

Report of a meeting held at Park House on 30<sup>th</sup> January re  
“Neighbourhood Forums.”

The Head of Planning, Mr. Jack Straw and his Senior Planning Officer, Miss Suzanne Parkes were kind enough to organise and run this meeting.

Attending: Hubert Carr (Chair of the LRA), Hilary Porter (Vice-Chair), John Howarth (from Bookham RA and on LAPand Action for Market Towns), Flip Cargill, Ann Cardew, Cheryl Allen, Norma Tatham-Thompson and Caroline Brown.

This was a meticulously prepared and well choreographed meeting, appreciated by all who attended, as evidenced by the time it finished – 10.00 pm.

Mr. Straw explained, very tactfully, that Leatherhead had little hope of being able to emulate Bookham and form its own Neighbourhood Forum. There are various Statutory reasons for this, accurate representation. being one of them. A minimum of 21, (42 being better), people representing all areas and ages and interests of the town would need to be collected before the end of October. Leatherhead covers a wide area physically and the population is very diverse so this would be very difficult to achieve..

His advice was that we should make use of the MVDC skills and time and act in conjunction with them. What is more, our involvement would come before any (major) planning applications went in

One of his chief concerns is that we should have a good bank of land available for housing, which would, thereby, give good protection to us against pressure from London and other unsuitable applications for buildings in unsuitable locations. Without this ability to provide alternative sites, no Planning Inspector can dismiss Appeals as housing is always required.

This brought up the subject of an impending consultation concerning the Green Belt. If a loss of certain areas of Green Belt is contemplated, that particular area will have to be proved to be no longer meeting the criteria by which it was originally established; in other words it is no longer maintaining the character and integrity of its neighbourhood. Miss

Parkes then showed us a map of Leatherhead surrounded by broken, purple lines which indicate how this Belt could be broken up into different, distinct sections for evaluation. It seems distressingly likely that some lengths of the Green Belt will have to be sacrificed.

This in turn led to the 32 acres of allotment and farm land between Barnett Wood Lane and the bypass being discussed. Currently partly in the Green Belt and owned jointly by Merton College and MVDC it is seen as an exciting commercial possibility by some councillors. By others it is seen as the death knell of the High Street as a possible retail park would suck all shoppers away from our historic centre.

Other worries arising from these ideas :were also expressed: namely the pressure on our infrastructure and our narrow, bottle-necked roads.