



5th March 2010

Nick Sandford, Woodland Trust for YHREF

I attended an informal discussion meeting last Friday which involved members of the Yorkshire and Humber Regional Planning Board and the Housing and Regeneration Board on the subject of "How Much Housing and Where?"

Thanks to Simon Bowens and to Richard Wilson, who sent me some information in advance of the meeting.

Kris Hopkins, leader of Bradford Council, gave a short introduction, saying that other regions were better than Yorkshire and Humber in setting out to Government what their demands are: eg lobbying by North West region on high speed rail. Yorkshire and Humber needs to sharpen up its act and be clearer about what it wants.

Richard Wood, head of strategy at LGYH (although he said he is leaving in about two weeks) and Andy Haigh gave some short presentations on the need for new housing in the region and factors affecting the amount and its location.

They put an emphasis on places and communities and the need for a more integrated approach to sustainable development. It is a difficult time to do this in a period of negative or at most very slow economic growth. The link between new housing and older housing developments is also important.

Inward migration to the region is having an impact on the need for more housing and most cities in the region now expect growth in population. In the recession there has been a fall off in house building, except for Leeds where it has been boosted by already committed development to building of flats for rent. Bradford and Sheffield in particular have very high social housing waiting lists. Land delivery involves a complex set of housing market relationships and recent experience shows it can be dangerous to rely on trend based predictions.

The meeting then progressed into a question and answer session. Most points raised focussed on how we can ensure that new housing contributes to delivering truly sustainable communities, rather than on detailed discussion of housing numbers or locations. That may come at the full planning board in a couple of weeks time.

I was able to get in some points about the need for housing developments to include green infrastructure and in particular natural greenspace and woodland. This seemed to get support from several of the local authority people present which was encouraging. Others mentioned the need to focus also on existing housing most of which is still likely to be here in 50 to 100 years time.

These meetings are useful to be able to network with senior council people and get them thinking about environmental issues, as well as having direct input to the meetings.