help, but they may well happen only if subsidised. Buses are still way out too expensive for even moderately well off families, who continue to cling to their cars for every travel purpose. Examine now, before moving on, two situations - exemplars from the past, one at Wymondham and the other at Colney, .

WYMONDHAM

- The Joint Core Strategy proposes for Wymondham, a further injection of 2,200 houses: giving rise to about double that number of cars.

Note from the sequence of dated maps, that growth of the town, under modern planning, occurred after 1940, and was carried out in ways destructive of any coherence.



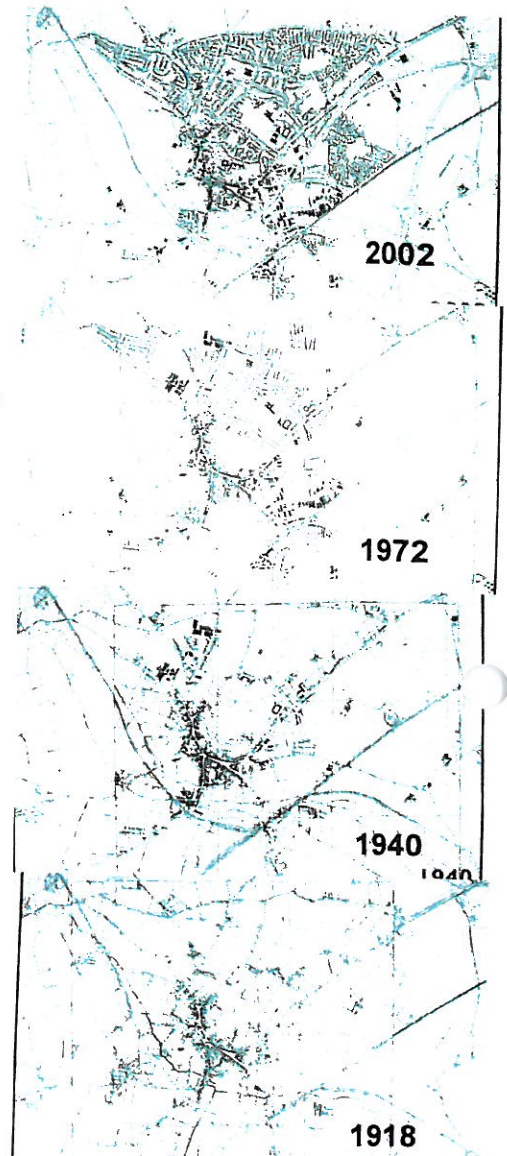
Wymondham has a very pretty and attractive core. Over the post war years it has steadily accrued 'estates' and these piecemeal patches of estate development now dominate Wymondham, to make it quite formless outside its small centre. Culturally, thanks largely to the strength of the earlier mixed and tighter core, Wymondham remains a good place to live, but the social as well as the physical structures are not helped by what has happened post 1940.

The town centre now has to compete with edge stores and supermarkets, and the old shops struggle to survive. A secondary employment and trading focus is becoming dominant around the Waitrose Supermarket, but has had little vision applied to attempt any kind of coherence or integration with the equally recent housing around. Zoned paper planning?

With further ribbon development stretching NW, via Hethersett towards Norwich and the hospital, there is little benefit to town or surrounding country from all this enterprise - just increasing traffic problems and inconvenience.

Now, if JCS is allowed to survive, there is every likelihood of more car orientated estates being added to the existing patchwork. No wonder a large local protest turnout of many NIMBY's!

- **Wymondham is but one example. Similar processes are at work in Aylsham, Long Stratton, and most of our local small towns.**



*didn't work out too well?
a couple of recent examples*

COLNEY

The NNUH at Colney, an example of a city centre function in the wrong place. It calls for much improved access: numbers are set to grow and this should be addressed before they do.

Most users have to get there by car or taxi, and some by bus. Essentially, the NNUH is a District General Hospital and therefore a public service building. People need to get there, in constant large numbers. It employs a lot of staff, including many shift workers, many part time; many on relatively low wages. On the previous hospital site in Norwich, thousands of staff lived within cycling and walking distance of their work. Now, as do the public, they have to travel much further.



The very large car park is often overloaded to the extent that press bulletins have appeared advising 'stay away' and 'Park and Ride'! Its carbon footprint must be quite something - bus and car, single purpose journeys in thousands, added to the heat loss from a very long perimeter on an exposed hilltop, which arises from its spread form. As a flagship PFI, the market provided, what the market wanted, not what the community needed nor what was in the public interest. The market continues to make money, the community continues to pay.

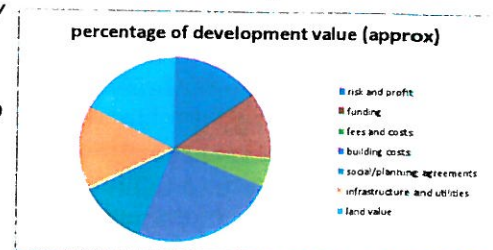
- **Not much can now be done about the hospital siting but, much improved public transport for patients and staff should be a major consideration when proposing growth strategies for the catchment.**

We ascribe to bad 'planning' very many of our complaints about the way our environment is evolving . That's fine and dandy, if you spell planning with a small 'p' to include the political, financial, fiscal, and social, as well as the physical planning for buildings, roads, etc. The 'town and country planning system' is a system for implementing the priorities of politicians and the powerful lobbies of the day. 'Planning', seldom pro-active, is too often in the position of trying to put lipstick on the face of the tiger. Hence 'forward planning' gets little attention and development control, trying too late for a silk purse, gets too much.

Large, and nationally orientated, housebuilders, have come to dominate the supply of houses and they have moved over from the vast public estates and new towns of the post-war period. Local builders, who were once the main suppliers of the private housing market, are virtually extinct in this role. These national providers, with their powerful lobbies, aided by the politics of 'right to buy', and 'a home owning democracy for all', brought with them their emphasis on methods, targets and numbers. National housebuilders and national politicians have continued to share a bed! Unfortunately, as with the banks, there was a failure to hang on to the real community purpose of it all. Land and housing, became commodities and chips in the national casino, with horrendously inflated values.

The cost of a house rose, to the point of pricing it out of range for many and pushing others to a lower specification. The cost of a house clearly depends upon its size, and quality of construction. Or does it? - not really!

- the construction cost is conventionally regarded as about 1/3rd the sale price. 2/3rds of the sale price is far more arbitrary, with room for much movement in its speculative inclusions, like land, profit and tax.
- the cost of the site - the price of land is often of greater significance than the cost of building. For many, at the bottom of the ladder, it is the cost of land and process that has pushed housing beyond reach and this is a direct consequence of the way we deal fiscally with land values - or rather, do not deal with them. When the use of farm land changes by the will of the community, an unearned windfall is created for the present owners. The notion that this 'betterment' in substantial part belongs to the community has long exercised the official mind and remains a prime topic for considering in any debate. The debate needs to be resumed and continued until arriving at a better out-turn. Land, is often much traded well before finishing up with the developer. 'Land banks' are a feature of this market, with trading in options - a sort of 'futures', based on the quantity of development land that might be available at any given time.



affordability
where the costs come from

- the rest of the sale price is made up of profits and the cost of everything else leading up to a practical start: negotiation, design, planning etc .
- **affordable housing** - We seem to be reinstating old formulae, for once again social housing is separated and identifiable as such - no development, so no %'age inclusions. One must enquire, perhaps naively, why not subsidise the individual? - potentially, it would seem to be more economic, and would add more choice. Past experience of providing the houses resulted in categorising families and often enough doomed them to them to the more distant locations they could least afford. The whole business of administering and maintaining buildings is surely more costly and less flexible than tax credits and the like? Special needs, are maybe necessarily dealt with as buildings, but they too should be on sites that ensure their integration with the communities at large.

There is such a thing as society. To a considerable extent, the built environment is what makes it. 'Big Society' requires better built environment to be 'Better Society'. At the extreme, the built environment can influence whether we are likely to be criminal, or not, even obese or not. More prosaically, it affects the likelihood of children playing together, and people talking together, or keeping fit, and we should plan for these better things. Sprawl, and large mono-cultural estates, work against the better things. We, in Norfolk, should start to 'do different', as soon as next we can, or we'll get committed to another 20 years of the same again, and after that, again?again?

We need fresh new policies for dealing with development, particularly those related to housing provision. We need to break the present assumptions of the priority afforded to the profit and convenience of the national providers, to have more regard for society in general and the house buyer in particular. In doing this, we would sever the financial cord that binds so much of 'local' to 'central'. We need the community somehow to be instructing its own professionals, in its own local interest. Builders should be principally that, builders; they should be building what is wanted and not dictating the crude environmental engineering that suits 'production'. Design needs to be by local teams, locally instructed. This way, old fashioned development control could be eliminated from the new communities - speeding matters up, eliminating uncertainties, restoring difference. Planning offices should be re-focussed, practising their skills at strategic and tactical levels, seeking better considered opportunities and defining standards. How to do it? First, by creating a better financial context.

Where housing numbers are large and to ensure their proper location, present arrangements should be changed to make for entirely different incentives. These should be designed to encourage communities with a large measure of financial autonomy, sense of ownership, and self worth. Fiscal and planning processes seem to be the tools best able to achieve these objectives? Some notes suggesting parameters:

Fiscally:

- Heavy fiscal disincentives for continuing to use land as a chip on the table in the national casino should be considered.
- 'Gain' attracting fiscal reward, if reinvested in the community interest - perhaps taxation exempt, if so invested?
- Policies permitting major growth, only in really suitable places having regard to building towards transport improvements, allowing relatively little growth elsewhere.
- Policies permitting major growth only in really suitable places to encourage private investment for the longer term, considering the issue of local bonds designed for this purpose.

For practicality and economy, all that is implied by the such methodologies might be realised through the agency of a 'Community Trust' or some such mechanism representative of the community's interest; perhaps, declaring it a planning-light zone, with devolved planning powers. This will give the 'Trust' and thereby the local representatives, the executive power to appoint a master planner and team, who will be directly responsible to them - cutting out the middle-man, and making for quick decisions on the basis of an agreed plan of action. This could reduce delays and uncertainties, reduce cost for everybody concerned and steer growth, within defined parameters, towards attractive goals.



Lord Wei, one of the Government's financial advisers, remarked that retiring baby-boomers have a trillion pounds to invest. He wants to create a slew of financial products that offer a safe way of making money and doing good at the same

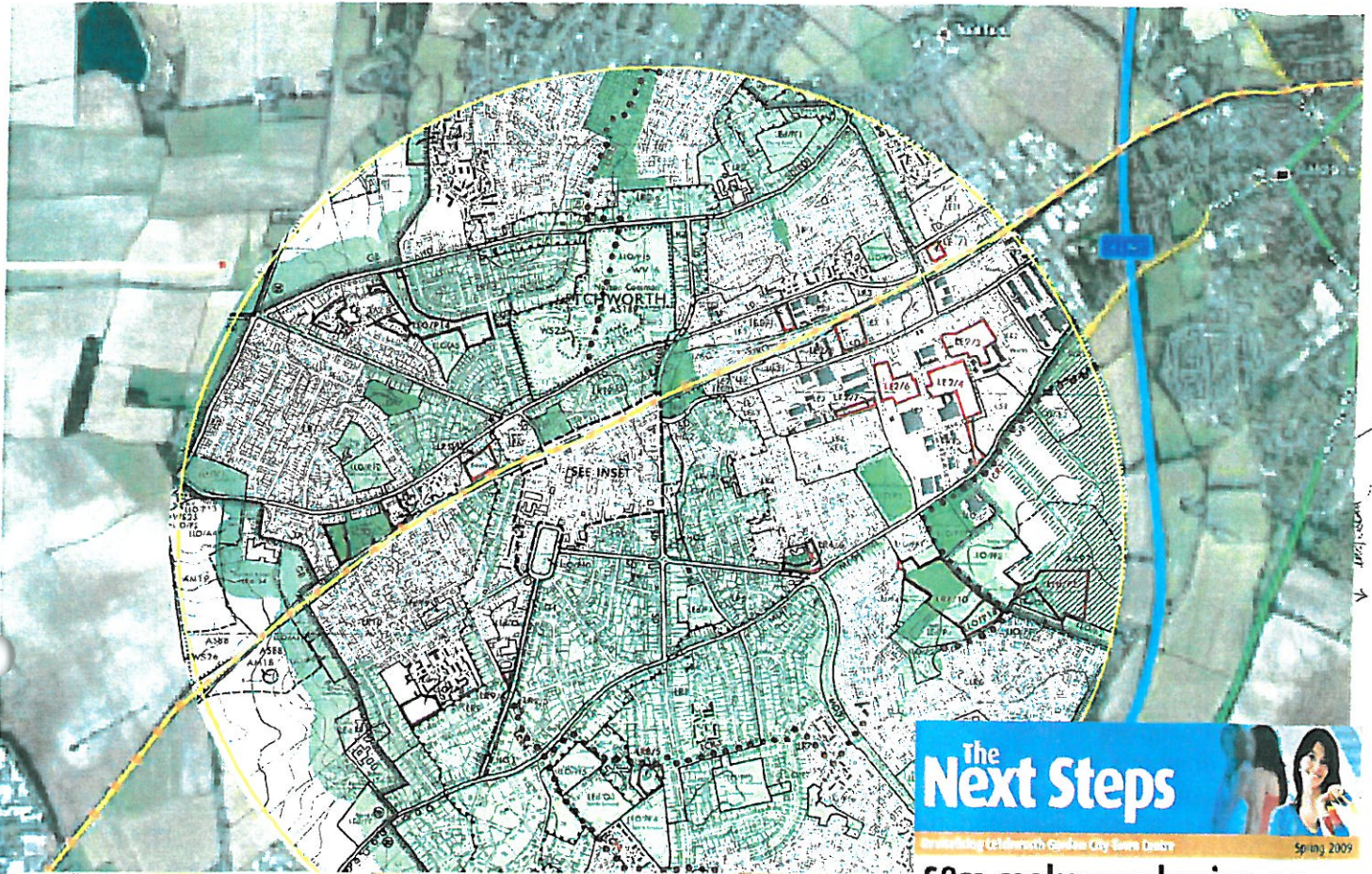
*parameters
for a new way*

Financially, one would look mostly to the market, perhaps in the form of specific Bonds for well defined purposes. Properly constructed, such offers should have appeal in a market place that is short of safe long term investments. Lord Wei, adviser to David Cameron, suggests Big Society Isas. Some of our future citizens of a new Acle, (see later) might well be interested. Their own investment growth, contributing to their own own amenity and pension? For those unable to afford to buy freeholds, co-ownerships and the like should perhaps attempt to emulate German precedents, which at least anecdotally, seem to have many advantages over the private landlords?

With a combination of the right fiscal inducements, favouring the long term, and the right population catchments, it should be possible to interest markets in funding better forms of transport for commuting, shopping and the like? If the location of the growing population is such that future growth increases values, convenience and relieves problems, the investment will grow more profitable too.

There is nothing impractical or new in much of this, it was what pretty well what did happen without the state, in a very free market, at the beginning of the last century. One particular example has been more successful in creating an enjoyable and sustainable community than any of the modern New Towns, Letchworth. Thanks to some ideas of clever old Ebenezer Howard!





The Next Steps
 Revitalising Letchworth Garden City Town Centre
 Spring 2009

£8m makeover begins on Eastcheap and Leys Avenue

Inside this issue
 Town Centre works: The town's fortunes improved
 Letchworth Town

• *Letchworth, perhaps, in the context of this discussion, less interesting for its architecture, than that it came about by private funds and initiative, the first Garden City. Letchworth, has administered itself successfully over many years, more recently in harness with a conventional local administration.*

Letchworth 2009 grew as the locals chose

LETCHWORTH - THE FIRST GARDEN CITY was founded in 1903. Cars were not an issue then and it looked out for itself while it completed the housing for its present population of about 33,000. Further significant growth is limited to consolidation - it has reached its green belt.

The town was the brainchild of Ebenezer Howard and grew, guided by its own management team, without major public sector money or intervention until the 1960's. In 1962, at the request of its own citizen's and by

Act of Parliament, it became a Corporation. This was in order to scotch a hostile buyout bid that arose as a result of its financial success.

• The fruits of this success continue to benefit its citizens today. It is still making substantial grants of many thousands to its citizens: these are available to its schools and individual scholars, as well as to subsidising diverse communal activities: sports clubs, home support workers and so on.

LETCHWORTH is just completing a multimillion town centre refurbishment scheme.

This scheme, decided upon by its own management, is being carried out with its own money, and continues in the depth of this financial 'crunch'.



It ought to be possible to create something new and worthwhile out of large scale growth. A place with a new, or a reinforced identity, should emerge. In addition to its own value, it also should contribute to a wider context and add enhanced character to the landscape.

Serious growth should be sited to allow for proper public transport and if at all possible should serve to alleviate some of the adverse effects of present sprawl.

Acle is able to answer these requirements: it lies to the east of Norwich.

Norwich can equally well be approached from any point of the compass. And yet, no significant option that has thus far been illustrated, has looked east of Norwich. This one is worth a second look. It starts with some solid advantages:

- Acle enjoys the helpful survival of the the Wherry Lines from the pre-Beeching era. It is not a huge step to upgrade this Yare Valley railway line, to a frequent, 20 hours a day, service.
- Acle is already very effectively bypassed. Over-passes and under-passes connect its territory both sides of the A47. Unlike Long Stratton or the NE growth triangle Acle would not depend upon any off-site roadworks as conditions precedent.
- Such is the relationship between these provisions and the present village that most construction work could be carried out with very little disturbance to the present population.

The major 'enabling' requirement envisaged in what follows is for a new 'Acle Water', a new lake or broad, (sadly unlikely to strike gravel, which could make it pay for itself,); at a cost of perhaps £5m, it amounts to rather less than the cost of one significant road junction.



Inset, a circle, equal to the area of Letchworth has been simply overlaid on a map of Acle.

It should not be understood as a development boundary.

aerial view of acle and inset, showing size of lechworth

acle
a possible example?

10



Acle is the chosen exemplar for other reasons.

• **Acle** was once a proper market town, and it is now a village that has already begun to lose its shape. **Under the JCT plan, it is down for another 100 - 200 houses, (200 - 400 cars?). Further erosion of Acle is already under way - set to continue therefore along muddled lines, all too familiar.** So far it has received what can only be described as inappropriate, growth - already eroding character and a direct consequence of no vision for 'place'. **No doubt each and every recent building was subjected to considerable process and costs in time and fees, but for what purpose? If you proceed mainly by way of careless imposed additions, the end picture is one of yet another spoil place.**

• **Acle** has remained something of a focus for its rural hinterland. It lays a proud but at present improbable claim. to be the 'Gateway to the Broads'.

• **A walk around Acle centre reveals the earlier attractive, rather urban, (and pre-planning) architecture, and facilities, of a real town. Current stock-taking would include:**

useful local convenience shopping, including for example: three proper butchers a couple of modest supermarkets, a florist, estate agent and an ironmonger

- Pub and coffee places
- The handsome mediaeval church of St Edmund.
- An attractive modern methodist church.
- A fully blown health centre.
- Splendid recreation ground with fooball/cricket/bowling etc.
- Acle High School - a science speciality
- Acle Primary School
- Police and Fire Stations
- Hotel and B&B
- Acle, already offers some employment in addition to the public sector: tyres, gardening tools specialist, hotels, cleaning equipment suppliers etc.

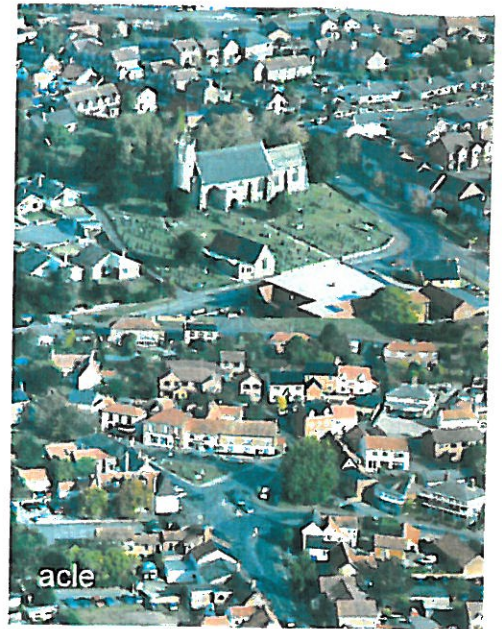
• *If more under its own control, with its own proper plan, would Acle vote to grow larger, but better?*

Or, would it prefer to lose further coherence slowly, untidily, and probably surely in the coming years - as has happened in Wymondham and is happening at Long Stratton?

• **Construction work could be carried out, mostly without crossing the centre of the town - to the west from the A47 and on the east, the Broad - Acle water, could be constructed from the A1064.**

This provocation leaves many matters undiscussed, subject to consultations and research - but, if progress is to be made, the batting has to be opened and if not here? then where? and how?

• **To Acle should be posed the main question, 'Should Acle grow - if in a good way?' It will provide an interesting exercise in true consultation. It would do something to demonstrate whether localism can deal with new ideas, attractive enough in themselves and of wide benefit, or whether NIMBY will rule and stagnation really has to be the inevitable outcome of 'localism'. See what you make of what follows!**

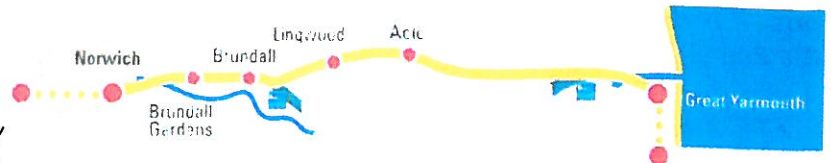


acle village
nearly a town already?



Modern transport systems are viable if they serve sufficiently large numbers, collected together in a way that keeps them busy, over a long operating day. It will want research, but there is intriguing potential if the Norwich - Gt Yarmouth, Yare Valley line can be considered as extendable, either by short route bus services using the termini to change mode, or far more attractive, would be to obviate the need to change modes at all and have the train become a tram. 20mins every hour, /20hours everyday! Cheap, regular and reliable? And comfortable! Commuting time could become useful.

Acle opens a very exciting opportunity for Light/Heavy rail, such a major step forward in effective transportation.



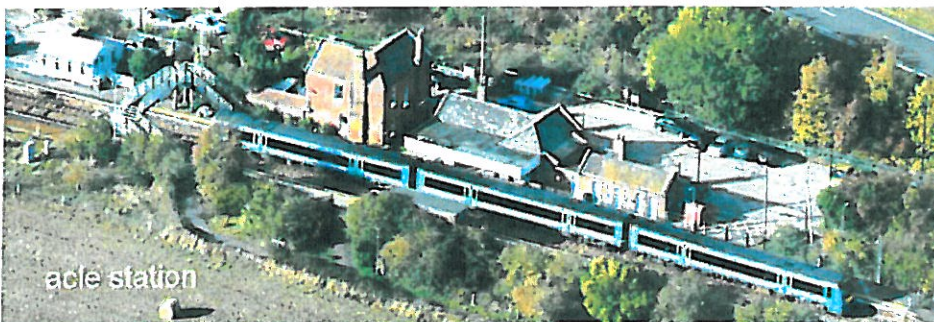
As long ago as 1975, Karlsruhe, in Germany, with 250,000 population, started on a Light/Heavy rail sharing scheme, that had a world first for the through running of vehicles in 1992. The deal with Deutsche Bahn, (DB) includes 8 new stations and continues with a programme for tunnelling sections of the line in the city, due to complete in 2015.



For Acle a light rail/heavy rail, as in Karlsruhe should be the target. In the meantime, improved services on the rail would go a long way to get things started.

- There would be a large enough critical mass to justify a proper full rail solution to justify extensions into light street rail: with Norwich at 132,000 population, (250,000 inner catchment); a population growing at Acle to perhaps a future of 20/30,000; and a 93,900 population in Gt Yarmouth : Norwich University Science Park/NUH at one extreme, and Gt Yarmouth Outer Harbour at the other - both, good and meaty, both with real further growth potential! Top up populations, providing further traffic, already exist on the way: Brundall, 5,500, Lingwood, 2,000, Thorpe St Andrew, say 2,000.

Every existing station-stop along the valley is not only a potential park and ride: it is also a cycle and ride, and a walk and ride - settlements that would use a frequent, reliable, cheap and rapid transit. Even the existing large park and ride site at Thorpe would seem to be readily convertible from bus to train.



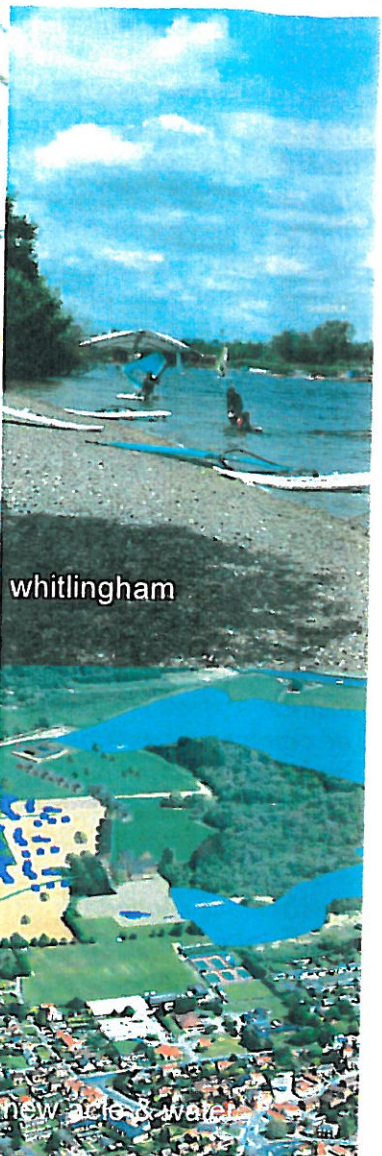
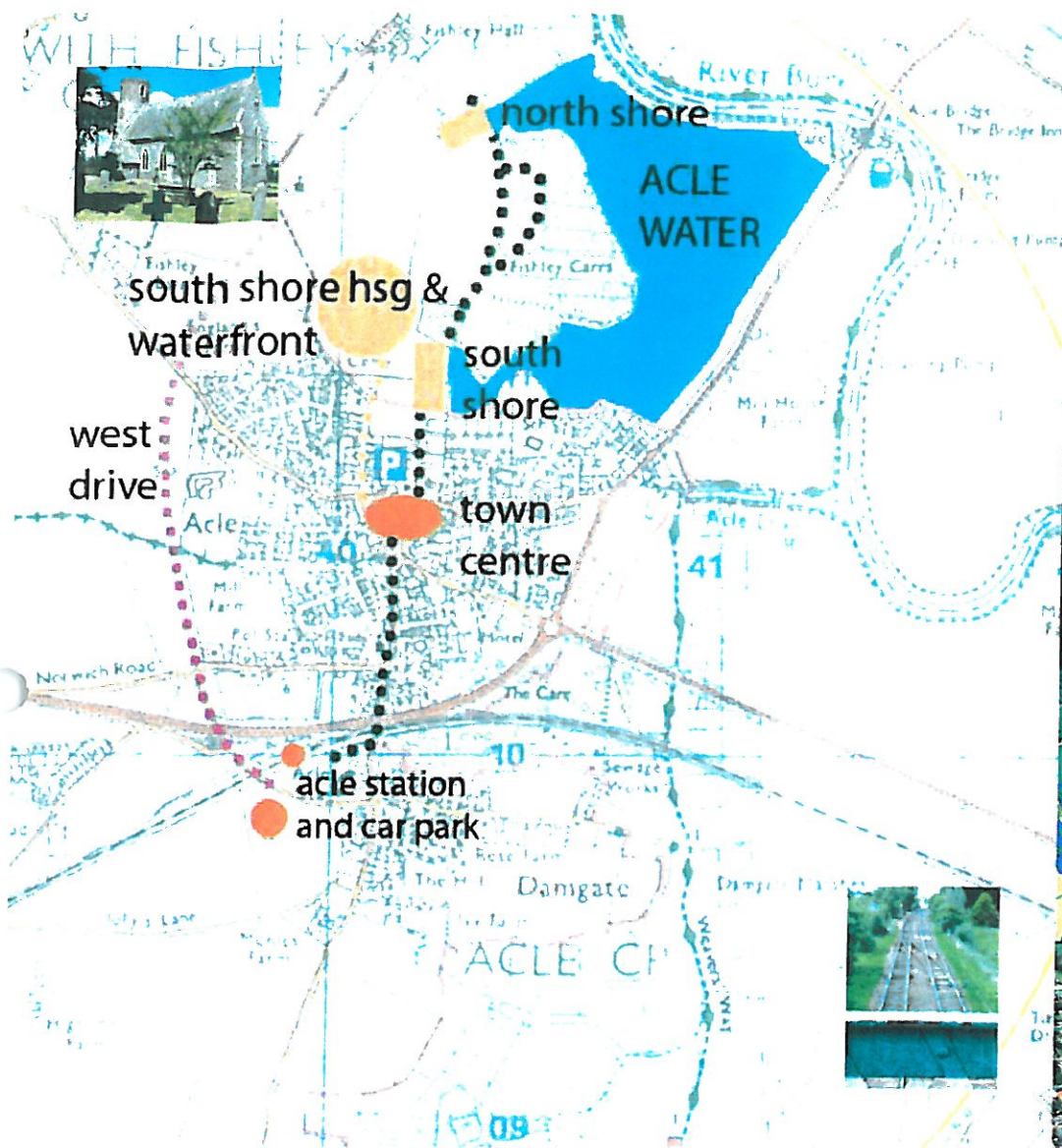
*acle
is on the way*

- **What a bonus for Acle, Norwich, the Yare Valley, and Gt Yarmouth! Perhaps a 'First Yare Valley Community Bond'? A safe investment and a guaranteed long term growth? Throw in south facing linear solar arrays on the way and generate a surplus of electricity to offset some running costs?**

At the Norwich end, the NNUH suddenly made very easy of access for many; and for shoppers there would be stops on Castle Meadow, St Stephens, without change of 'mode'. The Norwich route would take in a couple of industrial estates and so on, Riverside would be well connected and football crowds eased. Indeed, the inducement for many not to bother with the car when using Norwich would be great. The Thorpe Park & Ride could be served too. But never mind 'park and ride', the capacity of this system is many thousands, and need never be over-stretched - for the new residents and changed opportunities for those there already, no need to 'park and ride', a real inducement to 'live and ride'.

- It is of interest that Angers, France, with a pop. 158,500, is currently, (2009/10) installing a light rail system, to solve some similar problems.





Taking its cue from Whitlingham, this sketch assumes a new 'Acle Water' as the first move and 'South Shore' the place, where a start on building towards a new vision could be made.

acle new town

a proper start?

13

'Acle Water', should be the beginning of everything and made right at the start. This would immediately enhance most existing values in Acle and act as an attractive magnet for future growth. It would bestow instant great character and create a great new brand.



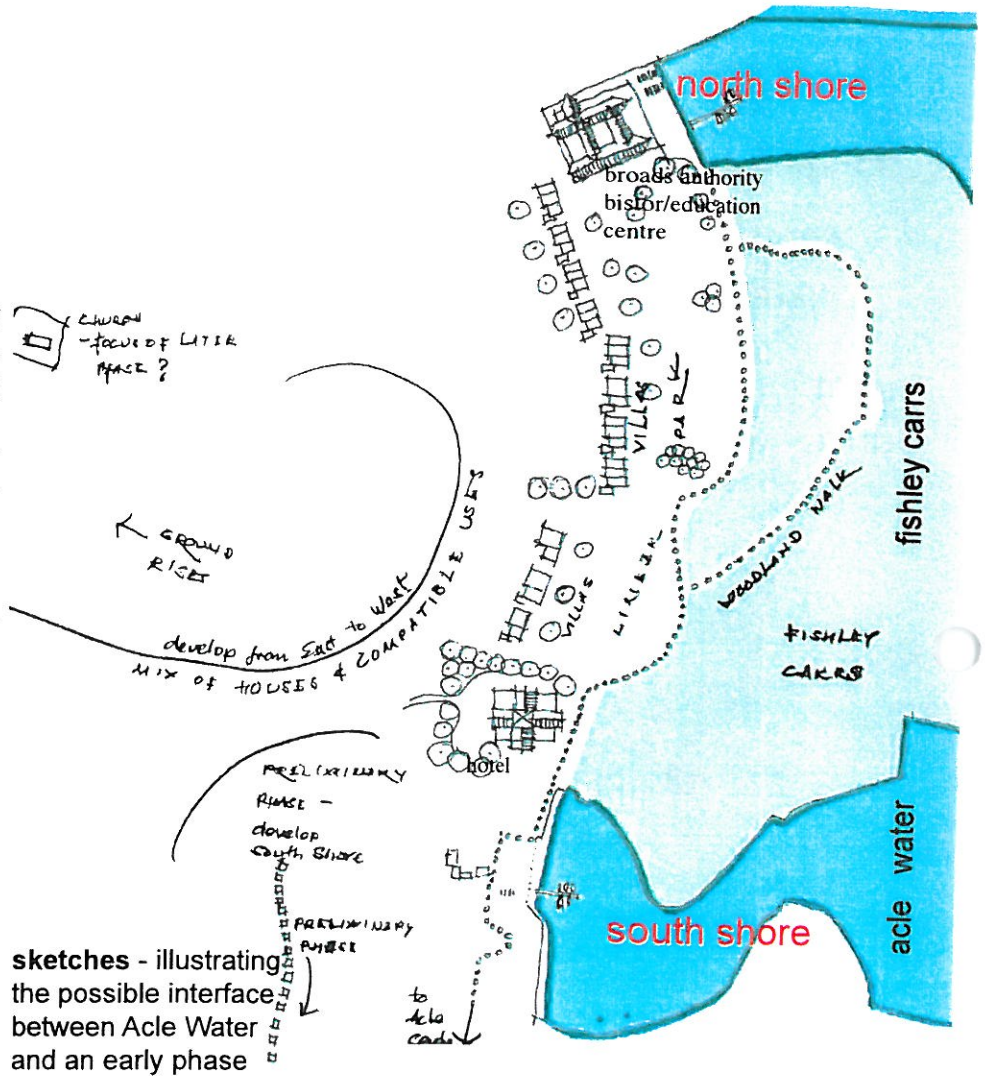
Further opportunity for Acle to grow to a completion, lies west and south, and could also be built out without serious disturbance to existing Acle centre. 'West Drive' indicates possible access to this land in a diagrammatic way.

Doing different, making a start:

Two 'landings', (North and South Shores) serve 'Acle Water' at the north and south ends of the existing woodland - along its edge a linear green park - fronting on to the green - housing at mixed densities, other uses interspersed.

- **North Shore** development would be about the Broads - training in watermanship; the Broads Authority at some future rent review, to set up here, instead of in Norwich. Activity, rather like at Whitlingham but with added dimensions for boat traffic visiting Acle, a visitor and training centre?

- **South Shore** development might include a 'Hotel of the Broads' or other commercial enterprise - in the diagram, the larger building on a site carved out of bit of existing woodland. For visitors by boat, shop and coffee etc, including an important good cycle/footpath connection direct to the town centre, (routed alongside the existing tennis courts). Perhaps an outdoor solar heated Lido, as at Beccles, might prove attractive, adding to local and visitor appeal.

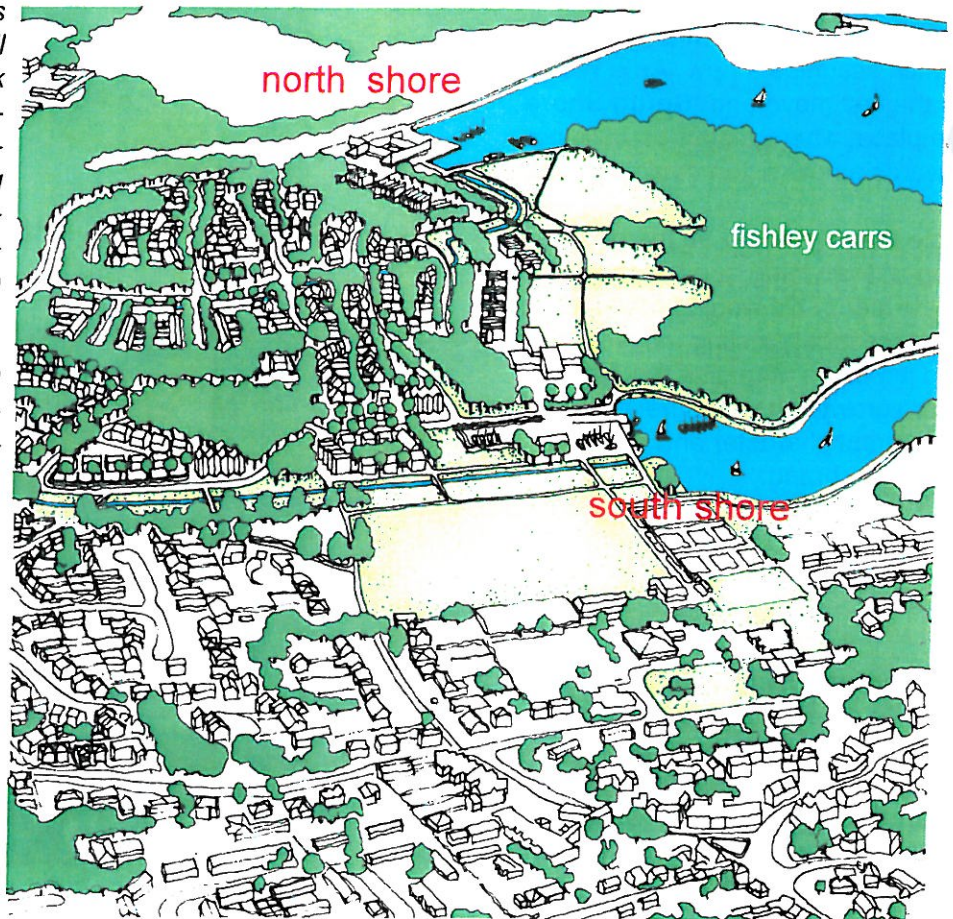


sketches - illustrating the possible interface between Acle Water and an early phase

The serious housebuilding, might commence at South Shore and progress westwards as medium density overall but mixing as it goes, eventually, back to a new West Drive, leading to the station. West Drive, would open up development to the north, without proving disruptive of the town: adding in suitable non-residential uses as opportunity arises - maybe as alternatives to the Business Parks elsewhere?.

The pedestrian and cycle routes could be directly connected to the centre by the 'scenic route' on the east. A car park near the station to provide a supplementary park & ride for outlying houses, and the villages around.

A green belt around Acle would define a capacity that, combined with already committed sites, would allow it to fulfil demand for a number of years < 20/30,000 population. In the meantime, a successor should be sought for there should be no reversion to old unhappy ways!



Suggested by the more or less straight line joining Norwich and Great Yarmouth by road, rail and river, a relevant symbiosis led to Acle early in these deliberations. As wider options for transport were realised, Acle seemed to offer ever-stronger opportunities for coherent growth. It quickly became apparent that it could be a catalyst for so much more than the provision of numbers. Horizons could be wider. Growing Acle, offering a real chance; maybe even as the catalyst and exemplar of a principle for more enlightened policies elsewhere?

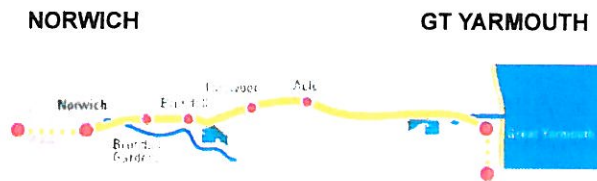
Norwich, is identified as the hub city for the Joint Core Strategy: ironically, the strategy, if implemented would add heavily to Norwich problems. The measures, suggested for their alleviation, do not convince. Traffic increases alone, are spread on a scale that would substantially add to the existing parking/access difficulties: in turn, making effective bus provision ever more problematic. In the case of Acle, offering an alternative policy, the rail line already exists even should the light rail idea have to wait a bit. Future large population growth confined mainly to this one place for some while would encourage manageable distributive bus improvements at each end of the rail link.

Gt Yarmouth new harbour, presently isolated, could in the medium term, share the light/heavy rail with the Hospital & University campuses in Norwich: their city and town centres and the Yare Valley, including Acle,

IDEAS & CONSEQUENCES



UEA
NNUH



LIGHT/HEAVY RAIL 15/20 LINK

outer
harbour



- A ferry link from western Europe to the new harbour would, in effect, be a ferry link to Norwich via Acle. Think of the relationship between Dublin and Dun Laoghaire, Edinburgh and Leith, and this would be an echo of that. **Norwich could claim a seaport as well as an airport.**



- A small marina on the south side of the new harbour? Think of Ijmuiden, think of North Sea access to the Broads, and Acle. Whatever way you think, this idea will 'up' the appeal of Gt Yarmouth.

- Gt Yarmouth for conferences, in conjunction with Norwich? 20 mins down the line, 15/20 /day connection? Now they both can have a seaport and an airport!

*norwich-gt yarmouth
support for both*

- Is it entirely fanciful to think of this symbiosis extending to provide part of the housing solution for the Norwich Hub? Gentrification of parts of Yarmouth with housing overspill from Norwich? Live by the sea and ride, not just park and ride!

- Look across the North Sea again and think of the Hague and the Kurhaus - shopping, hotel, conference synergies with Norwich. Think of Dieppe and its quayside fish restaurants.



Buried in all this brainstorming is the real marketability of this symbiosis of Norwich, Acle, the Broads and Gt Yarmouth with a branding for the advancement of them all: all this, for the price of a small lake and a really good extended transport link serving relevant populations of more than 250K, accommodating Acle as it grows – and made more affordable, because of the added population at Acle? Added value from growth!



The ideas outlined here could be realised by the combination of local initiative and market resources. Costs, to the public sector would be nothing like the cost of the by-passes and roadworks elsewhere. Future generations could enjoy annual advantage instead of annual penalty.

EPILOGUE

This is a story of how we might prefer to organise to live, given the uncertainty of social change. Will the population actually grow or shrink, long term? If it is more likely to grow in the medium term, how should we respond to that? Should the N&N in Colney get bigger and bigger? Or should we invent the 'modern' cottage hospital, as a pillar of a re-emerging localism? Should we allow a random sprawl of characterless housing developments on the edges of currently well functioning towns and villages; ghettoized developments, which typically lack infrastructure and civic space? Or should we look to organic growth in those areas with more potential for wider and benevolent impact, such as Acle? Can we make that growth a model of sustainable development, with strong public transport links, local social care, and low food miles?

It should be possible to produce an Acle that is a seriously good place to live - if planning is done with the will and wit, applied through its own appointed team - as Letchworth is still doing, having started without benefit of modern 'planning in 1903. It is still responding to local concerns and preferences as the town changes. The easy and obvious linearity of the public transport solution available in the Yare Valley, makes relationships with communities both near and far so very easy, without unnecessary use of personal transport for all the everyday commuting and running around. Instead of getting strained with further growth, such transport should get better and cheaper. Best of all and most convincingly with light/heavy rail, but much improved even with train and bus.

It would take a book or two and a research project rather than a pamphlet to explore the full potential of these ideas, but let's be clear, there is potential for coherent, organic local development: whereas sprawl, the present choice has little to offer but social and civic decline.

michael innes

NORFOLK ASSOCIATION OF ARCHITECTS

OCTOBER 2010

12 months ago the Norfolk Association of Architects formed a small working party to discuss the planning system. With the advent of the general election it decided to 'think out loud', believing this to be appropriate in the light of ministerial and other government statements. In view of the shortage of time to get a unified view out quickly enough to be active in the national debate, I was encouraged to put forward a personal document that broadly reflected the tenor of our discussions. It is a view with a good consensus, but in no way is it an official view of the Norfolk Association of Architects nor of the parent RIBA. It has been encouraged by the Council of the NAA as a proper document for the purposes of public debate.

The superb aerial photographs of Acle, Wymondham and the outer harbour at Gt Yarmouth are by Mike Page.

The photograph of the UEA, is courtesy of the UEA.

The OS survey for allowing the exercise of their copyright under the new rules.

There has been much use of current literature when reading and discussing for this paper - direct quotes are few - most are the salient points left in the mind as conditioned by residual personal prejudice, my apologies for any unconscious plagiarism.

POSTSCRIPT

".....people should open their minds and find new ways of doing more for less."