



We care, we inform

Wickford Action Group

People before Profit

Welcome to our first newsletter of 2008

We would like to say a big 'Thank You' to all who have supported us in 2007, either by coming to our meetings, writing to local papers, or by voting for us in the local elections. Start 2008 by joining the campaign to safeguard the town's future; visit our website at www.WickfordActionGroup.org.uk or email mail@WickfordActionGroup.org.uk, or phone our chairman, **Alan Ball**, on 01268 562851

The **Wickford Action Group** is fighting as best we can to protect Wickford from over development, and take every opportunity to try to convince the planning committee, chaired by a Wickford councillor, to take the resident's views into consideration, which they have disgracefully failed to do so far.

What has been achieved so far:

- We held two public meetings in 2007, for which we received overwhelming support for a complete re-think on the Master Plan.
- We put three candidates forward for the local elections, where we achieved 30% of the votes, causing a bit of a flutter among the main political parties.
- We host a website which we update regularly, and publish information about what is going on in the town in relation to the regeneration. www.WickfordActionGroup.org.uk
- We publish a regular newsletter, and distribute these and other leaflets in the town centre to keep everyone up to date on what is happening in their home town.
- We often have letters published in local papers, and these receive endorsement from on-line contributors.

We believe that many of Wickford's problems result from a failure to develop infrastructure for the existing population before building extra homes. We would like to see more doctors, dentists, police and school places in Wickford, together with improvements to our highways

What we **don't** want, are the monstrous blocks of flats, which the council are telling us is the only way forward.

Here are some of the things we believe in – why not join us – give Alan Ball a call:

- We support local shopkeepers. *Please, shop in Wickford whenever appropriate.*
- We are in favour of the sorting office staying in the town centre, and would oppose its move elsewhere. *If you agree, contact your local councillor.*
- We support the retention of the local post offices.
- We want to keep the Barn Hall green space, and are against the development there.

And what we are against:

- The Town Centre Master Plan, as it stands. Many of our members were in favour of it in the early days, but it is clear that the plans which were put before the public two years ago bear little relation to what is actually happening now.
- We oppose all high rise building in the town centre. We are also against any new building which does not offer the necessary improvements to the supporting infrastructure.



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Here are a few things we think you should know about.

The Wickford Town Centre Master Plan.

The Master Plan was approved at a Council Cabinet meeting in 2006. At this meeting it was decided that high rise buildings would be appropriate for Wickford, even though the consultation exercise reported that residents wanted the opposite. They also changed the Master Plan by increasing the Riverside Living developments from 121 to 253 flats – after we had voted!

We regard this as an abuse of power and responsibility; why ask the public if you are then going to do the exact opposite in terms of high-rise buildings?

Are blocks of flats the inevitable future for Wickford?

The main justification for the Master Plan is that all the proposed new homes, we make the current total 722, are needed to pay for the regeneration of the town. But what improvements will be provided by the 5 storey block approved for 3-31 Runwell Road for example? It will be a hideous blot on the landscape, yet the only Wickford councillor on the planning committee voted FOR a high rise block on this site!

Runwell Towers

Why was the developer of 'Runwell Towers', 3-31 Runwell Road, an anonymous company? **Butie Limited** is registered in the British Virgin Islands, the one registration authority that does not require the directors to be named. The site has now been sold on, and clearance of the site is now in progress.

The Wickford Action Group have received information on the identity of the directors of Butie Limited, and will be revealing this soon – watch our website for more information.

And what about the Green Belt?

Two of the developments in the pipeline are on 'green belt' land, at Barn Hall (which is not actually green belt), and Shotgate Farm, and once this is lost, it's gone for ever! We can't sit back and let it happen on our watch. The Barn Hall development application has been delayed and delayed, and we now understand that, due to the delay, **the developers have been able to bypass the council and appeal directly to the government inspector.** A council hearing has just been announced for 12th February, but it does seem to us like a major error of judgement from our council. With the

government's emphasis on ever more housing, we don't hold out much hope that it will be saved now.

The Shotgate Farm plan is for football pitches and a pavilion, and **it was approved in September last year!** Once this section is lost, the adjacent plot could easily follow. We will be watching to make sure that only the minimum build is allowed on green belt.

Buy-To-Let

The 700 flats planned for the town are prime targets for the 'buy-to-let' profiteers, thus denying our own children the chance to get on the housing ladder. The blatant shop front advertising by some Wickford estate agents for buy-to-let investors, just shows where *they* think the money will be made from the Master Plan!

'New' swimming pool – 'Wickford Reborn'

You will no doubt have seen the council's presentation last September about the rebuilt health centre, library and swimming pool? These are described as 'new', although we already have these facilities, and if this goes ahead **we will be without a pool for at least 18 months.**

Councillors brought to task

The Wickford Action Group raised questions at a council meeting in November last year about the dealings between councillors and the developer Bradgate. It was taken up by the Echo on December 5th:

'Answers are being demanded into why senior councillors met a Tory businessman to discuss publicity for his luxury flats development - before it got approval. Basildon Council leader Malcolm Buckley and deputy Tony Ball discussed announcing approval for the multi-million pound development during talks with developer Ray Ride.'

Plan to demolish Wickford School dashed.

A proposal from Essex CC to combine Wickford Infant and Junior schools with a new building on the Junior School playing field, have been dashed by the school governors rejecting the plan. We understand that the original proposal came from Basildon Council, who deny it, **but the truth WILL come out!** They would then have had prime land available for offering to developers for yet more blocks of flats.

Thank goodness common sense has prevailed in this instance.