

Wickford North GREEN ACTION GROUP

Leaflet 9 – December 2008 - this directly affects your neighbourhood

Our last Leaflet (8) was issued just after the Public Inquiry was held in Basildon at the end of June 2008. Although the outcome of that Inquiry was announced in October, we have waited until now in order to bring you the latest news about what's happening with regard to the application by Gleeson Homes Ltd and Gladedale Group Ltd to build flats and houses on two fields at the end of Station Avenue as the first step in their plans to 'concrete over' the whole of the Barn Hall fields by developing a 'mini-town' of up to 2000 flats and houses up to and beyond Waverley Crescent.

We now have good news too. All is not lost; there is a final, decisive battle; we are optimistic that it can be won; and that we can preserve this lovely countryside on the north-western boundary of Wickford for the continued enjoyment of current and future residents. This is what has happened:

Planning Inspector supported Wickford North Green Action Group & Basildon Council

After the Public Inquiry the Planning Inspector recommended in our favour that there should be no development at Barn Hall. In his report dated 23 July 2008, he considered that the most important factor was not to build here on the former Green Belt land, now in Special Reserve, until the Basildon Local Development Plan 1998 had been reviewed; and until the suitability for housing of Barn Hall and all other sites had been tested through the Local Development Framework (LDF) - in short, accepting the Council's main argument to the Public Inquiry.

The Government did not accept its own Planning Inspector's recommendation

Sadly, it must be said for democracy and fair play, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Hazel Blears, over-ruled the Planning Inspector's recommendation. She decided on 16 October 2008 to allow building at Barn Hall. It appears that her sole reason was to pursue central Government's desire to build more houses nationally. Unlike the Planning Inspector, she never visited Wickford and, even worse, she refused to meet the Wickford North Green Action Group (WNGAG) and our MP, John Baron, to discuss her decision - despite presenting her with a petition containing 3,521 of your signatures against any development.

Basildon Council are now appealing the Government's decision to the High Court

The Council is challenging the Government's decision on the grounds that it has been made prematurely and without regard to work currently underway to complete its LDF - which, as the Planning Inspector accepted, will be the planning document guiding all future decisions about where homes will, and will not, be built in Wickford and the whole Basildon District. The Council will also argue in the High Court that central Government failed to declare an interest in the land. When it was originally sold to the developers, Gleeson and Gladedale, there was a provision that, if and when any planning permission was granted and its value increased considerably, some of that increase would be paid to central Government. Councillor Tony Ball, the Basildon Cabinet member for planning, said "This land is highly valued by the community and they don't want to see it built on. We will do everything we can to try to get the Secretary of State's decision overturned".

WNGAG applaud this resolute action by Council leaders. We're equally determined to see local democracy win in the end. It may take up to six months or a year for the High Court to hear the case. We'll keep you posted. Meanwhile we wish you all a very Happy Christmas & New Year.

www.greenwickfordnorth.org.uk is WNGAG's very own website where you can read more & follow links to the Planning Inspector's recommendation & the Secretary of State's decision