

MEMORANDUM

**For the attention of Ms. Liz McCutcheon,
Community Planning Officer
Kent County Council
County Hall,
MAIDSTONE,
Kent,
ME14 1XX.**

15th. February 2006.

THE VISION FOR KENT DOCUMENT.

The Context. We, being the sub-committee of the RTW Town Forum set up to examine the document entitled Vision For Kent (“The Document”) dated 15th. January 2005, have now examined that document, and wish to report as follows, and as invited so to do, to the Kent County Council.

In general, we are full of admiration for the thoroughness and foresight demonstrated by the authors of the Vision For Kent Document. As a statement of policy and intent covering all salient aspects of KCC’s aspirations for the County in the foreseeable future, it is necessarily lacking in detail, but its main thrust is clear and concise. We like in particular the way in which the needs, strengths and weaknesses of each region of the County have been identified.

Our Remit. We have been at pains to confine our observations on the Vision for Kent document, and our related observations, to matters of considerable significance, and to omit any criticism of matters of detail arising from the document. We have, furthermore, confined our concerns to three matters which we regard as of outstanding importance:

1. A recommendation that the KCC should consider the passage of local legislation requiring the inclusion of alternative energy generation equipment in the design of all new structures built in Kent.
2. A suggestion that talks be commenced between the KCC and the Office of the DPM in the matter of government housing policy, in the light of the County's dwindling water supply capacity.
3. Specific recommendations related to the development of the County's tourist industry.

1. The problems of Alternative Energy Generation.

We note with approval the acknowledgement by the author of the Document of the problems arising from the need to generate energy from alternative sources, and for the County to meet the challenges of Global Warming and the consequences of climate change. We see this acknowledgement as recognising the environmental and ecological complications of these matters, as well as their somewhat more controllable economic aspects. We have taken note of the KCC's statement on page 25 of the Document with regard to "The changes facing the environment..."; on page 26, in the matter of Long Term Goals; on page 27, in the reference to "reducing energy use". On page 38, furthermore, we note the Author's reference to the rise in consumption levels of energy in the County.

Having regard to all these matters, we are inclined strongly to recommend that the KCC initiates local legislation whereby it would become a statutorily enforceable requirement for all applicants for Planning Permission to incorporate provisions for the generation of electrical energy, or a part thereof, in their plans as submitted.

We cannot think of any reason why our suggested policy, as stated in the previous paragraph, should not be adopted. We are minded additionally, of recent policy developments in the London Borough of Merton. Details of Merton's initiatives in this matter can be accessed on the Internet at <http://www.merton.gov.uk/living/environment/energy.htm>

2. The Problem of Housing Construction in relation to Water availability.

The incidence of climate change in recent times has given rise to increased variability in the availability of water. Especially in Kent, and more particularly with reference to Bewl Water, available water stocks have fallen to unacceptably low levels, and concerns are currently being expressed about the possibility of water rationing before the end of the forthcoming summer. Particular reference has been made to the danger of serious water shortages in the Weald of Kent. At the same time, the Office of the DPM continues to insist on the extensive construction of housing in the neighbourhood of Ashford, in circumstances which are clearly detrimental to the ecology of the County.

We have taken note of the observations regarding water and its usage on pages 25, 26, 27 and 39 of the Document.

We would recommend that the KCC makes representation to the Office of the DPM with a view to clarifying what seems to us to be a negligent misuse of that Office.

3. Kent's Tourist Industry – The case for Substantial Development.

We are encouraged by the emphasis which the Document places upon the importance of Tourism to the economic wellbeing of the County. We have taken notice of the references and observations on page 6. regarding the annual value of Tourism to the County, mention on page 15 of the importance of Tourism to the Thanet region, emphasis on Tourism on pages 16/18, and reference to “Kent's high quality landscape” on page 26.

We are of the opinion that the tourist industry in Kent offers outstanding opportunities for quantitative and qualitative growth. Accordingly we wish to make a number of specific recommendations of ways whereby this industry can be encouraged. In this context, we are mindful of the need to create opportunities for employment throughout the County, to foster the establishment of small businesses and to maximise the usage of the County's resources.

The East Coast.

The East Coast of Kent has been regarded traditionally as a tourist destination catering in the main for the less expensive tastes and needs of holiday makers from the South East of England. Perhaps this view of the Thanet resorts has been fostered by the inexpensive nature of accommodation in Margate, Ramsgate and so forth. But we are reminded that the East coast of the County possesses a wide range of resorts of all types. Included amongst these Faversham and Hythe (mediaeval market towns), Sandwich and Deal (smaller towns of considerable architectural merit), Margate, Ramsgate and Broadstairs (seaside towns of widely different character and qualities), Dymchurch at the less exalted end of the market, and Folkestone, perhaps for the more senior resident and visitor. In addition, there is Dover, the usual port of arrival for the County.

We are of the view that this entire coast should be marketed as one touristic area, with a name to compete and compare with the "Cote Opale" on the other side of the channel. The allocation of a comparable name to designate this entire region with its widely different but all-inclusive range of resorts, would greatly facilitate the promotion of the region overseas. The "Thanet Riviera" would probably be a somewhat too fanciful suggestion, but a term of that type might be seen as appropriate.

The presence of the port of Dover geographically in the centre of the group, the proximity of Canterbury, the accessibility of London, are all factors which could be used as central to a concerted overseas advertising campaign for the region. In our opinion, the region merits this degree of promotion.

The Weald of Kent

The Weald of Kent, with its dense concentration of mediaeval villages and large number of historic houses open to the public, situated in well wooded and rolling countryside, is unique in England. Comparable areas of outstanding historic and touristic merit in Europe are few and far between. Perhaps the Suisse Normande in Normandy, South Limburg, the wine-growing region of Alsace, and certain parts of Swabia, should be mentioned as areas of comparable merit and character.

We feel that, in the Weald of Kent, there are similar opportunities for overseas marketing to those we identified in Thanet. Once again, proximity to the Continent (Dover), to London and to Canterbury, could be cited as additional attractions of the Region. The Weald has already answered an increased demand for accommodation, and is now liberally provided with restaurants and “Gastropubs”. We feel that the small towns and villages of the Weald should be encouraged, perhaps with financial incentives, to develop this area of local economic activity, with all that this implies for job creation, vocational training, local economic prosperity, and so forth.

Conclusion.

The three foregoing areas of concern form the sum total of our commentary upon the Vision for Kent document. Needless to say, we will be most interested to learn of the reception of these ideas by the KCC. We would, furthermore, welcome any opportunity to contribute further to any dialogue arising from suggestions that we have made, or to act in consultation with any working party set up to advise in matters with which we are concerned.

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