



VALE OF EVESHAM AGRICULTURE AND FOOD DISTRIBUTION POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL

REPORT OF THE PANEL - FEBRUARY 2004



WYCHAVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

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FOOD DISTRIBUTION POLICY
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Foreword

It was a great pleasure to be elected as the Chairman of this Panel as the work we have carried out has been instructive and important for the Council in terms of engaging the key people who either work in or relate to our rural economy in the Vale of Evesham. We deliberately didn't define a precise study area when we commenced this exercise as the issues we have outlined in this report go well beyond any artificial administrative boundary.

I should make it clear that the Panel is not a decision making body of the Council but rather was formed to properly investigate the land use and labour related issues surrounding the agricultural / horticultural sector and the associated processing and distribution uses which predominate in the Vale area. Our remit was to prepare this report for the Council's Executive Board who will consider it's findings in due course. However, it is clear from our findings that the responsibility for implementing some of them goes beyond us as a District Council and we hope that decision makers wherever they may sit will have due regard to the matters we have highlighted. Over a period of 4 months we have heard a wide range of views, some very passionate and often divergent but that has in some respects been a justification for the Council's decision to set up the Panel. We have attached Notes of all our Meetings to give a full picture of the extent of the Panel's work.

We have met our original timetable for completing this report and held only one more meeting than originally anticipated, specifically to hear the views of the supermarkets sector.

I would like to thank my fellow Panel Members, Councillors Mrs Jean Dowty, Mrs Mary Smith, Mrs Anna Mackison and George Bourne. Also, I would like to thank the Officers who provided the support to the Panel in its deliberations.

I trust that you will find this report useful

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Audrey Steel." The signature is written in a cursive style with a small checkmark at the end of the name.

Councillor Mrs Audrey Steel
Chairman of the Panel and Executive Board Member for Planning Policy and Rural Affairs

1. INTRODUCTION

Reasons for the Council setting up the Panel

The Council's Development Control Committee at its meeting on 31st July 2003 recommended to the Executive Board that a working group be set up to look into agriculture and food distribution matters in the Vale of Evesham. For some time the Council has been aware through its planning policy, development control and economic development functions that there have been significant changes in the manner in which agriculture and related food distribution activities take place in the district, particularly in the Vale of Evesham area. Such matters generally manifest themselves either as planning, land use or transport problems both for local residents and the industry alike.

The Executive Board agreed to a Panel being constituted of 5 members of the Development Control Committee as follows

Councillor Mrs Audrey Steel –

- Executive Board Member for Planning Policy and Rural Affairs and Ward Member for Inkberrow

Councillor Mrs Jean Dowty –

- Chairman of the Development Control Committee and Ward Member for Ombersley

Councillor Mrs Anna Mackison –

- Vice Chairman of the Development Control Committee and Ward Member for Elmley Castle and Somerville

Councillor Mrs Mary Smith –

- Ward Member for The Littletons

Councillor George Bourne –

- Ward Member for Bretforton

The terms of reference for the Panel are:-

1. to investigate best practice in dealing with lorry generating uses in the distribution sector
2. to ascertain the effect, in land use terms, of the changing pattern of growers in the Vale
3. to analyse the implications of the emergence of the high volume food packing and distribution uses on the character of rural areas and look at the policy framework for these uses
4. evaluate the existing planning policy framework
5. look at the options for relocation including Vale Park
6. consider the issue of 'operators licences' for such uses
7. consider the impact on local communities and factors to ameliorate such impacts

Background information on the Vale economy

Some of the important issues are:-

- (i) the pattern of growers has changed over the years in the Vale
- (ii) the emergence of high volume food packaging and distribution uses is now a major influence on the economy of the Vale and also the character of rural areas
- (iii) transport matters and the poor rural road infrastructure are at the forefront of public concern
- (iv) planning policies are playing catch up to these land uses
- (v) The Supplementary Planning Guidance – Lorries in the Vale was published last year and its application needs to be reviewed
- (vi) The continuing role of the Cross Boundary Issues Group needs to be reviewed from Wychavon's perspective
- (vii) The Council's support for development of the food distribution sector and the growers needs to be reconciled with planning and land use policy matters
- (viii) The possibility of further land for lorry generating uses at Vale Park to date needs to be addressed from a planning perspective
- (ix) The issue of local influence over the award of operators' licences is currently a significant concern in the villages.

Food and farming : impact on local economy

Historical background

For many centuries the district covered by Wychavon and the Vale of Evesham in particular has been synonymous with food and farming, especially horticultural products such as fruit and vegetables. This traditional association has developed because of a combination of factors including:

- High soil quality. Grade 1 Agriculture land in the West Midlands is focused on the Vale of Evesham and Ombersley (Source: ERDP – West Midlands Region 2000, MAFF)
- Good climate relative to the rest of the UK. Historically local growers were able to bring much of their produce to market before other growing areas of the country. This enabled growers to receive a premium price. Today this advantage has generally disappeared because of imported products ensuring all year supply.

- Central location with good transport links over the ages to major markets. In the 1640s the river Avon was made a navigable waterway with local produce floated downstream to Bristol. The railway came to the area in 1852 with a large number of stations and farm sidings developed in the Vale to transport local produce to London. The closure of village stations and the Honeybourne line in the 1960s and 1970s further encouraged the trend towards transporting local produce by road haulage. Today the area's central location to the channel ports, Heathrow Airport and supermarket regional distribution centres is also an attraction for the handling of imported fresh produce.
- Technical and entrepreneurial skills associated with food and farming are available locally. These skills are supported by local centres of expertise such as Pershore Group of Colleges, Camden and Chorleywood Food Research Association and DEFRA's regional centre at Whittington. The rapid changes in this sector has resulted in many businesses and individuals responding by moving into new but related business areas. For example some growers have moved into new produce lines such as ethnic foods (e.g. chillis, chinese cabbage), continental salads and ornamental plants and flowers. The decline of rail services in the Vale of Evesham resulted in a number of growers setting up their own road haulage businesses to transport their own produce. Likewise as a result of supermarkets requiring 12 months of the year supply many local producers have been required to handle imported produce. In time some of these, haulage and import businesses have expanded to be larger than the original growing business. Most food-related businesses in the district are locally owned. There are however a number of major exceptions such as Evesham Foods (part of the Northern Foods Group), Robert Wiseman Dairy and Garners (now part of the Baxters Group).

Food and farming has historically had a major influence on the local economy and the pattern of development in our towns and villages. However in recent decades the area has attracted employment from a broad range of sectors and many new residents with little connection to food and farming have moved into the area.

Current employment impact

Despite recent trends the sector is still a major feature of the local economy and environment.

- Around 2,400 people in Wychavon are involved in regular full and part time employment in **Agriculture** - 4.8% of total employment. This is more than 3 times greater than the national average (Annual Business Inquiry, 2000). In addition to fruit, vegetable and salad growers the district also has a significant ornamental (flowers and plants) growers sector.

- Around 1,600 people in Wychavon are employed in the **Food Processing** sector – 3.1% of total employment (Annual Business Inquiry, 2000). This is more than 50% above the national average. It is likely that employment levels in this sector have substantially increased since 2000. For example, Kanes Foods (Middle Littleton) and Robert Wiseman dairy (Droitwich) have created around 1,000 new jobs. The food processing sector can and does support local growers.
- **Distribution and Haulage** of food is a major element of the local economy. Unfortunately government employment statistics do not specifically identify the employment levels for the distribution and haulage sectors as a whole let alone that associated with food. However estimates indicate that around 500 jobs are associated with this activity.

In total, the various elements of the “food chain” are estimated to employ around 10% of regular employment in Wychavon. The various parts of the food chain are often dependent on each other. For example Kanes Foods, a salad and stir fry processing business, directly supports seven growers occupying 800 acres in the Vale and directly employing 120 people.

Agriculture and Food Processing sectors also support locally a large number of casual workers employed via a number of sources including government regulated schemes (e.g. SAWs, Working Holidaymakers Scheme), recruitment agencies and “gangmasters”. The 2002 Agricultural Census identifies a casual workforce in Wychavon of 585. It is felt that this is only a partial record. For example it has been estimated that “gangmasters” alone supply around a 1,000 casual international workers on a daily basis.

The Vale of Evesham’s association with food and farming provides positive opportunities for attracting visitors to the area. Initiatives in recent years such as the Blossom Trail, Asparagus Fair and Plum Fair along with the many garden centres, farm shops, pick your own farms, farmers markets and the unique environment created by farming contribute substantially to the estimated 3,396 jobs **tourism** related jobs in Wychavon (source: 2000 Tourism Economic Impact Assessment, Heart of England Tourism Board).

Food and farming : a rapidly changing sector

Horticulture following national trends has declined locally. For example, the amount of land farmed for horticulture in Wychavon has declined from 3,097 hectares in 1990 to 2,591 hectares in 2002 – a 17% fall (source: Agricultural Census, Defra). However, as indicated above the area has moved from being dominated by employment in farming to now having local employment spread throughout the food chain. Indeed the growth in jobs has come from the food processing and distribution sectors.

In the course of our investigations we have identified a number of trends which have had a major influence on these changes. The overriding factor would seem to be the dominance of supermarkets who now have around 80% of the fresh produce market in the UK. Conversely the wholesale market – historically a key outlet for Vale produce – has declined rapidly. We have found this factor has led to a number of trends, including:-

- Supermarkets have moved to reducing the number of primary suppliers e.g. Tesco has consolidated its primary supply base in the U.K. to around 100. Consequently, the primary suppliers to supermarkets have had to get larger to secure these contracts. These primary suppliers are responsible for meeting supermarket requirements such as quality assurance, employment practices and ethical audits. In turn some primary suppliers will receive produce from other growers. Those growers who are not part of the supermarket supply chain are, however, finding it increasingly difficult to find a market for their produce.
- Suppliers are increasingly required to provide all year round supply of fresh produce. Consequently, local growers to meet this requirement now need to deal with imported produce during parts of the year.
- Supermarkets operate computerised ordering systems based on hour by hour sales return can, and do, change fresh produce orders on a next day notice.
- Supermarkets are consolidating their own distribution depots so that they operate fewer but larger operations. Locally this trend has been highlighted by the loss of over 500 jobs with the closure of a Sainsbury depot at Droitwich Spa (operated by Christian Salvesen). For suppliers this may mean longer transport distances.

These factors all mean that supermarket suppliers - the growers and packhouses - have had to alter their production to meet these changing orders. This in turn has also had a major impact on their labour needs, especially in an area such as Wychavon which currently has full employment levels (1.4% - Nov 2003). Consequently, the requirement for a supply of casual workers at short notice has grown and is now an all year round requirement. Indeed without this supply of casual workers it is unlikely that businesses and their level of regular local employment would survive.

The price of primary agricultural products has declined by nearly 20% since 1995 (source : Eurostat statistics, Defra). This has resulted in reduced margins so businesses will generally need to increase volumes to survive.

There is a trend towards alternative markets to the supermarkets such as farmers markets, box delivery, farm shops. However the evidence would indicate that the alternative markets although growing in significance are still a small percentage of overall food production in the area.

The Vale of Evesham is recognised as having a concentration of horticulture production of regional importance (ERDP – West Midlands Region, MAFF 2000). However at the national level the Vale’s horticultural importance is not as significant today as it was in the immediate post-war period. Today fresh produce production, especially for the supermarkets, is increasingly becoming focused on the eastern counties such as Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire and Norfolk. As a Panel this fact was well demonstrated to us by the visits to South Holland and Boston districts in South Lincolnshire. For example:-

Table : Comparison of Horticulture and Farming Activity : Wychavon and South Holland districts 2002

	Wychavon	South Holland
Ha. of horticulture land	2,591	9,070
No. of horticulture farm holdings	324	512
Horticulture % of all farm holdings	28%	46%

Source: Agriculture Census, DEFRA

Food related employment is much more dominant in South Holland district where it is estimated that this sector accounts for 60% of all jobs in the district.

The Vale of Evesham has traditionally grown a broad range of fresh produce. Information provided to the Panel indicated that opportunities in certain sectors such as top fruit was declining and the real opportunities in the future was for the area to focus on sectors of local specialism such as salad onions and legumes.

Future business trends

The Panel has identified the following trends which will have a further impact on local businesses:-

1. We anticipate that the supermarket dominance of the supply chain will remain in the future and the trends outlined above will continue. Indeed the consolidation of the supermarket sector e.g. the purchase of Safeway by Morrisons will add to the pressures on suppliers especially those currently supplying Safeway.
2. The European Union will expand in May 2004 to take on board 10 new countries mainly from Eastern Europe. This potentially will have a number of impacts :
 - It is likely that the membership of the EU will provide an additional boost to farming investment in these countries with the potential that their agricultural sector will compete more strongly. This in turn has the potential of reducing farm produce prices even further and reduce UK market share of it’s own home market.

- The 75 million citizens of the new EU nations will have the right to work and live in the UK. This will significantly increase the pool of workers potentially able to work on UK farms, packhouses and food processing operations. The area currently attracts Eastern European students on a temporary basis via regulated schemes such as SAWS. Membership of the EU will mean workers from these countries will not be regulated and will be able to settle permanently.
3. Supermarkets are now consolidating their transportation requirements. As a result single national transport contracts are now being awarded to one transport operator. For example Corby had been awarded the national Sainsbury chill contract. The panel was told that this is likely to produce more vehicle movements collecting half empty crates in the Vale and this will be generated from operators based outside the region i.e. HGVs' on local roads without the benefit of local jobs.
 4. Ethical employment practice is becoming a more important consideration. This was highlighted in detail by the House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee on Gangmasters (report published September 2003). A voluntary code of practice for employing gangmaster staff has recently been developed by DEFRA and the Ethical Trading Initiative (membership includes retailers, non-government organisations and trade unions) – with guidance from Vale of Evesham based Fusion Personnel. This is currently being piloted in Lincolnshire and is likely to become a national requirement in the near future.
 5. Re-assurance of consumer confidence is likely to result in additional food safety and environmentally sensitive requirements on growers, packhouse, processors and transport operators. This will be driven by the supermarkets backed by legislation and regulation. Consequently business practices and premises may need to be improved.

2. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS AND REFERENCE NUMBERS		DIRECTED AT:
Planning Policy Matters:		
1.	The Panel fully endorses the Council's revised stance on planning policies for packhouses as it is a more realistic approach and urges that all new proposals are looked at critically under the other development control policies in the Local Plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wychavon District Council
4.	That all three Local Planning Authorities consider adopting planning policies in any reviews of their local plans to fully reflect and endorse the guidance in the SPG – Lorries in the Vale of Evesham.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wychavon District Council Cotswold District council Stratford on Avon District Council
16.	The Panel strongly supports the allocation of further employment land at Vale Park in the local plan review. The further opportunity offered to enable traffic generating uses to relocate is a unique one and is a soundly based policy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wychavon District Council
17.	The Council's general approach to not allowing residential development on vacated sites be continued as it represents a sound basis for good development control and also reflects the district's housing supply situation in strategic planning policy terms. Any exceptions to this approach would need to be very extenuating and have substantial benefits for local communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wychavon District council
24.	That the work of the Cross boundary Issues Group continue to be supported by the Council and the CBIG be urged to move forward on the basis of the original raison d'être for the Group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wychavon District council Cross Boundary Issues Group
Development and Amenity Matters:		
2.	That farmers and other stakeholders in the food production business always seek advice from the Council on the siting of mobile homes whether planning permission is required or not in the interest of the character of the rural area. Issues regarding siting and landscaping are very important. The Panel recommends that the Council should produce a guidance leaflet on this matter.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The agricultural and horticultural sector Wychavon District Council

7.	All those involved in the industry should be fully aware of the amenity problems caused by 24 hour traffic movements off the principal road network and where rural communities are affected and they should, in conjunction with their principal clients (the supermarkets) seek to regulate such movements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural and Horticultural sector • Food processing and Packing sector • Supermarkets • Parish Councils
27.	The Panel recognises the importance of a number of 'primary' suppliers to the supermarkets and the Council should be particularly aware in decision making about the planning and community issues when such businesses have to expand. Where suppliers/ producers are not located on the principal road network , the Council should give support (especially primary suppliers) to find more suitable sites for expansion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supermarkets • Food Processing and Packing sector • Wychavon District Council
29.	Haulage companies should be encouraged to relocate to Vale Park and financial incentives should be investigated for so doing and the Council should ensure that such vacated sites are only occupied in the future by businesses with minimal HGV movements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribution Sector • Defra • Wychavon District Council
30.	That any new packhouses should be constructed adjacent the main road network to ensure satisfactory access by HGVs' unless it can be demonstrated that there are overriding reasons that they need to be located on a farm holding. The need to consider such developments outside of established settlement boundaries will need to be considered.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural and Horticultural Sector • Food Processing and Packing Sector • Wychavon District Council
31.	That extensions to existing packhouses and food processing premises shall only be allowed where it can be demonstrated that the development will not result in an increase in HGV movements, or they are required to serve the adjacent land holding. Section 106 agreements should be required to ensure the packhouse remains linked to a farmholding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wychavon District Council • Agricultural and Horticultural Sector • Food Processing and Packing Sector
32.	That applications for new or improved facilities at the premises of established growers are considered on their merits, taking into account the needs of the industry, the impact of the development on local residents, and the ability of the local road network to accommodate any additional traffic likely to be generated by the development.	<p>Wychavon District Council</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural and Horticultural Sector • Food Processing and Packing Sector
33.	That growers are encouraged to develop a working Code of Best Practice that would allow them to share packhouse facilities, in particular to direct imported produce to packhouses sited in the most appropriate locations for processing and onward distribution.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural and Horticultural Sector • Defra • Food Processing and Packing Sector

34.	That public bodies such as Defra, who provide financial support for new food and farming investment, will be encouraged to take into account this report when making investment decisions. Indeed, their funding opportunities should be used as a positive tool for encouraging investment in appropriate locations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defra • Food Processing and Packing Sector
35.	That local growers and producers always seek professional planning advice from the Local Planning Authority prior to undertaking any development or changes on their sites.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural and Horticultural sector • Food Processing and Packing Sector
36.	That local growers, producers and local and national transport operators engaged in servicing local sites devise transport plans utilising appropriate local and strategic routes suitable for accommodating HGV traffic away from centres of population within the Vale of Evesham. As far as is practicable, all 'contracted' distribution companies also adhere to such measures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural and Horticultural sector • Food Processing and Packing Sector • Distribution Sector
Transportation Matters:		
5.	That all applicants for development affecting new or existing processing or distribution facilities including packhouses submit transport assessments and, where appropriate, workplace travel plans and lorry control plans with any planning applications to enable the Council to properly consider the proposals. The absence of such comprehensive information could result in a refusal of permission if the Council is not satisfied with the impact on traffic movements.	<p>Wychavon District Council</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural and Horticultural Sector • Food Processing and Packing Sector • Distribution Sector
6.	In making development control decisions, the District Council and the relevant highway authority should have due regard to the unique characteristics of the road network and the pattern of lorry movements in the Vale and moreover, the implications for traffic growth away from the limited principal road network.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wychavon District Council • Worcestershire County Council • Highways Agency
8.	The Government should investigate the merits and feasibility of regulating the traffic movements of non-UK registered lorries especially at weekends because of the adverse amenity impact on local rural communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Transport
9.	The Panel commends the work of the Freight Quality Partnership in producing and distributing the multi-lingual map of Worcestershire to assist international drivers. Other adjacent Counties are urged to follow this example.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worcestershire County Council • Freight Quality Partnership • Cross Boundary Issues Group

10.	That a review of highway signage in the Vale of Evesham and the affected strategic road network in the area (including the M5 and A46 linkages) should be undertaken by both the affected highway authorities possibly via the Freight Quality Partnership and in conjunction with and supported by the industry itself with the aim of rationalising and clarifying road signage on a strategic basis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highways Agency • Worcestershire County Council • Freight Quality Partnership
11.	That both highway authorities investigate the merits of and legality of multi-lingual signage for lorry drivers on the local road network.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highways Agency • Worcestershire County Council
12.	That speed restrictions including the feasibility of 20mph zones in villages which are through routes for significant numbers of large vehicle movements be investigated by the County Council where local communities in the Parishes support this approach. The South East Worcestershire Transport Forum could be used as a forum for debating such issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worcestershire County Council • South East Worcestershire Transport Forum • Parish Councils
14.	The Panel strongly believes that the use of single national contracts for suppliers in terms of food distribution is not an environmentally sustainable approach and cannot minimise road mileage by large vehicles on the road network. In areas such as the Vale of Evesham where there are large numbers of established distribution companies this asset should be exploited by the supermarkets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supermarkets • Food Processing and Packing Sector • Distribution Sector
19.	That any proposals for lorry parks in the Vale should be based on a sound strategic case supported by the Freight Transport Association and other representative bodies. Such proposals should only be considered favourably if sufficient demand is proven locally and the site conditions in development control terms are favourable.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribution Sector and it's representative bodies
20.	The Council and the County Council should be positively involved in making representations to the Traffic Commissioners on applications for Operators Licences and the recent reluctance to do so should be reviewed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wychavon District Council • Worcestershire County Council
21.	The Panel believes that there should be legislative change to allow third parties to be properly involved and make representations / object to applications for Operators Licences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Transport • Traffic Commissioners
22.	The Government should legislate to allow for neighbour notification / better local publicity as part of the Operator Licence application procedure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Transport • Traffic Commissioners

23.	The Government should allow Traffic Commissioners to interpret the legislation more rationally to allow persons affected by the traffic movements from an Operating Centre to make representations / objections and not just those persons in the immediate vicinity. The implications of traffic movements from an Operating Centre can affect communities and individuals much wider than just those adjacent to a site.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Transport • Traffic Commissioners
25.	The District Council should continue to be represented in the FQP and also the new Vale of Evesham FQP and, equally importantly, the local food and distribution sector should ensure they are well represented on this Group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wychavon District Council • Food Processing and Packing Sector • Distribution Sector
26.	The Panel does not regard the findings of the Halcrow Study to be particularly helpful to future decision making and the Badsey/Bretforton by-pass concept is one which may give unrealistic expectations to local communities. Moreover, the Panel are not convinced by the suggested cellular approach to weight restrictions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wychavon District Council • Worcestershire County Council • Cross Boundary Issues Group
28.	That the Local Highway Authorities be aware of the concerns of the industry about the co-ordination and execution of road maintenance projects and the effects on business operations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worcestershire County Council • Highways Agency
Labour Matters:		
37.	The Panel supports the call for the Government to carry out detailed research into accurate measurement of the numbers of casual workers in the Food and Farming sector. This should assess all forms of casual working including Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS) and Working Holiday Scheme as well as the gangmaster system. The research should also examine the impact of casual workers on local communities, especially rural communities. The Vale of Evesham would make an appropriate pilot study.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home Office • Job Centre Plus • Defra • Wychavon District Council
38.	That the Government should review the studies looking at the scale of migration following EU enlargement and assess this in terms of the agriculture/horticulture sectors and the impact on rural communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home Office • Defra

39.	The Panel supports the development of a national Gangmaster Code of Practice. However, the Panel believes that it should include a requirement for basic skills i.e. english language and appropriate driver training. The Panel will support efforts by Wychavon District Council in partnership with relevant organisations and businesses to seek funding for the delivery of a pilot training scheme.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Colleges • Wychavon District Council • Food Processing and Packing Sector • LSC • Defra • Ethical Trading Initiative • Supermarkets • Agricultural and Horticultural Sector
40.	The Panel supports the House of Commons Select Committee's recommendation that in areas where gang labour is commonly used consideration should be given to the implications for rural services and how these can be best managed. We recommend that the Government should support local agencies to pilot and deliver appropriate initiatives in the Vale of Evesham.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home Office • Defra
41.	The Panel recognises that the supermarkets are key to driving up ethical standards in the food and farming sector. We welcome the steps currently being taken such as the Gangmaster Code of Practice and ethical audits. However the Panel believes that ethical issues should be seen in a wider context and that supermarkets and suppliers should be part of finding broader solutions to their impact on local communities. The Panel recommends that Wychavon District Council works with these bodies in helping to pilot some local initiatives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supermarkets • Wychavon District Council
Training and Education Matters:		
47.	A detailed training needs analysis should be undertaken for the food and farming businesses in the District. This should be produced as a collaboration involving businesses, Pershore Group of Colleges, Evesham College, Learning & Skills Council (LSC) and the Council. Funding to carry out the study and it's findings will be sought from partners such as Advantage West Midlands (AWM), Defra and the LSC.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Colleges • AWM • Defra • LSC • Wychavon District Council

48.	The industry (growers, producers and the distribution sector) need to have better links with the education sector and there should be more awareness and initiative amongst employers to ascertain the range of training available and influence the future direction of vocational training in the Colleges. Support should be given so as to increase awareness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Colleges • Food Processing And Packing Sector • Agricultural and Horticultural sector • Distribution Sector
49.	The flexibility of the Colleges to meet the industry's training needs in terms of the location and nature of training should be exploited.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Colleges • Food Processing And Packing Sector • Agricultural and Horticultural sector • Distribution Sector
50.	The Panel believes that any bids for training by the industry are likely to be more successful if the Colleges and other public sector partners are involved and such collaborative approaches are more advantageous for all partners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Colleges • Food Processing And Packing Sector • Agricultural and Horticultural sector • Distribution Sector • Wychavon District Council
51.	Measures to increase awareness of the major economic importance of the ornamental (e.g. plants, flowers) growing sector in Wychavon should be taken. In particular, plans to increase the level of training and business support for this sector are welcomed and supported.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Colleges • Agricultural and Horticultural Sector • Business Link • Wychavon District Council • Defra
Accommodation and Community Matters:		
3.	That the industry has due regard to the planning and other legislative implications of any change of use of properties to hostels especially in the urban areas and that advice is always taken from the appropriate bodies prior to the commencement of any use.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food Processing And Packing Sector • Agricultural and Horticultural sector • Wychavon District Council
13.	That the West Mercia Police be aware of the Panels' findings about the level of concern in the Vale communities regarding traffic speeds through villages and the perceptions of local population about the enforcing of speed restrictions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • West Mercia Police • Parish Councils' • Worcestershire County Council • South East Worcestershire Traffic Forum

15.	The Panel strongly urges local food and farming businesses to work together to help improve the mutual understanding between the industry and the local community. Where appropriate the District Council and other bodies should support these activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food Processing And Packing Sector • Agricultural and Horticultural sector • Distribution Sector • Parish Councils • South East Worcestershire traffic Forum • Wychavon District Council
18.	Supermarkets should be strongly encouraged to 'think local' and become directly involved in their suppliers' investment decisions in terms of new development and premises expansion. Supermarkets are urged to support the Council's commitment to minimising the impact of suppliers' facilities on local communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food Processing And Packing Sector • Agricultural and Horticultural sector • Distribution Sector • Supermarkets • Wychavon District Council
42.	The Panel commends the West Mercia Police initiative in conjunction with key local employers to engage the resident casual labour force and address cultural differences to minimise tensions in the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • West Mercia Police • Food Processing and Packing Sector
43.	That the Council looks into the issue of houses in multiple occupation (HMOs') in a co-ordinated manner across service areas to ascertain any incidences of unauthorised HMOs' and ensure compliance with statutory requirements e.g. planning, Housing Act, Building Regulations, Fire Regulations etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wychavon District Council • Fire Service
44.	That employers and the supermarkets ensure that any temporary accommodation used by any casual workforce complies with all statutory requirements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food Processing And Packing Sector • Agricultural and Horticultural sector • Distribution Sector • Supermarkets • Wychavon District Council
45.	That the pressure on the existing housing stock is recognised and this could exacerbate the situation after expansion of the EU in May 2004.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wychavon District Council

46.	<p>That the Council should support the principle of small scale, on site hostel accommodation for resident casual workers where a robust case has been made. On site hostels or those nearby to premises in the rural areas be assessed against the countryside protection and residential amenity policies of the local plan review. This should be subject to new build facilities being controlled by way of a planning obligation to prevent unrestricted residential usage. If there is a continuing demand for such accommodation the Council should adopt interim policy guidance to facilitate development control decisions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wychavon District Council
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3. CONSIDERATIONS OF THE PANEL AGAINST THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

As a Panel we have sought to limit our investigations to that set out in the original terms of reference. To some extent this has been difficult because of the wide-ranging nature of this area and because many of the individuals and groups with which we had dealings had particular issues that they wanted to be conveyed. This report cannot deal with all such issues and it concentrates on the matters relevant to the terms of reference. It is, however, clear that we devoted a proportion of our time to labour related issues which are of importance to a wide range of stakeholders and we had not anticipated putting so much emphasis on this aspect when we commenced this exercise.

To put our deliberations in context we can comment as follows against each of the terms of reference:-

1. *To investigate best practice in dealing with lorry generating uses in the food distribution sector*

In deliberating this matter we have sought to engage with the food distribution companies and those who represent them. This has been enlightening and our findings later in this report show how difficult it is within our road infrastructure in this part of Worcestershire to find any quick solutions.

2. *To ascertain the effect, in land use terms, of the changing pattern of growers in the Vale.*

The Panel gleaned a lot of information on this particular matter from the round table sessions in November and also from site visits to local growers.

3. *To analyse the implications of the emergence of the high volume food packing and distribution uses on the character of rural areas and look at the policy framework for these uses*

As a Panel we looked at the social and economic issues surrounding this sector as well as the land use issues. From our investigations it has been difficult to deal only with land use issues without considering and understanding the labour issues surrounding how modern day packing and processing of fruit and vegetable products occurs in the Vale and the inherent reliance on casual labour to manage local businesses. In respect of this term of reference our involvement of supermarket representatives has been extremely important.

4. *Evaluate the existing planning policy framework*

We have spent some time examining the existing policy framework from a regional to a local level and we are in a position to make some recommendations in this respect.

5. *Look at the Options for relocation including Vale Park.*

Vale Park is an established industrial park to the south side of Evesham strategically located on the A46. We deal with the issue quite extensively in this report and hope to show that relocation of effectively 'non-conforming' businesses from village locations to dedicated industrial parks is not easy because of a range of economic and land use matters. However, on the other hand we want to highlight the potential opportunities as well.

6. *Consider the issue of ' Operator Licences ' for such uses*

As a Council, we have known for some time that there are shortcomings with the system for granting operators licences and that environmental considerations do not always figure highly in the Traffic Commissioners consideration of applications by vehicle operators. In the Vale with a large distribution sector, this issue warranted some detailed investigation and we did raise this at our round table sessions in November.

7. *Consider the Impact on local communities and factors to ameliorate such impacts.*

We were keen to use our round table sessions to ascertain whether the perception of amenity impacts from the local food processing, horticultural and distribution sectors was as we had anticipated and whether individuals and groups had any solutions.

4. THE KEY ISSUES

Policy matters

i. **West Midlands Regional Delivery Plan : Strategy for Sustainable Farming & Food – AWM/GOWM/DEFRA - 2003**

This Delivery Plan seeks to co-ordinate the main sources of regional funding for the farming, food and drink sectors in the West Midlands available from Advantage West Midlands, English Rural development Programme and Defra. As such it is a key document for providing financial support for the industry. The Plan takes forward those parts of the government's strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food that can be delivered regionally. The objectives are:-

- Improved efficiency and competitiveness of the farming and food chain
- Improved management of natural resources, landscape and biodiversity
- More productive and healthy communities

To meet these objectives ten action areas are identified:-

1. Information networks, skills development and business support for farming, food and drink businesses
2. Improving supply chains
3. Direct selling and distribution
4. Developments for regional and local food
5. Incubator support the food and drink sector
6. Promoting public procurement
7. Environmental benefits and "public goods" from agriculture
8. Non-food cropping
9. Managing waste
10. Rural tourism and recreation

ii. **Planning policy – current situation**

National planning policy

The Government has recently published Draft Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 7 - Sustainable Development in Rural Areas. This is currently out to consultation, but when finalised it will supersede PPG7 'The Countryside – Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development' which was published in February 1997.

The draft PPS follows the theme of the Government's Rural White Paper 'Our Countryside: The Future' (November 2000) in which the aim was to sustain and enhance the distinctive environment, economy and social fabric of the English countryside for the benefit of all.

Included in this vision, and stated in associated strategies such as sustainable farming and food in England (December 2002), the Government's objectives are the promotion of thriving, inclusive and sustainable rural communities and sustainable economic growth and diversification.

The main message in this draft Policy Statement, relevant to this report, is that:

Local Planning Authorities should adopt positive planning policies, and support development proposals, that will enable farming and farmers to:

- *become more competitive, sustainable and environmentally friendly;*
- *adapt to new and changing markets;*
- *comply with changing legislation and associated guidance;*
- *diversify into new agricultural opportunities (e.g. renewable energy crops);*
- *or broaden their operations to 'add value' to their primary produce.*

Regional Planning Guidance

Planning Policy at a local level is directed by regional planning guidance. The most recent issue in this respect is the Draft Regional Planning Guidance for the West Midlands (RPG11). This was issued for public consultation in September 2003 and incorporated the Secretary of State's proposed changes following the public examination in 2002.

At the heart of the strategy for the West Midlands region is the recognition that there needs to be a step change in urban and rural renaissance programmes in order to shape a more sustainable future. The overriding rural renaissance policy (RR1) in this draft guidance states:

"Rural areas of the West Midlands will be regenerated through the improvement of choice in housing; the diversification of the rural economy; better transport links both within rural areas and between urban and rural areas; improving health, education, skills training, social, shopping, community facilities and other services; and the sustainable use of environmental assets."

The strategy recognises the importance of market towns, such as Evesham, to their rural hinterland, and their important role in the regeneration of rural areas. Improvement of public transport facilities between the town and its hinterland is one aspect of this.

Policy PA15 of the draft Regional Guidance identifies the need to:

"...support the sustainable diversification and development of the rural economy through the growth of existing businesses and the creation of new enterprise. This should be done in ways that meet local employment needs, maintain viable and sustainable local communities, conserve and enhance environmental assets and respect local character and distinctiveness."

Agriculture is seen as one of the most important activities in the region's rural areas, with a strong inter-dependency with many other sectors. Policy PA16 states:

“Development plans and other strategies should recognise the continuing importance of the agricultural sector in the region. Development plans should include positive policies to promote agriculture and farm diversification through the development of innovative business schemes including tourism, environmentally sustainable farming, forestry and land management, new and innovative crops, on-farm processing adding value to existing production and the promotion of local marketing and supply chains. Any development should be appropriate in scale and nature to the environment and character of the locality.”

Furthermore, *“Environmental improvement is a key component of the spatial strategy in order to underpin the overall quality of life in all areas and support wider economic and social objectives.”*

The regional strategy echoes the Government's objectives for a more sustainable transport system, obtainable by the direction of economic growth to locations served by a number of modes of transport to reduce reliance upon the car. However, it is recognised that where rural businesses exist, they are frequently serviced by larger vehicles that cause damage to rural lanes and raise perceptions of safety concerns.

Worcestershire County Structure Plan

This Plan, which was adopted in June 2001, provides a statement of the overall strategy for development and the use of land in Worcestershire for the period 1996-2011. This strategy is promoted through policies which seek to retain and enhance the County's environmental assets and the distinctiveness of the local environment and to direct development to locations where the need to travel is minimised. The Structure Plan also endeavours to provide for a policy background which will work towards a better balance between housing, employment, social and community facilities within settlements and encourage urban and rural regeneration.

There are few specific policies within the Structure Plan relating to agriculture. Policy D29, which gives priority to employment purposes when proposals for the change of use of building in rural areas are considered, contains the restriction that development that would generate HGVs' on unsuitable roads should not be granted planning permission. Policy D30 supports proposals for the diversification of agricultural units as long as they protect the rural environment and promote sustainable development; and, where possible, are contained within the farm complex.

It is, perhaps, indicative of the fact that the Structure Plan was adopted prior to the draft PPS or the Draft Regional Planning Guidance that it does not contain more policies relating specifically to rural areas or to the need to promote economic activity in the countryside.

Wychavon District Local Plan

The Wychavon District Local Plan was adopted in January 1998. It has been the Council's primary land use policy tool since then and will continue to be until the Local Plan Review is adopted (see below).

The primary aims of the Plan are to conserve and enhance the best of the district's natural and man-made features, to accommodate housing and economic growth, to have regard to the needs of agriculture and forestry and to provide a policy backcloth for development control. What is noticeably missing from this Plan is the aim to regenerate rural areas as required by the draft Regional Guidance and draft PPS7. This can be explained by the age of the document which was prepared and adopted prior to the current Government's overhaul of the planning system and stated objective of sustainability in town and country.

The Local Plan contains general broad-based policies which direct development away from the Green Belt and other areas of open countryside, and away from defined floodplains and specially designated areas such as the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Areas of Great Landscape Value.

A whole chapter is allocated to agriculture and horticulture, and policies are included relating to the protection of agricultural land, and providing criteria against which applications for agricultural dwellings will be judged, together with caravans or mobile homes as agricultural dwellings, the re-use of buildings in the countryside and the design of new agricultural buildings. The Council supports farm diversification projects where the proposals are small-scale and can be successfully accommodated within a rural environment. Criteria against which such proposals will be judged are detailed in policies AG15, AG16, AG17 and AG18 (including farm tourism and farm shops).

Policy AG20 of the adopted Local Plan sets out criteria against which proposals for new fruit and vegetable distribution depots will be judged. The policy makes it clear that planning consent will not be forthcoming where such proposals would be detrimental to the appearance of the area and to amenities of nearby residents, or would result in additional HGV traffic movements on inadequate or unsuitable roads. It is also stated that the Council will, where appropriate, encourage the relocation of existing depots to Vale Park, Evesham, where land for fruit and vegetable distribution was specifically allocated. This part of the policy is supported by Policies AG22 and AG23 which, respectively, allow consideration of alternative uses on depot sites within a specified area that give rise to environmental problems.

These policies have had limited success in encouraging existing businesses in the fruit and vegetable production and distribution industry to relocate to Vale Park. It seems that there are a number of reasons for this, as detailed elsewhere in this report. What is evident, however, is the need for more positive action. The allocation of land to which businesses can locate is insufficient to make such moves happen.

Policy AG21 of the Local Plan contains a number of detailed criteria against which proposals for new packhouses will be judged. These criteria limit the size of new packhouses, influence their siting and restrict their use to the processing of fruit and vegetables grown in adjoining parishes.

The Policy recognises the ever-changing demands of the industry and the fact that what was once a fairly localised activity has now become international. However, the impact of this upon the amenities of people living in the Vale is acknowledged with more and larger lorries visiting the packhouses and the unsuitability of the roads serving many of them.

The Local Plan Review (see below) continues to acknowledge the problems caused by HGV movements related to food production and distribution in the Vale, but also attempts to recognise the needs of the industry, which is continuing to change at a rapid pace.

The adopted Local Plan does not contain any policies relating to accommodation for seasonal agricultural workers. Policy H17 states that mobile homes intended for residential use will be judged against the same criteria as permanent homes.

Although drafted at a time prior to the recent phenomenon whereby temporary student workers are often housed in hostels, Policy H11A of the adopted Local Plan relates to the change of use of existing residential development to institutional homes and multiple occupation. The policy was drafted at a time when the major issue was care for the elderly and the changing residential needs for this. The policy allows such changes of use only where it can be demonstrated that, either individually or cumulatively, the proposal will not cause environmental or highway problems and will not have an adverse impact on the residential amenity of the area. This policy is equally applicable to proposals to provide hostels for temporary agricultural workers.

**Wychavon District Local Plan Review –
Revised Deposit**

We are currently reviewing the District Local Plan and our Revised Deposit version is to be subject to a public inquiry commencing at the end of March 2004. This is to provide the planning policy guidance against which proposals for development in the district will be judged until the year 2011.

It is in a different format to the adopted Plan in that it moves from 'topic' based sections to a structure reflecting sustainability objectives and containing criteria based policies. The overall plan increases emphasis on integrating sustainable development, transport and land-use policies with the aim of minimising the need to travel and ensuring the reuse of previously developed land and making best use of existing resources.

The pre-deposit consultation exercises, prior to the production of the Revised Deposit version of the Plan, highlighted a common concern that the rural parts of the district were stagnating. Concern was expressed about the need to sustain rural areas and the need to improve access to services and local housing and employment opportunities. As a result, the Plan seeks to establish a rural regeneration strategy through a combined policy-led approach. This is consistent with Government objectives, Regional Planning Guidance and Structure Plan Policies.

The relevant policies within the Local Plan Review promote limited economic expansion within the rural parts of Wychavon but put great emphasis on protection of the rural character of the area and the restriction of HGV traffic upon the rural road network. Policy ECON2 allows minor extensions to existing employment sites outside the main built up areas of settlements where the site is currently operating without adverse impact and the proposal is required to meet the needs of an established business.

Policies ECON3, ECON4 and ECON5 relate to existing food storage and distribution businesses operating in the Vale of Evesham Control Zone as defined in the SPG 'Lorries in the Vale of Evesham (2001)'. These policies provide for:-

- the relocation of these businesses to sites better situated on the main road network, provided that the relocation will result in transportation/ environmental improvement and the proposed site is a brownfield site or adjacent to an established business activity;
- the allocation of 4 hectares of land adjacent to the Vale Business Park at Evesham to accommodate these businesses; and
- new B1, B2 and B8 uses, or expansions to existing, where it can be demonstrated that the use and scale of activity proposed will not generate an increase in HGV movements through any of the settlements in the zone, or only limited increases in certain specified circumstances.

The Plan Review recognises the importance of finding specific ways in which to assist rural regeneration and to provide for more sustainable rural communities. To minimise landscape impact and to encourage new employment development in the rural area, Policy ECON 6 provides for small-scale employment development (B1 and B2) in locations immediately abutting settlements, having regard to the nature and character of those settlements.

Policy ECON7 permits development where it is reasonably necessary for agricultural or forestry purposes, subject to it being seen in the context of existing buildings on the holding, unless there are special circumstances. Farm diversification is allowed by Policy ECON8 subject to certain criteria relating to the scale and appropriateness of the use. Any such development is, however, subject to the general development control criteria of Policy GD2 which requires that any development does not have unacceptable effects in terms of the appearance or character of the area, public amenity, health and safety, the ability of the transportation network, highway safety or a number of other detailed criteria.

Packhouses are addressed in Policy ECON9 which permits buildings for the cleaning, grading, chilling and packing of locally grown fruit and vegetables provided the building is of a scale commensurate with the fruit and vegetable production of the holding, and the majority of the produce processed is grown locally within the parish or adjacent parishes. However, it is evident from our findings during the course of this study that this policy is totally unrealistic in the face of the fruit and vegetable production and distribution industry as it exists at present within the Vale of Evesham. Implementation of this policy would impose constraints upon the existing businesses which would not allow them to continue their current operations, never mind to plan for the future. Consequently we intend to omit this policy from the Local Plan Review and the Council agreed to this Pre-Inquiry Modification at its meeting on 8th January 2004. The findings of the Panel and the recommendations contained within this report will address the scope of policies relating to the agricultural and food distribution industry for the future.

Recommendation No. 1:

The Panel fully endorses the Council's revised stance on planning policies for packhouses as it is a more realistic approach and urges that all new proposals are looked at critically under the other development control policies in the Local Plan.

Our findings have revealed a growing need for accommodation for the casual labour necessary for picking crops on a seasonal basis and to pack and process food and vegetables at the established packhouses and distribution depots within the Vale. This accommodation is generally for student workers from countries such as South Africa or from Eastern Europe. On some holdings, these employees are accommodated within temporary caravans, sited on the holdings on which they are working. If these are only required for the growing season of a crop, or a number of related crops, they do not require planning permission. They are, however, sometimes placed in prominent locations and are visually incongruous with their rural surroundings. We suggest that farmers and other stakeholders in the food production business are encouraged to discuss the siting of these temporary mobile homes with officers of the Council in advance to agree on the least prominent siting within the holding.

Where planning permission is required for temporary agricultural dwellings, Policy COM9 requires a functional need for such accommodation to be demonstrated, evidence that these needs could not be met by an existing dwelling, or a converted building, and that it is sited to minimise its impact on the landscape. Proposals relating to permanent residential caravans are evaluated on the same criteria as for housing development. Proposals for permanent agricultural dwellings are subject to a number of criteria, detailed in Policy COM8, including a demonstrated functional need to a full-time worker to live on the site and a stringent financial test to give evidence of the future viability of the enterprise:

Some existing businesses are turning to hostels to accommodate their short-term employees. This seems to be a growing trend which has implications for the housing stock within Evesham. Indeed, it appears that hotels are in the process of being purchased with a view to turn them into hostels to accommodate student workers. This, in turn, could reduce the ability to accommodate tourists visiting the area. Whilst there are no specific policies relating to hostels in the Local Plan Review, proposals for such development will be judged against the criteria in General Development Control Policy GD2. We are aware of the potential impact of hostel type accommodation on neighbouring residents in terms of noise and nuisance caused by groups of people coming and going, often at unsocial hours. As such houses in multi-occupation are occupied by people on a short term basis, there is generally less regard for the immediate surroundings than with a family dwelling, and the accumulation of litter, or groups of people congregating outside or in the garden can have a detrimental impact upon the amenities of the neighbourhood. We deal with the hostel issue later in this report.

Recommendation No. 2:

That farmers and other stakeholders in the food production business always seek advice from the Council on the siting of mobile homes whether planning permission is required or not in the interest of the character of the rural area. Issues regarding siting and landscaping are very important. The Panel recommends that the Council should produce a guidance leaflet on this matter.

Recommendation No. 3:

That the industry has due regard to the planning and other legislative implications of any change of use of properties to hostels especially in the urban areas and that advice is always taken from the appropriate bodies prior to the commencement of any use.

iii. Lorries in the Vale of Evesham Supplementary Planning Guidance – Synopsis

The Lorries in the Vale of Evesham Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) was adopted in November 2001 by the three district authorities responsible for the Cross Boundary Consultation Area: Cotswold, Stratford-on-Avon and Wychavon District Councils. This was in recognition of the Vale of Evesham's traditional association with agriculture and market gardening, but also because of the number of former military bases and former airfields where redevelopment for employment uses, especially storage and distribution, has occurred on a large scale. The various employment uses have led to significant growth in the numbers of HGVs' passing through the area.

An officers' Cross Boundary Issues Working Group was established in 1999 to address the problems of lorries in the Vale, followed by a Members' Working Group in 2000. In January 2001 the Working Group agreed joint funding for a freight study to identify the range of measures to reduce the impact of lorry traffic on communities in the Vale.

The SPG was produced to provide interim planning guidance for a specified area to the east of Evesham, broadly based on the Vale of Evesham. It is anticipated that the policies in the SPG will be replaced by similar policies in the current Reviews of District Local Plans by the three participating authorities.

The policy statement within the SPG states that applications for B1, B2 and B8 uses within the specified zone will only be permitted if it can be demonstrated that the use will not generate an increase in HGV movements through any of the settlements located within the zone. However, permission may be granted where it can be clearly demonstrated that the benefits to local communities resulting from the development would outweigh the harm. It is expected that all relevant applications will be accompanied by a Transport Assessment and a Workplace Travel Plan. Applications for B8 uses will also need to include a Lorry Control Plan indicating how the impact of distribution lorries on local settlements will be minimised.

When considering an application likely to generate HGV movements, each District Council is expected to consult each of the neighbouring authorities within the Cross Boundary Consultation Area. The Cross Boundary Working Group then has an opportunity to comment on applications which the respective authorities have not yet determined.

Recommendation No 4:

That all three Local Planning Authorities consider adopting planning policies in any reviews of their local plans to fully reflect and endorse the guidance in the SPG – Lorries in the Vale of Evesham.

Recommendation No. 5:

That all applicants for development affecting new or existing processing or distribution facilities including packhouses submit transport assessments and, where appropriate, workplace travel plans and lorry control plans with any planning applications to enable the Council to properly consider the proposals. The absence of such comprehensive information could result in a refusal of permission if the Council is not satisfied with the impact on traffic movements.

Development Control Matters

iv. Appeal decisions – implications for policy direction and development control decisions

Many of the farms in the Vale of Evesham have packhouses on site which were used historically for the washing, grading and packing of produce grown on the farm unit itself. Used in this respect, such packhouses were subservient to the overall farming activity on the land and were considered to be ancillary operations. What has happened in recent years, mainly as a response to intensifying demands from the large supermarket chains who seek to provide year-round availability of previously seasonal produce, vegetables and fruit have been sourced from much further afield and conveyed to UK packhouses for processing. Our investigations have led to the conclusion that a material change of use has occurred on certain sites. In effect, what were once ancillary uses on farms have evolved into mixed B2/B8 manufacturing and distribution activities in their own right. Such conclusions have also been reached by other authorities.

This Council has been at the forefront in addressing the planning issues associated with these activities. The actions taken, including serving enforcement notices where necessary, and consideration of applications for Certificates of Lawful Use, have led to a number of important appeal decisions. An analysis of these decisions follows and a number of very helpful parameters have been established which will assist in assessing future proposals for similar packhouses within our district.

Appeal by Red Star Growers, Woodfield Farm, Birlingham

The applicant applied for Certificate of Lawful Use in respect of the mixed use of the site as agriculture and as a vegetable processing business following an enforcement investigation. This involved not only processing vegetables grown on their own farm, but also those sourced from beyond the site, including other countries within Europe. The vegetables are washed, cleaned, graded, chilled, packed and distributed from the site and as much as 90% of the raw produce had been imported to the site for a period of at least ten years prior to the submission of the application. The applicant had argued that the operations constituted a use falling within Class B2 (General Industrial) of the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987, although this was disputed by the Council. The Certificate was granted on the basis that the use was Sui Generis, i.e. it does not fall within a specified use class. The appellant lodged an appeal which was dismissed on 4th August 2003.

The inspector agreed a number of points, namely:-

1. The processing of vegetables grown at Woodfield Farm itself remains an ancillary agricultural activity to the use of the farm as an agricultural holding. This does not involve development.

2. The appeal site also retains a lawful element of agricultural activity and remains physically attached to Woodfield Farm. As such, he did not find that a separate planning unit had been created.
3. The processing of imported vegetables may be the primary use and it may also have the character of an industrial use within Class B2. However, because there exists a mixed use on the land, it was concluded that the lawful use is sui generis, as determined by the Council.

Appeal by Simms and Woods, Land to the South of Evesham Road, Chapel Lane, Wyre Piddle, Pershore, Worcs

The appellant lodged an appeal against an Enforcement Notice served by the Council in respect of the alleged unlawful change of use of a building and associated land for the washing, trimming, packing and chilling of vegetables. The Notice required the permanent cessation of the alleged unlawful use and the removal from the building of all associated equipment and machinery.

The Inspector agreed in his decision letter dated 3rd September 2003 that, as the vegetables processed in the building were not grown on the appellant's land at Chapel Lane and all vegetables were imported, the appeal building and land constitute a distinct planning unit and the use was industrial, not agricultural.

Appeal by Bomford Ltd, Land and Buildings at Manor Farm, Luddington, Warwickshire

The appellant lodged an appeal against an Enforcement Notice served by Stratford-on-Avon District Council in respect of the alleged unlawful change of use of the land in question from agriculture to a mixed use of agriculture and an industrial and distribution use consisting of the storage, handling, washing, refrigeration, packing and distribution of vegetables. The appellant argued at inquiry that the activity was agricultural and not industrial, so that no development had in fact taken place. On the other hand, it was argued that even if the process was considered to be industrial, it was in fact ancillary to the appellant's agricultural activity and no development had taken place.

The Inspector concluded that the processing of vegetables where they are changed in form and appearance between entering and leaving the building constitutes an industrial process falling squarely within the definition set out in Article 2 of the Use Classes Order 1987.

v. Conclusions in relation to appeal decisions

The conclusions to be reached from an analysis of the above cases in relation to the changing nature of modern horticulture and market gardening and with specific reference to the use of packhouses for the processing of vegetables are as follows:-

- Not all processing activities on farms constitute separate industrial activities. In the case of processing of vegetables genuinely produced on the farm unit upon which the packhouse is situated, the activity may be ancillary to the agricultural use of the land. The test is whether a separate planning unit can be identified. In the above cases at Wyre Piddle and Luddington, separate planning units were identified and the use of the packhouses were not found to be ancillary to the use of the sites for agricultural purposes.
- It is also important to identify the sources of the produce being processed, and the degree of imported vegetables in order to assess whether or not a material change of use has occurred.
- The main implications in terms of policy direction is that much of the food processed in the Vale does not originate in the area and it has no association with the agricultural land around. What has developed, in effect, is an industrial process that may have more flexible locational requirements. Whilst local growers still need packhouses in which their own produce can be processed and distributed, the existing buildings are being used to satisfy more than a local need.

These recent appeal decisions support our view that the production and distribution of food from the Vale of Evesham has outgrown its traditional roots and, in many cases, has become a quasi - industrial operation.

Transportation Matters

vi. Transport matters generally – analysis of current problems

It comes as little surprise that traffic matters dominated our deliberations both with local people and the employers as well. Moreover, our research in Lincolnshire also revealed a number of important transport related issues which are dealt with below.

The main issues surrounding transport in this sector always come back to two matters, namely, adequacy of the road network and secondly the effects of lorry movements on amenity.

Road infrastructure

The hierarchy of the road network in the Vale is such that there is only one trunk road (the A46) which runs north to south and is the link with the M5 to the south and to the M42 to the north. The Highways Agency is the highway authority for this road. All other roads in the Vale are under the jurisdiction of the County Council. Apart from the A44, there are no other A class roads in the Vale area and there are three B class roads with the remainder being C class with a few unclassified roads. The obvious problem is that the majority of the employers are not located on or close to the A class road network. Vale park is on the A46 and is ideally suited to accommodating significant lorry movements.

The most striking difference we found in our research in Lincolnshire was the difference in the road infrastructure particularly in relation to the quality of the network and the marked difference in the density of population on the rural road network and the relationship of major employers to villages. Even the decision of South Holland DC to allow the Geest factory in the open countryside which will be a major generator of traffic when it opens soon, does not appear to be dogged by the infrastructure problems that we experience in this part of Worcestershire. Of equal importance however, in terms of acceptance of such enterprises in the open countryside in Lincolnshire is what appears to be a marked difference in approach/attitude to this sector by local people. This is because up to 60% of locals depend of such industry for employment which is significantly higher than our reliance on this sector. Our discussions with South Holland informed us that the Local Authority seemed to believe that the area had a good road network linked to major routes and was well placed geographically to serve East Coast ports and other areas of the country. There is a port locally at Sutton Bridge. Of course, for many of our growers and distribution companies, Lincolnshire is in direct competition.

In our round table sessions we found, not unsurprisingly that local people had particular points to make about the adequacy of the road network with a general consensus that there was a general problem with the road infrastructure. Some participants thought there was a traffic problem even without the lorry movements.

Equally, we tried to ascertain how much value local people put on this sector and were they prepared to tolerate traffic movements because of the economic benefits. Our view is that there is a general tolerance of the traffic movements associated with local grown produce but it is the imported produce to the processing industry to keep the 12 month supply chain that breeds the least tolerance and the HGV traffic is the most difficult expression of the changes in this sector for local people to accept.

For the industry's part, the case was made to us that there now tended to be less commercial vehicles on the roads but they were now 44 tonne vehicles. The FTA did not envisage any larger vehicles in the foreseeable future. In terms of the road infrastructure, those present at our round table session from local businesses agreed that the transport industry had problems with inadequate roads. It was clear to us that the employers also agreed that inadequately located packhouse were an issue

Distribution operators told us that drivers were under pressure and that in consequence they would take the quickest or shortest route. We are, from our discussions with supermarkets, now fully aware of the pressure put on suppliers by the supermarkets to meet specific delivery timeframes.

Recommendation No. 6:

In making development control decisions, the District Council and the relevant highway authority should have due regard to the unique characteristics of the road network and the pattern of lorry movements in the Vale and moreover, the implications for traffic growth away from the limited principal road network.

Amenity issues

We deal with this matter in more detail elsewhere in this report. Lorry movements are the main source of effects on residential amenity. This could be because of the quantum of traffic movements: the times of traffic movements during the day: the type of traffic movements or the speed of traffic. What is more difficult to fully ascertain in some cases is the degree of loss of amenity. Moreover, the tolerance levels of local people is sometimes suspected by employers to be very low but in reality we saw that communities particularly in the Badsey/Bretforton area have tolerated considerable traffic flows by HGVs'. In some communities there is a 24-hour traffic flow issue. Again, in our knowledge gained from the Lincolnshire experience, the level of traffic movements from some of the large operators in that area is considerably more than our circumstances. For example, the Lingarden premises at Weston in Lincolnshire generates some 250 movements per day and seems to be generally tolerated by locals, although it is noteworthy that the Company puts high emphasis on links with and contributions to local community life.

Recommendation No. 7:

All those involved in the industry should be fully aware of the amenity problems caused by 24 hour traffic movements off the principal road network and where rural communities are affected and they should, in conjunction with their principal clients (the supermarkets) seek to regulate such movements.

Foreign lorries

We have no figures for the number of foreign registered lorries passing through the Vale on business with local employers each day but it is clear that there are substantial numbers with almost all the major food processing companies reliant on imported produce to varying degrees during the year. We have dealt with issues surrounding the lack of supervision via the Traffic Commissioners elsewhere in this report. However, foreign lorries raise a number of other issues.

One matter of great consternation to local communities is large tonnage lorries getting lost on the local road network. We commend the work of the Freight Quality Partnership in producing maps for use by incoming lorry drivers and this is an initiative which should continue.

The foreign registered lorry seems to generate more concern from locals than local distribution companies and we believe that there is a disproportionate amount of concern in this respect when relayed to actual traffic movements. Having said that, foreign registered lorries can arrive at unsocial hours and at weekends and there are no restrictions on them. Some of the representatives we met from local producers suggested that there should be controls over movements of foreign registered lorries at the weekends. The FTA hinted that there may be more foreign lorries on our roads in the future as a consequence of the enlargement of the European Community.

We are not the appropriate body to decide if any restrictions can be placed on foreign lorries to prevent nuisance on our local road network but we shall make a recommendation to others who can best decide if such an initiative can be legislated for and enforced. All we can do is to emphasize that we found this matter to be of some significance to local communities and also recognized by the industry itself.

Recommendation No. 8:

The Government should investigate the merits and feasibility of regulating the traffic movements of NON- UK registered lorries especially at weekends because of the adverse amenity impact on local rural communities.

Recommendation No. 9:

The Panel commends the work of the Freight Quality Partnership in producing and distributing the multi-lingual map of Worcestershire to assist international drivers. Other adjacent Counties are urged to follow this example.

Road maintenance

The Manager of the County Council's Highways Partnership Unit told us that he was aware of the enormous damage to the road network caused by heavy vehicle movements. The South East Worcestershire Transport Forum believes that the wear and tear on rural roads is disproportionate and the cost should not be borne by the local taxpayer but by those causing the damage. The suggestion of the Forum is that special levies could be introduced and that the supermarkets could become more directly involved. We cannot see any workable local taxation system such as this being feasible.

The Forum also state that depots and packhouses should be closer to the main road network and we don't disagree with is and we pick this matter up in a more general sense in our recommendations for planning policy.

Traffic management issues

We did spend some time debating the issue of signage on the local highway network at the round table sessions. Indeed it was raised in all our sessions and there is general agreement that signage on the local highway network could be better.

The industry itself told us that drivers (generally not local distribution companies but ones from outside the region because of the trend of supermarkets to award a single national contract to distribute produce) can spend some time looking for directions. Not only is this inefficient but it is often problematic for local communities. It seems that some of the supermarkets' simplistic approach to having a single distribution company must lead to increased road mileage and is arguably not an environmentally sustainable approach as locally based distribution companies in the regions could provide local solutions. At least local companies understand the local road network.

At the highest level there is the signing of the trunk road (A46) and the A44 which should be reviewed by the highway authorities. In addition, because some of our most significant employers and the large site at Honeybourne airfield is some distance from any principal road network, there is a wider need to review signage.

We believe this should take the form of a comprehensive signage strategy for the Vale to deal with HGV movements and be led by both highway authorities. It would not be inappropriate to seek contributions from the industry. The use of the FQP as the vehicle to achieve this may be the way forward.

One issue which was unresolved at our round table discussions, was the appropriateness and legality of multilingual signage and this could be wrapped up in the same study in our view.

Traffic restrictions on local roads including weight restrictions can be seen as a solution in some cases. Weight restrictions on some minor roads between Offenham, Blackminster, Bretforton and Honeybourne do restrict vehicles of more than 7.5 tonnes using them which is clearly appropriate in that area.

One effect of weight restrictions however, is that in most cases the traffic is simply displaced elsewhere on the network and the amenity and traffic flow issues are rarely resolved by this mechanism alone. As part of a wider strategy there is some merit in such restrictions. The practical enforceability is something we have become sceptical about in our deliberations however.

Finally, speed is a matter which has been raised as a concern by both the highway authority and local communities. We have been advised that speed limits in the villages were revised as part of the County Council's Speed limit Initiative in 2000 and this generally imposes a 30mph limit in the villages although some lengths are restricted to 40mph. The need to enforce existing speed limits is also something that came across clearly to us in our deliberations with local communities.

It seem to us that some of our villages are some dogged by large vehicle movements that there must be scope for some 20mph zones on road safety and amenity grounds to be investigated but only if supported by local communities in the Parishes.

Recommendation No. 10:

That a review of highway signage in the Vale of Evesham and the affected strategic road network in the area (including the M5 and A46 linkages) should be undertaken by both the affected highway authorities possibly via the Freight Quality Partnership and in conjunction with and supported by the industry itself with the aim of rationalising and clarifying road signage on a strategic basis.

Recommendation No. 11:

That both highway authorities investigate the merits of and legality of multi-lingual signage for lorry drivers on the local road network.

Recommendation No. 12:

That speed restrictions including the feasibility of 20mph zones in villages which are through routes for significant numbers of large vehicle movements be investigated by the County Council where local communities in the Parishes support this approach. The South East Worcestershire Transport Forum could be used as a forum for debating such issues.

Recommendation No. 13:

That the West Mercia Police be aware of the Panels' findings about the level of concern in the Vale communities regarding traffic speeds through villages and the perceptions of local population about the enforcing of speed restrictions.

Recommendation No. 14:

The Panel strongly believes that the use of single national contracts for suppliers in terms of food distribution is not an environmentally sustainable approach and cannot minimise road mileage by large vehicles on the road network. In areas such as the Vale of Evesham where there are large numbers of established distribution companies this asset should be exploited by the supermarkets.

**Balancing economic needs
with the effects of transport**

In it's written submission to us, the CLA states, inter alia, that the industry is clearly not understood locally and that newcomers to villages have little knowledge of farming and food distribution as they try to create a rural idyll. On the other hand, we heard quite clearly in our round table sessions and through some written submissions that local people feel as if they have little say on decisions that affect this sector. We also see groups like the South East Worcestershire Transport Forum springing up.

So there is the problem for decision makers such as ourselves as a Local Planning Authority. As always, decisions need to have due regard to local opinion when it is well founded, and we have no doubt that in the majority of cases in the Vale that valid arguments relating to traffic matters are made. Moreover, the effects of any decision on the viability and prospects for any employer needs to be part of the decision making process.

The ability and approach of employers to making a robust cases for planning permission, to respect the tenor of planning policy and to recognize the community implications of any changes has not been consistently good in the past. Our impression at our round table sessions was that the industry could do more itself to work together.

**Communications between the
producers/distribution sector and the
public**

We think that the industry does not promote itself in the best manner locally. We were asked to use our facilities to promote the importance of the industry and to work together on joint initiatives. We can see merit in the industry itself being more cohesive in terms of how it operates locally and it would help if the supermarkets at the top of the food supply chain are also seen to participate in community matters. Of course, our local packers are working for supermarkets who are not represented locally or even in the sub region. We believe there is scope for more clarity for the public on how the 'food chain' works.

Recommendation No. 15:

The Panel strongly urges local food and farming businesses to work together to help improve the mutual understanding between the industry and the local community. Where appropriate the District Council and other bodies should support these activities.

vii. Vale Park

Vale Park is an industrial estate located on the south side of Evesham, on the A46 trunk road. It gained planning permission in September 1990 and whilst it took some years to attract occupiers, it is now nearly all occupied. When the original permission was allowed the Council negotiated some 14.8 acres of land on the northwest side of the 'estate' for local businesses known as 'qualifying users'. The legal agreement accompanying the permission allows for local companies who are involved in food sector to relocate to Vale Park on the Council owned part of the site at a value per acre less than the prevailing market rate. To date, there has only been limited success in persuading companies to leave their present sites and Walsh Mushrooms are the only major name established on the qualifying users land although there are a number of current enquiries.

The Wychavon Local Plan Review (Revised Deposit) makes further allocations of employment land in the District for the remainder of the Plan period up to 2011. The Council has taken the decision to make it's major allocation in Evesham as an extension of Vale Park.

The decision to extend Vale Park will be tested by an Inspector at the local Plan Inquiry later this year when it is hoped that the allocation will be confirmed. The Council is seeking to diversify employment opportunities in the south of the district and the allocation of Vale Park is the linchpin in this strategy. It is ideally located on the A46 and has the capability to have the necessary infrastructure to expand. As part of any allocation at Vale Park, the Council will be seeking to secure more land for local businesses as community benefit from the development. Under Policy ECON4 of the Review four hectares of land adjacent to the main allocation has been identified to accommodate the relocation of existing food storage and distribution businesses operating in the Vale of Evesham Control Zone (an area identified in the Lorries in the Vale SPG). Planning permission would be granted for businesses to relocate provided there would be demonstrable transportation/environmental improvements at their existing location. A binding legal agreement with the developers is already in place to secure this land at Vale Park in the event that the land allocation is confirmed through the statutory adoption process of the local plan.

Unlike the existing land at Vale park the new 'restricted' land would be much more flexible in terms of usage, extend over a much wider area in terms of which firms would qualify to relocate including the adjoining parts of Cotswold District and Stratford District respectively (The aforementioned Control Zone) and of great significance, the Council would seek to secure proper control over the present sites of any relocated businesses.

In our round table discussions we heard a wide range of views about Vale Park. We heard confirmation from growers and producers that the Vale of Evesham was ideally placed to serve UK markets. On a more local level however, Vale Park was seen by some of the producers and transport companies as too expensive to relocate to. There are no financial incentives to relocate and it was put to us that the industry could not justify moving to Vale Park because of the competitive nature of the business and the competition from elsewhere e.g. Lincolnshire. Moreover, the CLA in relation to producers rather than the distribution sector also made the point about cost when the industry has tight margins and also planning complexities make it easier to adapt existing facilities. The CLA also stressed that business parks don't want muddy tractors and that packaging and distribution is better carried out near the source of the food. We deal with locational issues for packhouses elsewhere in this report.

On the other hand, Mr Powell, representing some of the producers, has said to us in his written submission that 'planning gain' would help encourage relocation to Vale Park. We had it confirmed at the round table discussions that some operators are still hoping for a residential land value via a planning permission for housing in turn for relocating. Honeybourne Parish Council has also specifically raised the issue of alternative land uses in its submission.

It is clear to us as Panel that the Council's resistance in general terms to this is wise in relation to planning policy as this would lead to large amounts of new housing provided on an unplanned manner in locations where one would not normally seek to allocate new residential development and this would be in direct conflict with Government planning policy advice. Of major importance in any event, are our housing supply figures which show that we can accommodate our planned housing growth over the plan period in the urban areas, principally on brownfield sites which is the correct approach in terms of PPG3 and the sequential approach to new housing development. It is always difficult to generalize but the policy approach to new residential development is soundly based and it would be necessary for any operator to show sufficient extenuating circumstances to set aside this approach.

We have also heard a request that there should be more lorry parking facilities at Vale Park. This is not something on which we have evidence of substantive demand and we haven't attempted to make any judgements on the suitability of this location for this use. This is a matter, in our view for the industry with the help of its representative bodies such as the Freight Transport Association to look at and make a case in strategic terms in relation to the wider highway network.

It would be futile and unrealistic to expect that that the allocation of new land for local businesses alone would eradicate amenity and traffic problems caused by the lorry generating uses in the Vale. Clearly, the land for local businesses provided as part of the original Vale Park allocation was not enough to persuade relocation on a significant scale. Any policy approach should be a mixture of 'carrot and stick' in terms of influencing relocation decisions. As a Local Planning Authority we have only an influence in respect of new development as most of the existing lorry generating sites have lawful uses. Our role is supplemented by an enabling role in terms of being proactive about creating opportunity to relocate at Vale Park. However, to succeed further we need the producers and the supermarkets alike to look at locational aspects further when making investment decisions on existing sites.

Recommendation No. 16:

The Panel strongly supports the allocation of further employment land at Vale Park in the local plan review. The further opportunity offered to enable traffic generating uses to relocate is a unique one and is a soundly based policy.

Recommendation No. 17:

The Council's general approach to not allowing residential development on vacated sites be continued as it represents a sound basis for good development control and also reflects the district's housing supply situation in strategic planning policy terms. Any exceptions to this approach would need to be very extenuating and have substantial benefits for local communities.

Recommendation No. 18:

Supermarkets should be strongly encouraged to 'think local' and become directly involved in their suppliers' investment decisions in terms of new development and premises expansion. Supermarkets are urged to support the Council's commitment to minimising the impact of suppliers' facilities on local communities.

Recommendation No. 19:

That any proposals for lorry parks in the Vale should be based on a sound strategic case supported by the FTA and other representative bodies and such proposals should only be considered favourably if sufficient demand is proven locally and the site conditions in development control terms are favourable.

viii. Operators' Licences

By way of background information, the purpose of Goods Vehicle Operators' Licensing is to ensure the safe and proper use of goods vehicles and to protect the environment around operating centres. (The Goods Vehicles [Licensing of Operators] Act 1995 refers). Locally, decisions on licence applications are taken by Traffic Commissioners and there are seven in the country appointed by the Secretary of State. Because of the geography of Wychavon we are covered by two of the regional offices, Birmingham and Bristol respectively.

We particularly wanted to consider the issue of operating licences, as the granting of licences should, inter alia, have regard to the suitability of the Operating Centre on environmental grounds. In the Vale of Evesham we have a well-recognized issue of lorry movements in the rural areas generally and through villages more specifically. Such bodies as the CPRE and the South East Worcestershire Traffic Forum have also highlighted the issues surrounding the Operating Centres and this was evident at our round table discussions.

Our research shows that Local Authorities are generally reluctant to become involved in making representations to the Traffic Commissioner.

We heard that the Local Highway Authority, Worcestershire County Council, no longer get involved despite being one of those few bodies with a statutory right to make objections. For our own part, Wychavon has also been reluctant in recent years to become involved because of a feeling that any representations made have little bearing on the outcome of decision making by the Commissioner. Wychavon has recently however, tried to exert some influence supported by the willingness of our local M.P. Peter Luff. Mr Luff was able to bring the Traffic Commissioner to a site visit at Wychavon during last summer when the District Council and the South East Worcestershire Transport Forum met with him and undertook site visits in the Vale, most notably to Honeybourne Airfield. There was a general feeling of better understanding of the system by all parties after the visit.

We do, however, find it regrettable that the environmental effects (including often the planning history of a site) do not appear to be given significant weight and moreover, that the system does not encourage public participation in decision making.

We have considered a number of issues surrounding the procedures for Operators' Licensing applications and we deal with them in turn below.

Recommendation No. 20:

The Council and the County Council should be positively involved in making representations to the Traffic Commissioners on applications for Operators Licences and the recent reluctance to do so should be reviewed.

Making representations

The following have a statutory right to object to the granting of an application for a licence or variation to a licence:-

- A Chief Office of Police.
- A Local Authority (but not a Parish Council).
- A Planning Authority.
- The British Association of Removers.
- The Freight Transport Association.
- The General and Municipal Workers' Union.
- The National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers.
- The Road Haulage Association.
- The Transport and General Workers' Union.
- The Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers.
- The United Road Transport Union.

As can be seen, only 'principal' Councils can make statutory objections (there is also a subtle difference between making 'representations' and 'objections'). This excludes Parish Councils who are often the most affected by the grant of licences. (Parish Councils can make representations [not objections] as can individuals only if they own land in the vicinity of the site of the application for an operator's licence). Otherwise members of the public in general have no right to object either individually or collectively. This means that bodies such as the South East Worcestershire Transport Forum or the local CPRE branch, for example, cannot make representations.

We see this as wrong. It seems perverse for local people to see applications advertised in the local press (a statutory requirement) but then not be able to express any statutory objections to the grant of such licences. We also see this exclusion as going against the current grain of Government Policy which in general seeks to involve Parish Councils more in local affairs (as expressed in the Rural White Paper). Parish Councils should also be a statutory consultee.

Recommendation No. 21:

The Panel believes that there should be legislative change to allow third parties to be properly involved and make representations / object to applications for Operators Licences.

Recommendation No. 22:

The Government should legislate to allow for neighbour notification/better local publicity as part of the Operator Licence application procedure.

**Consideration of 'environmental issues' by
the Traffic Commissioner**

When considering environmental matters associated with an application for a licence, or variation to an existing licence, the Traffic Commissioner will take into account:-

- The nature and use of any other land in the vicinity of the operating centre, and the effect that granting the application would be likely to have on the environment of that land;
- How much harm would be done to the environment of the land in the vicinity, by granting an application which is materially to change the use of an existing (or previously used) operating centre;

- In the case of land not previously used as an operating centre, any planning permission (or planning application) relating to the operating centre or the land in its vicinity;
- The number, type and size of the authorised vehicles which will use the operating centre;
- The parking arrangements for the authorised vehicles which will use the operating centre;
- The nature and times of use of the operating centre;
- The nature and times of use of the equipment at the operating centre; and,
- How many vehicles would be entering and leaving the operating centre and how often.

Generally, we have no dispute with these criteria. However, the first one and in particular the interpretation of what is the 'vicinity' of the site is of concern. In Wychavon District Council's deliberations with the Traffic Commissioner recently it has become clear that the Commissioner is obliged to adopt a very narrow interpretation of this term which he advises is based on experience over many years as meaning 'within sight, sound or smell of the operating centre concerned'. In a recent and yet unresolved case at Honeybourne Airfield, Wychavon District Council has objected to an application and believes that there should be a wider interpretation of this to enable the effect of traffic movements through adjoining villages to become a material consideration.

Because of the road infrastructure in the Vale, lorries with their origin or destination at Honeybourne Airfield have to travel through villages (particularly Bretforton and Badsey) to get to and from the trunk road (A46). Therefore, we believe that Parish Councils in particular who are not adjacent to an Operating Centre but are clearly affected by any decision taken by the Traffic Commissioner in terms of effect of lorry movements should be allowed to make valid objections to any application i.e. there should be a redefinition of the vicinity of the site or a rewording of the criterion to allow those affected by traffic movements to become involved in the decision making process.

Recommendation No. 23:

The Government should allow Traffic Commissioners to interpret the legislation more rationally to allow persons affected by the traffic movements from an Operating Centre to make representations/objections and not just those persons in the immediate vicinity. The implications of traffic movements from an Operating Centre can affect communities and individuals much wider than just those adjacent to a site.

ix. Cross Boundary Issues Group

By 1995, there was considerable pressure to introduce Weight Restriction Orders in some of the affected villages in Gloucestershire. In 1996, Gloucestershire County Council brought forward proposals for 17 tonne restrictions. Neither Wychavon nor the then, Hereford and Worcester County Council supported the proposed Weight Restriction Orders and objected on the grounds that, inter alia, the problems would be transferred to other locations. Orders were subsequently advertised in March 1998. In February 1999, the Gloucestershire Traffic Regulations Order Sub-Committee resolved that the Order be made as advertised. Moreover, at the same meeting it was also agreed that all of the administering authorities should again enter discussions to develop a comprehensive solution.

In March 1999, Worcestershire County Council proposed that Collin Lane should be designated as a lorry route out of the Vale, with a weight restriction on the B4632 through the main part of Willersey Village. Gloucestershire County Council did not agree with this proposal.

In May 1999, Gloucestershire County Council advised that the proposed Order would be submitted to a Public Inquiry. Gloucestershire County Council advised that if the Inspector was not minded to support the Order, any future action on introducing weight restrictions would be deferred for three years in order that agreement might be reached on a lorry management strategy. The Inquiry was held in October 1999.

The Inspector acknowledged, in his decision, that there was harm caused by the HGVs'. Importantly, whilst he recognised the desire to protect the character of the affected Cotswold villages, this would have placed an unreasonable burden on villages in Worcestershire that would have to deal with the displaced vehicles. The Inspector instead, suggested a compromise whereby only part of the Order were put in place. It has been the role of the Cross Boundary Issues Group to address the issues and attempt to secure an agreed common approach.

The Cross Boundary Issues Group has met regularly since July 2000. It generally meets 4 times per year and Member and Officer representatives of the six affected District and County Councils attend. The principal success of the Group has been the preparation of the Supplementary Planning Guidance for dealing with lorries in the Vale. This means that a consistent policy approach can be adopted by all of the affected planning and highway authorities. The Group has also been instrumental in the progress of the Vale of Evesham Freight Study and it also monitors development proposals likely to have traffic generation issues.

Our brief was to look at the work of the Group and we have reached the conclusion that the Group is a success in terms of ensuring a joint approach to problem solving in relation to HGV matters and that we should continue to support it as a Council. This view has been backed up by the submissions of Honeybourne Parish Council and to some extent the South East Worcestershire Transport Forum who want better development control decisions.

If one looks at the origins of the Group as outlined above, a masterplan solution to dealing with the localized traffic problems via a lorry management strategy across administrative boundaries has not yet been achieved and it is the hope of this Panel that the collaborative working of the six Councils' will ensure that any future traffic management decisions are taken jointly as the traffic impacts do not respect our administrative boundaries.

Recommendation No. 24:

That the work of the Cross boundary Issues Group continue to be supported by the Council and the CBIG be urged to move forward on the basis of the original raison d'être for the Group.

x. Freight Quality Partnership

The Worcestershire Freight Quality Partnership (WFQP) was set up in March 2002 and has the aim:-

' to ensure the efficient transportation of freight within Worcestershire, such that is supports a strong local economy, but increasingly does not compromise the existing or future needs of our society or environment '

Wychavon District Council is a member, as is Bretforton Parish Council (on behalf of CALC) and the CPRE. The industry is also well represented.

It is too early to look at any added value as a result of the creation of the Partnership but the Panel supports our continued involvement in the Partnership at the present time. One positive outcome of the Partnership is the production of an advisory lorry route map not only for locally based operators but also those travelling through including foreign-based lorries.

In addition to the Worcestershire FQP the Vale of Evesham FQP is in an embryonic stage. The industry and the District Council should fully support it.

Recommendation No. 25:

The District Council should continue to be represented in the FQP and also the new Vale of Evesham FQP and, equally importantly, the local food and distribution sector should ensure they are well represented on this Group.

xi. Halcrow study in the Vale – implications

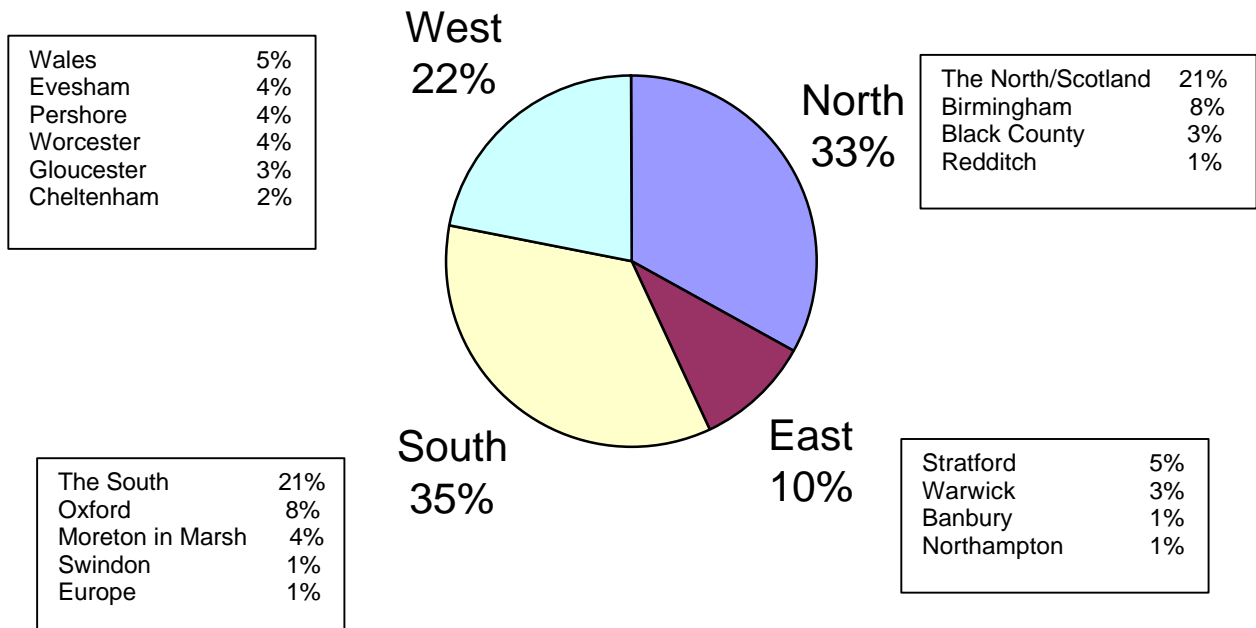
In January 2001, the Cross Boundary Issues Group commissioned Halcrow to undertake a study of freight transport in the Vale. The aims of the study were:-

- (a) To review previous work undertaken by the various authorities, and consider the feasibility of the 'Inspector's Way Forward', which formed the outcome of the Public Inquiry held in 1998;
- (b) To identify the main generators of freight within the Vale;
- (c) To quantify the lorry movements on the main routes within the Vale;
- (d) To assess future changes in freight patterns, including the potential for the expansion of rail freight;
- (e) To measure the impact of lorries on each settlement in the Vale;
- (f) To make recommendations to reduce the impact of lorry traffic on communities in the Vale.

The study was published in March 2002. A full copy can be seen on our website (www.wychavon.gov.uk)

The study appears to have been dogged by low response rates to surveys/questionnaires to the employers in the area and this means that the study cannot be regarded as robustly as it might have been. One interesting statistic to come out of the work is the pattern of traffic movements (external origins and destinations).

Freight Movements: External Origins/Destinations



Source: Vale of Evesham Freight Study – Halcrow

The document recommends a strategy consisting of five key points. It states:-

- “(a) The overwhelming evidence drawn from the surveys undertaken for this study is that the largest volume of heavy vehicles in the Vale occurs on the B4035 between Buckle Street and Evesham, passing through Bretforton and Badsey on a poorly aligned route. The initial focus of the strategy, therefore, should be the detailed appraisal of the potential to construct bypasses for the two villages. This would allow weight restrictions to be put in place through the village of Willersey without adversely affecting villages in Worcestershire.*
- (b) If this appraisal concludes that the costs of road construction in the Badsey/Bretforton area are too high in relation to the environmental benefits to be gained, then consideration should be given to introducing weight restrictions in a ‘cell’ format, whereby different areas of the Vale would only be able to use specified routes in and out of the area. For the lorry generators in the central part of the study area at Unipart and Honeybourne, this would require all access/egress via the B4632 and an upgraded Collin Lane. This is likely to require further in-depth consultations, and it is suggested that a phased approach could be adopted, concentrating first on the improvement of Collin Lane to an acceptable standard to accommodate an increase in heavy goods vehicles, in line with the Public Inquiry Inspector’s suggested ‘Way Forward’.*
- (c) Consideration of a permit system for certain local heavy vehicle movements between one section of the Vale and another to provide exemption from some weight restrictions.*
- (d) The strategy should be reinforced through the establishment of a Freight Quality Partnership for the whole of the Vale, which can act as a forum for discussion and consultation with both residents and businesses, to ensure that any strategy has the backing of all parties concerned.*
- (e) The strategy should also be backed up by a continuation and strengthening of the existing policy of Wychavon District Council to relocate certain businesses, where the conditions are right, to more suitable locations adjacent to the strategic road network. This should include an investigation into the potential for removing the land use designation of vacated sites, together with the cost involved.”*

In its written response to the Panel, the South East Worcestershire Transport Forum were critical of the study in that it has not provided definitive information on the number of HGV traffic movements and they have called for a full census of lorry movements. We don't disagree with the desire to have robust information as this would be helpful to decision making and we believe that this matter should be taken up in the first instance by the Cross Boundary Issues Group. We see no substantive merit in another study along the lines of the Halcow study at the present time.

While we discussed traffic issues at length with all of the participants of our round table sessions, we did not debate the outcome of the study with them. Our own views as a Panel of the study are set out as Recommendation 26.

Recommendation No. 26:

The Panel does not regard the findings of the Halcrow Study to be particularly helpful to future decision making and the Badsey/Bretforton by-pass concept is one which may give unrealistic expectations to local communities. Moreover, the Panel are not convinced by the suggested cellular approach to weight restrictions.

The Importance of this Sector and the Locational Arguments

xii. Importance of the sector to the Vale – summary of the divergent views

During our Round Table discussion groups with Parish Councils and other interested parties, it became evident that there are a number of differing views on the importance of the agriculture and food distribution sector to the Vale of Evesham. One Parish Council within the Vale expressed the view that the industry provides no value to the area at all and that villages only receive nuisance through employees, immigrants, asylum seekers and cheap labour.

We are happy to report that this does not seem to be a widely shared view. Indeed it is openly recognised by other Parish Councils that the industry does add value to the area and that its benefits go beyond the local growers. It is acknowledged to employ many people both locally and outside the area.

There are, however, matters of concern to local residents, Parish Councils, and other bodies such as West Mercia Police. These are detailed later in this report.

The CPRE considers that there is a need to balance economic needs with the problems caused by HGV movements and a need to strive for balance between a vibrant countryside and its protection.

There was no discussion about the visual contribution the production of fruit and vegetables makes to the character of the area, and the impact that would be felt if local food distribution ceased – in visual and economic terms. The majority opinion seems to be that the local growers are a valuable asset to the area.

Those present, however, considered that steps should be taken to overcome the main concerns about the industry: vehicle movements; the use of casual labour; the perceived ineffectiveness of the planning system; and the system of issuing operators licences for the overnight parking of HGVs' in inappropriate locations.

One of the factors we encountered was the changes in the number of suppliers over recent years and the supermarkets' reliance on 'primary' suppliers. We have a number of these in the District and it is important to recognise the economic benefits they have, as well as the pressure on such suppliers to adapt and diversify to meet supermarket demands. In addition, primary suppliers often have a critical interrelationship with the growers and the Panel believes that there is scope to give special regard to the needs of this sector. We, as a Council, can help directly with expansion plans through our planning powers and planning can be seen as a positive tool in this respect subject to the co-operation of the industry.

Recommendation No. 27:

The Panel recognises the importance of a number of 'primary' suppliers to the supermarkets and the Council should be particularly aware in decision making about the planning and community issues when such businesses have to expand. Where suppliers/ producers are not located on the principal road network, the Council should give support (especially primary suppliers) to find more suitable sites for expansion.

xiii. Views of the industry

The Panel heard views from two different sectors of the industry: national bodies including DEFRA, the NFU, the Road Hauliers Federation, the Country Land and Business Association, and Midland Regional Growers, and a selection of local growers/producers, and distributors.

There was a consensus of opinion that the general infrastructure for the industry is lacking and that local roads are poor. The local transport operators provide a service both locally and nationally and it is envisaged that the use of foreign vehicles will increase, particularly with the forthcoming enlargement of the European Union. It was considered that 44 tonne lorries will be the maximum weight likely to be used in the foreseeable future, and the distribution companies involved suggested that organisation of loads has resulted in less commercial vehicles using the roads than previously.

Whilst vehicles transporting goods from abroad will take return loads if possible, they are very much constrained by return ferry schedules and regulations relating to what produce can be transported on a vehicle that has had a previous load.

It is acknowledged that the transportation industry will be affected by the new Working Time Directive which will have the effect of reducing driving time and night time deliveries. However, the industry across the board is subject to supermarket demands, which require a constant supply of fresh produce. This implies foreign imports as and when necessary. The supermarkets tend to award transport contracts to one haulier, e.g. Sainsbury uses Corby Chill. This inevitably produces more vehicle movements.

There was a call from local growers and distributors alike for:-

- Improved road signage to enable efficient lorry movements (the haulage industry is already using multi-lingual maps).
- Assessment of the key routes through the Vale of Evesham.
- Incentives for drivers to use the most appropriate routes.

- Prominent advance notices to warn drivers of weight restrictions ahead (before driver has started approaching the inappropriate road).
- Co-ordination of road repairs and sets of temporary traffic lights to avoid excessive delays on more appropriate routes.
- Lobbying of the Government to regulate HGV movements at weekends.

Recommendation No. 28:

That the Local Highway Authorities be aware of the concerns of the industry about the co-ordination and execution of road maintenance projects and the effects on business operations.

xiv. Can such uses be relocated, or do existing businesses need to grow on site?

At the round table discussion for local growers and distributors, it was generally recognised that the Vale of Evesham is an ideal central location for the distribution industry in the UK. Whilst the growers acknowledge that it would be better from a transport point of view if all packhouses could be centralised and sited closer to major roads, the cost of relocation is a major disincentive preventing existing businesses from moving. Whilst Wychavon District Council has allocated land at Vale Park, Evesham, to which business in the industry can relocate (at advantageous rates, subject to place of origin), the ease of transportation from there is insufficient incentive. Due to fierce competition in the industry from other parts of the country, e.g. Lincolnshire, they cannot justify the costs of moving and the ongoing increase in business rates.

Consequently, as things stand, HGVs' and other associated vehicles have to travel on inappropriate roads through villages to access packhouses which have traditionally served farms in the area.

We consider there are three distinct sectors to the industry that should be treated differently in this respect:

Haulage companies

These have no direct association with the land and are often located in or near villages in the Vale due to historic association with local growers. Spiers and Hartwell is a prime example of this. However, the company has grown successfully and operates on a national and international basis. Whilst some of the produce transported by such companies may be locally produced, we believe that this constitutes a relatively small proportion of their business. Haulage companies such as this should be encouraged to vacate their existing premises and to locate to a more suitable setting, such as Vale Park.

This would leave the problem of the future use of the existing site, but it is possible that a less transport intensive use could use the premises and we deal with the re-use issues elsewhere in this report.

Recommendation No. 29:

Haulage companies should be encouraged to relocate to Vale Park and financial incentives should be investigated for so doing and the Council should ensure that such vacated sites are only occupied in the future by businesses with minimal HGV movements.

Food producers

Some of the producers in the Vale of Evesham have no direct land ownership and are divorced from any land holdings. For example, Kanes of Middle Littleton has contracts with a number of local growers to supply fruit and vegetables, which in turn rely on the company to provide an outlet for their produce. Kanes itself prepares and processes the imported produce for the supermarkets. Simms and Woods grow salad onions during the english growing season, but under contract with farmers over a wide area. The company is currently constructing a new packhouse on the outskirts of Wyre Piddle (which was allowed on appeal). This has no association with a land holding and it could be located anywhere within reasonable transportation distance of its suppliers. In theory, a company such as Simms and Woods could relocate to Vale Park. However, we recognise that the arrival of tractor loads of dirty salad onions may not be welcomed by other occupiers of Vale Park and it's new premises on the principal road network is a benefit in itself. The business is, in effect, a hybrid between a traditional agricultural packhouse and a processing plant/distribution depot, although in planning terms it is recognised as an industrial use.

As both of the above cited companies now have new purpose-built premises, it is unlikely they will relocate. However, the Panel considers that lessons can be learnt from these instances. It is suggested Policies are adopted to ensure:

Recommendation No. 30:

That any new packhouses should be constructed adjacent the main road network to ensure satisfactory access by HGVs' unless it can be demonstrated that there are overriding reasons that they need to be located on a farm holding. The need to consider such developments outside of established settlement boundaries will need to be considered.

Recommendation No. 31:

That extensions to existing packhouses and food processing premises shall only be allowed where it can be demonstrated that the development will not result in an increase in HGV movements, or they are required to serve the adjacent land holding. Section 106 agreements should be required to ensure the packhouse remains linked to a farmholding.

Local growers

These are traditionally located on farmholdings, using packhouses that were originally designed to process produce from the associated holding. It is often these businesses that cause more disruption for villages as vehicles have to travel along inappropriate lanes through villages to access the packhouses. Due to the changing nature of the industry, these businesses no longer work on a seasonal basis, but all year with supplies augmented by foreign imports during winter months, e.g. Red Star Growers, Birlingham and Evesham Vale Growers, Lower Moor.

As established by the appeal decisions detailed above, we take the view such mixed uses require planning permission. We could decide that the amenities of the villagers take precedent and refuse planning permission for any new buildings or improvements to existing facilities. Such an approach would, however, lead to the demise of the horticultural industry in the Vale, with drastic economic and landscape consequences:-

Recommendation No. 32:

That applications for new or improved facilities at the premises of established growers are considered on their merits, taking into account the needs of the industry, the impact of the development on local residents, and the ability of the local road network to accommodate any additional traffic likely to be generated by the development.

Recommendation No. 33:

That growers are encouraged to develop a working Code of Best Practice that would allow them to share packhouse facilities, in particular to direct imported produce to packhouses sited in the most appropriate locations for processing and onward distribution.

The issue of financial incentives to aid relocation of poorly located facilities is a difficult one. At a local level we can positively contribute with land availability at Vale Park. There is scope, we believe, for bodies such as Defra to work with the local food sector to see if any positive financial incentives can be realised and to provide advice to the industry on funding opportunities.

Recommendation No. 34:

That public bodies such as Defra, who provide financial support for new food and farming investment, will be encouraged to take into account this report when making investment decisions. Indeed, their funding opportunities should be used as a positive tool for encouraging investment in appropriate locations.

Rural Character and Amenity Matters

xv. Local amenity issues

One of the primary purposes of instigating this report was to consider and assess the impact of the activities of the food producing and processing sector upon the amenities of the physical environment of the Vale and people who live and work within it.

A preliminary list of possible issues was formulated early on and formed the basis for discussion within the round table groups. We identified the possible main issues as:-

1. *Increased use of narrow roads and lanes through rural areas by large commercial traffic;*
2. *Noise, inconvenience and congestion arising from HGV traffic;*
3. *Foreign drivers transporting goods to and from the continent becoming lost and causing inconvenience to local residents;*
4. *Increases in the numbers of immigrant workers and difficulties associated with finding them local accommodation, leading to planning problems such as proposals for caravans and hostels;*
5. *Breakdown of trust between residents and the agriculture sector;*
6. *Perception that “unscrupulous” gangmasters are increasingly engaged in providing local labour, usually illegal and likely to have security implications for local communities;*
7. *Communication problems associated with immigrant workers who may not speak English and therefore have problems integrating within the local community;*
8. *Perception that supermarkets apply pressure on producers to comply with strict deadlines and standards resulting in increasingly intensive production methods and extensions to working hours;*
9. *Other planning problems include compliance Development Plan policies for location of larger industrial activities. These tend to be on allocated sites away from rural areas and away from residential properties; and,*
10. *The visual intrusion caused by large areas of associated hardstanding, lorry parking, external storage, additional plant and machinery and intensive nighttime illumination.*

This list was a particularly useful reference point when discussions involved local Parish Council representatives.

By and large, local amenity issues can be categorised as comprising the physical attributes of the Vale of Evesham area, including the landscape, pattern of settlements, road network and land use, and the quality of life of people resident there. It is also important to balance these characteristics with the needs and requirements of those businesses located within the area. The purpose of this document is to establish a set of land use policies which acknowledges that the needs and wants of residents, visitors and businesses may not be compatible with each other but which seeks to achieve a way forward to reach a situation of equilibrium.

To supplement our preliminary list, we were able to categorise the amenity issues as follows:-

- Traffic issues including increasingly large HGVs' travelling through villages and on narrow lanes, causing congestion, noise, inconvenience and general disturbance for local residents, especially during anti-social hours. Traffic issues are dealt with in more detail elsewhere in the report.
- Produce transported from abroad to local processing centre by foreign drivers who are susceptible to losing their way, thereby causing obstruction to roads and delaying or disturbing local residents.
- Increasing dependence upon migrant workers with the attendant problems of sourcing accommodation and integration within established communities.
- Visual intrusion caused by large buildings, hardstandings, lorry parking, outside storage and illumination.
- Increasing sense of polarity between requirements of local residents and those of the producers/processors.
- Environmental implications of supplying the demands of the market.

Many of the packing, processing and distribution centres within the Vale area have expanded significantly in size during the last two decades, and this trend appears to be continuing. Increased mechanisation and the intensifying demands of the market have led to extended operating hours on many sites with employees working shift patterns around the clock and HGV traffic servicing sites during day and night.

Adoption of higher operating standards has resulted, in some cases, in logistical changes on sites, including increased numbers of loading bays, car-parking areas, illumination of facilities and an increase in late night activity. Many of these uses are historical and are not subject to planning conditions restricting operating times. This, as referred to earlier in this report, has the potential to cause local inconvenience and aggravation, particularly in respect of foreign lorries arriving late at night.

The problems are further compounded by the fact that several sites are situated in close proximity to local residential properties, especially at Blackminster and South Littleton, where the potential to cause noise disturbance and inconvenience is significantly higher.

It seems clear that the producers, processors, distributors and other operators have a responsibility to ensure that their activities do not unreasonably impinge upon the rights of local residents to enjoy the peace and quiet of their homes and surroundings, particularly at night.

xvi. What do local people and interest groups think?

In order to fully understand and assess the issue of impact upon local amenities, it was important from the outset to involve a range of different individuals and groups so that a balanced and comprehensive assessment could be undertaken. We arranged a number of round table discussions.

As mentioned above, representatives from the Parish Councils regarded the tangible effects of change such as: increased traffic movements along narrow lanes and through villages by HGV traffic; damage caused to roadside verges; noise and light pollution as being the most serious impact of those listed above. They are also concerned about, in some cases, the apparent propensity by the producers to act first and regularise any breaches of planning control later. Several appeal cases have been contested in recent years, which saw Parish Councils opposing change at certain sites. From our discussions there appears to be an element of suspicion about the practices, activities and intentions of the producers and growers amongst some local communities. This appears to have resulted in an undermining of relations between local communities and producers as the former view the latter as being less and less concerned about the environmental repercussions of their activities.

Simultaneously, however, local Parish Councils generally recognised that the Vale of Evesham has traditionally been characterised by a form of intensive agriculture with ancillary packhouses on farms processing produce grown on the related holding. Some local advantages are alluded to, particularly in relation to potential opportunities for local transport operators. However, as mentioned earlier in this report, there has been an increasing trend by the supermarkets to follow single national contracts with national hauliers for the transportation of produce, thereby minimising these perceived opportunities.

Recommendation No. 35:

That local growers and producers always seek professional planning advice from the Local Planning Authority prior to undertaking any development or changes on their sites.

Recommendation No. 36:

That local growers, producers and local and national transport operators engaged in servicing local sites devise transport plans utilising appropriate local and strategic routes suitable for accommodating HGV traffic away from centres of population within the Vale of Evesham. As far as is practicable, all 'contracted' distribution companies also adhere to such measures.

xvii. How might local impacts be ameliorated?

There is a view that traditional farming methods within the Vale of Evesham have changed dramatically and have evolved to the present situation in response to changes in supply chains, subsidies, market demands, labour supply and technological developments.

Parish Council representatives were invited to make suggestions to the Panel about how the impacts referred to above might be addressed and a significant number of Parishes came to our round table session. Responses were also received in writing from Fladbury and Hill and Moor Parish Council, Charlton Parish Council, Honeybourne Parish Council and White Ladies Aston Parish Council. Whilst it was acknowledged that growers and producers are now subject to intense demands and contractual obligations, the clear message delivered by some of the Parish Councils is that many packhouses are no longer compatible with their surroundings and should be encouraged to relocate to an appropriate business park. This would, in their view, deliver mutual benefits in terms of reduced HGV movements, noise, disturbance and inconvenience for local residents as well as improving the visual quality of the Vale of Evesham area, as well as placing these businesses within an appropriate physical environment with advantageous access to suitable road networks.

The existing planning policy framework set out in detail earlier in this report acknowledges the value of supporting an active, diverse and competitive rural economy. These broad aims still need to be balanced with ensuring that the environmental quality of the rural area is not adversely affected, so that a meaningful approach to sustainable development may be realised.

From our research, it is apparent that a proportion of food producers would welcome the opportunity to relocate to a business park and to avail themselves of the obvious benefits of safe and direct access to the primary road network and modern premises. The main obstacle to realising such ambitions is one of cost, allied to the fact that their existing sites have very little alternative development potential in land use planning terms.

This remains a difficult area for which no immediate solution appears likely. Certainly, the Council will consider any reasonable proposals on their individual planning merits which attempt to facilitate the diversification of the rural economy in a sustainable way.

However, it is acknowledged by some that by vacating existing sites in favour of more suitable sites there is a danger that the problem will not be solved. This is because, in land use planning terms, the old sites may still retain lawful use as processing sites into which new operators could move. It is recognised, therefore, that a fundamental change in the way the use of the vacated site is controlled is essential.

Labour Issues in the Vale

The use of seasonal labour is not a new phenomenon for the area and we recognise that it is an essential requirement for local businesses. However the increased pressures for very flexible food production systems and the handling of large amounts of imported produce has resulted in the demand for high numbers of casual labour throughout the year.

This labour can be sourced by employing casual workers from the local population either directly by the business or through the use of local recruitment agencies e.g. Back-Up, Westbourne Services. However given the current full employment nature of the district businesses have increasingly been unable to meet their requirements through these local methods. Consequently businesses have increasingly been using international labour. This can be sourced from a number of government regulated schemes such as:-

- Seasonal Agriculture Workers Scheme (SAWS) – the government legally allows 25,000 students (aged 18-25 years) from non-EU countries (currently mainly Eastern European) to work temporarily. The scheme is operated through a number of approved operators such as Concordia and HOPS.
- Working Holidaymakers Scheme – this legally allows young people (up to 30 years) from Commonwealth nations to work part time in the UK for up to 2 years. Kanes Foods, for example, employs around 300 South Africans through this scheme.

In addition a number of local businesses (e.g. Evesham Foods, Robert Wiseman) are employing directly workers from existing EU nations, especially Portugal.

xviii. Gangmasters

In addition a substantial amount of labour is provided through the Gangmaster system. Gangmasters have played a role in the supply of agricultural casual labour in the UK for over a century. The term Gangmaster with it's Victorian connotations is still used by the industry and government agencies. In fact an inter-government department initiative known as "Operation Gangmaster" has been running since 1998. The system is legal, however, it now has a stigma attached to it as a result of the abuses committed by some large scale Gangmasters over the last decade or so.

Historically Gangmasters have tended to be relatively small and served the immediate area. However, the recent changes in the farming and food sectors and immigration levels have also resulted in the introduction of large scale Gangmasters covering a much wider catchment area. The opportunities for exploitation and abuses have correspondingly increased.

We have heard that the problems and abuses caused by disreputable gangmasters include:-

- Non payment of minimum wage.
- Illegal deductions from wages.
- Long hours without days off and paid holidays.
- Use of Underage workers.
- Using bogus self employed status.
- Tax and VAT evasion.
- Poor living accommodation.
- Illegal transportation of workers.

A House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee recently undertook an examination of the Gangmaster system. This Committee published a detailed report in September 2003 which included comprehensive range of conclusions and recommendations. As a Panel we heard a great deal of information locally and in Lincolnshire which backed up many of the findings of the Committee and as such we as a Panel endorse their recommendations. Our findings are summarised below:

Don Pollard is a gangmaster researcher for the Trade and General Workers' Union and he conducted research in the Vale of Evesham in 2001. When he conducted the research he identified four Asian gangmasters using Asian workers from India, Pakistan, the Yemen, Bangladesh and other Asian sources. However, increasingly Eastern European workers were also being used. On a daily basis Don Pollard estimates that approximately 1,000 gang workers are employed in the Vale of Evesham. His research indicated that the majority of these workers are legally in this country with their own passports. However, he also identified that there are others with forged or no documents.

More recently it has been estimated by one local gangmaster that around 1,500 gang workers are now working in the area.

It should be noted that both figures are very much estimates. We were unable in our research to make an estimate of the numbers of casual workers in the Vale. In general, there are no comprehensive statistics available on the accurate level of casual workers. This was the finding of the House of Commons Committee which reported "If the Government does not even know how many casual workers there are and who they are working for, it is plainly difficult for it to make any estimate of the scale of any illegal activity being carried out within that section of the labour market. The Government cannot develop an appropriate policy response to a problem, or allocate appropriate resources, if it cannot make even a rough estimate of the scale of that problem." The Committee recommended that the Government commission a detailed study into the use of casual labour in the agriculture and horticulture sectors.

We feel that this study should consider all forms of casual working, including the SAWS and Working Holiday Scheme. In addition more consideration should be given to the labour and social impacts of the expansion in May 2004 of the European Union. The Government in its response a Parliamentary Question from Peter Luff MP (PQ 4376) has stated “While this (*enlargement to the EU*) will significantly increase the potential pool of workers able to work in English farming and horticulture, a number of independent studies looking at the scale of migration flows into the EU after enlargement suggest that there are likely to be only relatively small inflows into the UK”. The Panel was told in Boston, Lincolnshire that 3,000 Portuguese citizens (current EU nation) had settled in the town. Whilst this number may be considered relatively small in terms of UK migration it has a major impact on housing and local services in a rural location.

Recommendation No. 37:

The Panel supports the call for the Government to carry out detailed research into accurate measurement of the numbers of casual workers in the Food and Farming sector. This should assess all forms of casual working including Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS) and Working Holiday Scheme as well as the gangmaster system. The research should also examine the impact of casual workers on local communities, especially rural communities. The Vale of Evesham would make an appropriate pilot study.

Recommendation No. 38

That the Government should review the studies looking at the scale of migration following EU enlargement and assess this in terms of the agriculture/horticulture sectors and the impact on rural communities.

The work practices and legality of gangmasters does vary significantly. For example, the Panel met with gangmaster Fusion Personnel. This business keeps detailed accounts, pay workers with proper payslips and maintain records of their employees' passports and work permits. In addition they have successfully provided their workers with basic skills training, including food hygiene and language skills. Fusion would now like to build a training facility for casual workers at its market garden nursery at Bretforton, Vale of Evesham. This business has been recognised nationally by the government, NFU and supermarkets as a good role model. Indeed DEFRA recently placed a member of staff with Fusion on secondment to help develop the national Gangmaster code of practice in partnership with the Ethical Trading Initiative (representatives include retailers, Fresh Produce Consortium, trade unions and non-government organisations).

This code of practice is currently voluntary and encourages gangmasters to operate basic business practices such as proper payroll systems, pay slips and records of employee passports and work permits.

This code of practice is initially to be piloted in South Lincolnshire. We will monitor the results of this pilot work and encourage local businesses to take on board the good practices learnt. To help achieve this Wychavon District Council hosted a gangmaster meeting on 6th October 2003 organised by Advantage West Midlands. This meeting brought together several local authorities, regional development agencies and public bodies interested in tackling issues related to gangmasters.

We note, however, that the code of practice does not currently include specific requirements requiring gangmasters to provide basic skills, language and driver training. We feel that such training would have a number of important advantages:-

- Ensure health and safety conditions are met. For example, the fatal accident which killed 3 international gangworkers at a level crossing at Charlton, near Evesham is still being investigated but it is possible that poor language and driving skills have played a part.
- Allow better communication and integration with local staff and communities.
- Defra provided statistics to the Panel which indicates that productivity levels in UK farming has in recent years fallen below EU average and is substantially below nations such as Denmark, The Netherlands and France. Research suggests that low levels of education and skills in UK farming is an important factor and the decline in productivity is potentially linked to the increased reliance on poorly trained international casual workers. Consequently improved training will help improve productivity.

Worcestershire Partnership has recently identified gangmasters and basic skills as one of it's priorities. Reflecting this status Wychavon District Council and the Learning Skills Council Herefordshire and Worcestershire are currently exploring funding opportunities such as the European Social Fund (EQUAL, Leonardo) for supporting basic skills programme. The Panel met a number of major local food and farming businesses as part of a round table session. The businesses all agreed to work together to help improve their business performance and their communication with the local community. The implementation of a basic skills programme would be of mutual interest for all the businesses and provide an opportunity for practical partnership working.

Recommendation No. 39:

The Panel supports the development of a national Gangmaster Code of Practice. However, the Panel believes that it should include a requirement for basic skills i.e. english language and appropriate driver training. The Panel will support efforts by Wychavon District Council in partnership with relevant organisations and businesses to seek funding for the delivery of a pilot training scheme.

Recommendation No. 40:

The Panel supports the House of Commons Select Committee's recommendation that in areas where gang labour is commonly used consideration should be given to the implications for rural services and how these can be best managed. We recommend that the Government should support local agencies to pilot and deliver appropriate initiatives in the Vale of Evesham.

The House of Commons : Environment, Food and Rural affairs Committee in its report concluded:

“We are convinced that the dominant position of the supermarkets in relation to their suppliers is a significant contributory factor in creating an environment where illegal activity by gangmasters can take root. Intense price competition and short time-scale between orders from the supermarkets and deliveries to them put great pressure on suppliers who have little opportunity or incentive to check the legality of the labour which helps them meet these orders. Supermarkets go to great lengths to ensure that the labels on their products are accurate, for example, whether they are organic or contain certain products. We believe they should pay equal attention to the conditions under which their produce is harvested and packed, and label it accordingly.” (para 25)

The House of Commons Committee recommended:

- That supermarkets re-examine their policies in this area bearing in mind their own stated policies on corporate social responsibility.
- That the DTI revisit the relationship between the supermarkets and their suppliers.
- More needs to be done to promote consumer awareness of the issues related to gang labour and identify those suppliers and supermarkets who subscribe to, and enforce, ethical employment practices.

As part of our review we have met many food and farming businesses who supply various supermarkets. It should be noted none of the businesses we met expressed any criticism of the supermarkets. They all indicated that their relationship with the supermarkets were crucial to their business growth and survival. They also indicated that ethical issues, especially labour, were now a major issue with supermarkets and that they received regular Ethical Audits. Businesses recognised that they needed to meet the audit requirements in order to maintain their supermarket relationship.

It is therefore very clear to us that supermarkets are key to more ethical practices in the future.

We were therefore pleased that representatives from Asda and Tesco attended a meeting of the Panel.

The Ethical Trading Manager from Asda stated that ethical issues were now increasingly important for retailers and provided a detailed review of the approach taken by his company. In the past the focus was on suppliers from developing countries, today there is an increasing recognition that it is also an issue for their UK suppliers. Asda's ethical audit is consistent with the UK Ethical Trading Initiative base code. Asda supports the developing Gangmaster code of practice but would like to see a national register of labour providers.

Tesco re-iterated that ethical issues were now critical and they are actively working with their supply chain to ensure that standards are achieved. For example, Tesco are providing training seminars for suppliers on labour management. Both supermarkets stated that their relationships with suppliers were seen as long term business partnerships of mutual benefit.

In our discussions with the supermarkets and suppliers it is clear that ethical matters were largely seen mainly in the context of labour practices at the place of work. We believe that ethical matters should be viewed more broadly to take into account issues such as impact on local services e.g. housing, health and local communities e.g. HGVs' on rural roads.

The local impact of international workers is typically viewed as negative. However, we believe that with careful development there are opportunities for helping to support and revive rural services and communities. For example, Fusion Personnel bring 15 new LDV mini buses into the Vale of Evesham on a daily basis from Birmingham. Typically these arrive at around 8am and depart in the evening in between time they sit idle. Discussions are currently taking place between the business, Wychavon District Council, Worcestershire County Council and Evesham Market Town Partnership to consider the feasibility of using these buses during the day for community transport purposes.

Recommendation No. 41:

The Panel recognises that the supermarkets are key to driving up ethical standards in the food and farming sector. We welcome the steps currently being taken such as the Gangmaster Code of Practice and ethical audits. However the Panel believes that ethical issues should be seen in a wider context and that supermarkets and suppliers should be part of finding broader solutions to their impact on local communities. The Panel recommends that Wychavon District Council works with these bodies in helping to pilot some local initiatives.

Community and Housing Issues

xix. Community safety matters and community cohesion

The issues of community safety and community cohesion are oblique to our terms of reference but were raised in our deliberations and we also looked at these matters in our visit to Lincolnshire. As the sector uses a very high proportion of non-local labour, whether that be student or directly contracted labour from the conurbations or via a gangmaster, there are cultural issues and impacts on services which cannot be avoided. At its most simple level, there is often a communication problem in terms of language. At the workplace for the casual labour it is not an issue. Kanes is very sophisticated in this respect with multilingual signage throughout the factory.

It is the interface with local communities that is important. We have seen no dissent from the premise that the resident, and to some extent, the non-resident casual labour should integrate into our communities. Inspector Brooker told us that the Police do have concerns with both transport operations and illegal labour. It is the differentiation between illegal labour and a more regulated labour force that is important. The perception that can perpetuate that most of the casual labour is illegal is clearly wrong but the fact that a perception exists does cause image problems for our local companies. We believe they should do more with local communities and the media to explain labour supply matters.

On the transportation side, this has of course been an issue because of the train crash in 2003 at Charlton. The Police informed us that international workers can sometimes be ignorant of the law. Drivers can be unlicensed with vehicles with no insurance and tax. This is clearly a matter for other enforcement bodies but again the industry was quick to show us that it was keen to be associated with legitimate labour only. Moreover, the supermarket sector places a high reliance on the legitimacy of its supply chain. The industry needs to square this circle. At a local level we did see good practice in the matter of transport. For example, the high quality minibuses used by Fusion Personnel and the minibus fleet of Kanes.

One initiative drawn to our attention was the 'Welcome to the Vale of Evesham' leaflet to be distributed by the Police but also directly supported by key local employers. This leaflet is in different languages and seeks to minimise cultural differences. For example, the Police are rightly keen to get the message across to casual labour about the law on carrying knives in the UK.

One of the problems with educating and communicating with casual labour is that often the gangmaster does not know the cultural background or in the worst case circumstances the nationality or name of the individuals. To meet peak demand we saw how local packers need to call upon the gangmaster system at short notice and the regulation of this is clearly an issue.

We know that the local companies have by their own admission to us not realised the importance of community linkages and since our meetings we have seen evidence of Parish Councils getting to know how local firms operate. We also have knowledge of some less successful attempts to gain mutual understanding which is unfortunate.

Recommendation No. 42:

The Panel commends the West Mercia Police initiative in conjunction with key local employers to engage the resident casual labour force and address cultural differences to minimise tensions in the community.

xx. Effects on housing matters and dealing with transient workers' accommodation issues

The casual workforces are generally either locally resident or non-resident and bused in from the metropolitan areas especially Birmingham and generally accessed through the gangmaster system. This is a relatively small commuting time for the workers. In Lincolnshire, we were advised that workers there are bused in daily from the metropolitan areas in South Yorkshire which is a much larger distance. The resident population also includes foreign students. Accommodation can comprise existing housing stock, hostels or mobile homes/caravans.

One matter we were keen to investigate was the perception that casual labour for the industry was having an effect on the housing stock. We already know that Kanes Foods has purchased several large properties adjacent to the factory and these are used to house students. Other properties have been purchased more recently by the Company in the vicinity of the site (some with current planning difficulties) and also in Evesham.

We are not aware of significant hostel accommodation. A hostel was recently approved in Offenham and this was the subject of some controversy locally.

We have also seen no direct evidence of 'hot-bedding' but cannot rule out that it may happen especially in the Evesham urban area.

In Lincolnshire, there were housing pressures in Boston from Portuguese and there was evidence of hot bedding. As the gangmasters arrange accommodation matters themselves, the practice is that the employers don't get involved. Boston Borough Council did not see any significant tension in terms of accessing social housing in the area. We were also advised that cultural differences needed to be understood by both local people and migrant workers.

In our rural areas, the Parish Councils told us that they didn't see too much of a problem with housing for workers and there appeared to be a general acceptance of the use of caravans for the student accommodation.

Recommendation No. 43:

That the Council looks into the issue of houses in multiple occupation (HMOs') in a co-ordinated manner across service areas to ascertain any incidences of unauthorised HMOs' and ensure compliance with statutory requirements e.g. planning, Housing Act, Building Regulations, Fire Regulations etc.

Recommendation No. 44:

That employers and the supermarkets ensure that any temporary accommodation used by any casual workforce complies with all statutory requirements.

Recommendation No. 45:

That the pressure on the existing housing stock is recognised and this could exacerbate the situation after expansion of the EU in May 2004.

Recommendation No. 46:

That the Council should support the principle of small scale, on site hostel accommodation for resident casual workers where a robust case has been made. On site hostels or those nearby to premises in the rural areas be assessed against the countryside protection and residential amenity policies of the local plan review. This should be subject to new build facilities being controlled by way of a planning obligation to prevent unrestricted residential usage. If there is a continuing demand for such accommodation the Council should adopt interim policy guidance to facilitate development control decisions.

xxi. Training and education matters

When we met representatives of the industry it was put to us that both the local Further Education Colleges (Evesham College and Pershore College respectively) were not meeting the needs of this sector and the argument was promoted that there is too much emphasis on the academic qualifications with less on appropriate vocational courses. We were, as a Panel, keen to seek the views of the education sector on these matters and to ascertain to what extent training and education needs can be met locally.

We met the Principals of both Colleges at the end of our study and both made written submissions to us which were very helpful. At the outset the Colleges emphasized the competitive nature of their sector and that there needed to be a recognition that they are businesses but they collaborate on bringing down sources of funding.

Both Colleges refuted the assertion made that they simply concentrate on academic qualifications as they demonstrated that they offer a whole range of courses, whether short or long with a high degree of flexibility on how they are delivered. The Colleges advised that they are not defensive about any criticism over the range of vocational matters covered and that such feedback can help ascertain demand. However, on the other hand, the industry needs to make links with the education sector and emphasise what its training needs are. The use of the 'Skills Station' initiative is an easy route into this for both small and large employers alike. We also debated the need, or otherwise, for a training needs analysis in the Vale and there was general consensus that there is substantial merit in pursuing this.

We are aware from our discussions that good examples of effective working do exist. For example, Evesham College is working with Primafruit on a management course for its employees and is setting up an apprenticeship programme with local distribution companies.

Trying to reach a casual labour force is generally difficult as there are limited ways of reaching such 'hard to reach' groups. There are, however, examples of both Colleges becoming engaged in such matters. We had, in our deliberations as a Panel thought that attempts to engage with casual labour to try and provide language skills would be something that would help with integration. The Colleges appear to be willing and flexible to engage with the industry to meet their demands and this will need the industry and gangmasters to be willing to invest in training. If training is promoted outside the established educational sector it is less likely to be successful in terms of drawing down resources and collaborate approaches with the industry is a more effective approach.

Recommendation No. 47:

A detailed training needs analysis should be undertaken for the food and farming businesses in the District. This should be produced as a collaboration involving businesses, Pershore Group of Colleges, Evesham College, Learning & Skills Council (LSC) and the Council. Funding to carry out the study and its findings will be sought from partners such as Advantage West Midlands (AWM), Defra and the LSC.

Recommendation No. 48:

The industry (growers, producers and the distribution sector) need to have better links with the education sector and there should be more awareness and initiative amongst employers to ascertain the range of training available and influence the future direction of vocational training in the Colleges. Support should be given so as to increase awareness.

Recommendation No. 49:

The flexibility of the Colleges to meet the industry's training needs in terms of the location and nature of training should be exploited.

Recommendation No. 50:

The Panel believes that any bids for training by the industry are likely to be more successful if the Colleges and other public sector partners are involved and such collaborative approaches are more advantageous for all partners.

Recommendation No. 51:

Measures to increase awareness of the major economic importance of the ornamental (e.g. plants, flowers) growing sector in Wychavon should be taken. In particular, plans to increase the level of training and business support for this sector are welcomed and supported.

WYCHAVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

NOTES OF THE FIRST MEETING OF THE VALE OF EVESHAM AGRICULTURE AND FOOD DISTRIBUTION POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL, HELD IN ROOM 23 AT THE CIVIC CENTRE, QUEEN ELIZABETH DRIVE, PERSHORE ON THURSDAY 25TH SEPTEMBER 2003 COMMENCING AT 2.00PM

PRESENT:-

Members:-

Councillors:-

G F Bourne
Mrs J C Dowty

Mrs D A Mackison
Mrs M J Smith

Mrs A Steel

Non-Members:-

Councillors:-

R W Banks
R G Cartwright
M A Jennings

Mrs M M Mathews
P A Wright

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTES

There were none.

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

It was proposed by Councillor Mrs J C Dowty, seconded by Councillor Mrs D A Mackison and

AGREED

That Councillor Mrs A Steel be appointed Chairman of the Panel.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were none.

3. MEMBERSHIP OF THE PANEL

AGREED

CEW That the Membership of the Panel as listed on the Notice of the Meeting be noted.

4. TERMS OF REFERENCE

AGREED

CEW That the Terms of Reference of the Panel at Appendix A to these Notes, be noted.

5. WORK AND MEETINGS PROGRAMME

AGREED

CEW That the work and meetings programme at Appendix B to these Notes be approved.

6. REPORTS AND SUBSEQUENT ACTION

The Panel received and considered the following reports:-

- WDC Local Plan adopted version 1998 (extract).
- WDC Local Plan review, Revised Deposit 2003 (extract).
- SPG Post consultation, final document.
- Important Appeal decisions.
- Practical issues.
- Operators' Licences, how they operate.
- Impacts on individual Communities.
- Groups who could be invited to Round Table Session.
- Letter from Mr Peter Luff MP with regard to use of casual labour.

AGREED

- (1) That the list of selected bodies at Appendix C to these Notes be approved.
- (2) That the allocation of Vale Park, Evesham in the Wychavon District Local Plan review (currently at revised Deposit stage) is considered essential to ensure that there are opportunities for the relocation of traffic generating uses from the affected villages.
- (3) The current Supplementary Planning Guidance Policy does not allow Wychavon to control traffic generating uses outside the B1, B2 and B8 use classes ie: sui-generis uses generally unrelated to food distribution or haulage and it needs revising and Local Plan policies re-addressed.
- (4) That the County Council (acting as highway authority and Planning authority) should have due regard to the policies of the Supplementary Planning Guidance for Lorries in the Vale and is urged to apply it vigorously when commenting on or determining development proposals.
- (5) That the implications of criterion B of Policy ECON 9 of The Wychavon Local Plan review needs to be reassessed as regards the practical application of the policy and effects on local businesses.
- (6) That the importance of recent Appeal decisions considered at the meeting for Development Control determinations be borne in mind and applied for future Development Control cases.
- (7) That the importance of the food processing, growing and associated food distribution industries to Local employment be noted together with the numbers employed in this sector of the Local economy.
- (8) That the establishment of a Middle Managers Group to look across the Council at the impacts of the casual Labour situation in the District be welcomed.
- (9) That the publication of the House of Commons Select Committee's Report on Gangmasters and its intention to re-convene in March 2004 be noted.

APPENDIX NO. 1

- (10) That the Report of the Panel should influence the deliberations of the House of Commons Select Committee, when it re-convenes.
- (11) That the intention of DEFRA to pilot a Protocol for Gangmasters be welcomed and that it be encouraged to consider undertaking such Protocol in Wychavon.
- (12) The House of Commons Committee report on Gangmasters recommends that DEFRA should provide funding for projects in areas where gang labour is commonly used. This recommendation to be pursued with DEFRA and support to be sought for projects such as basic skills training, advisory and health services.
- (13) Note with concern the implications on Planning policies of the anomalies created by the application of the Agricultural Wages Order and the National Minimum Wage.
- (14) That the employment of non-local labour in other sectors of the Local economy outside agriculture/horticulture and food processing be recognised.
- (15) That the living accommodation implications for casual labourers needs to be better understood.
- (16) That a copy of the HALCROW study into the characteristics of freight movements in the Vale of Evesham, its problems and potential solutions be made available for the next meeting.
- (17) The Panel considered the experience of the Local Planning authority vis-à-vis those commenting on Planning applications in relation to amenity impacts on individuals and Communities for agriculture and food distribution as follows. Full details listed at appendix D.
- (18) That in terms of the effect of the ability of the food processing and growing sector to deal with the housing of workers and accommodate pressure for hostels/caravans, this is an area where the matter needs to be understood better.
- (19) That the establishment of the Freight Quality Partnership (led by Worcestershire County Council with the support of the Cross Boundary Issues Member Group) be noted.
- (20) That the letter from Mr Peter Luff MP in respect of Supermarkets and Government "in the dock" over illegal labour at Appendix E to these Notes, be noted.
- (21) That the High profile nature of the issues to be investigated by the Panel and the interest of Mr Peter Luff MP be borne in mind.
- (22) That copies of the responses to the SPG Post consultation final document be copied to Members of the Group by 6th November 2003.
- (23) That the Government should legislate to allow Parish Councils to be treated the same way as Principal Councils with regard to Operators' Licences.
- (24) That the Government should legislate to allow for neighbour notifications to be part of Operators Licence procedures.
- (25) That the Traffic Commissioners and the Government should be pressed for a robust definition of the meaning of 'vicinity' of the site and one which affords local residents the right to properly make representations.

The meeting ended at 4.05pm.

CEW

TERMS OF REFERENCE

<u>TITLE:</u>	AGRICULTURE AND FOOD DISTRIBUTION POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL
<u>PURPOSE:</u>	TO ADVISE ON THE PRINCIPAL ISSUES IN THIS SECTOR AS THEY AFFECT THE PLANNING SYSTEM AND ADVISE ON POLICY DEVELOPMENT
<u>CONSTITUTION:</u>	FIVE MEMBERS OF THE DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE
<u>DURATION OF WORKING GROUP:</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• MAXIMUM OF FOUR MEETINGS (AND ANY APPROPRIATE SITE VISITS).• TO REPORT BACK BY JANUARY 2004.

TERMS OF REFERENCE:

1. To investigate best practice in dealing with lorry generating uses in the food distribution sector.
2. To ascertain the effect, in land use terms, of the changing pattern of growers in the Vale.
3. To analyse the implications of the emergence of the high volume food packing and distribution uses on the character of rural areas and look at the policy framework for these uses.
4. Evaluate the existing planning policy framework.
5. Look at the options for relocation including Vale Park.
6. Consider the issue of 'Operators' Licences' for such uses.
7. Consider the impact on local communities and factors to ameliorate such impacts.

**WYCHAVON DISTRICT COUNCIL
VALE OF EVESHAM AGRICULTURE & FOOD
DISTRIBUTION POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL
PROGRAMME AND PURPOSE OF MEETINGS/SITE VISITS**

Meeting No 1 - 25th September 2003 at 2pm.

Purpose of Meeting : *to provide the panel with all relevant background material and explore topic area.*

Appoint Chairman and other procedural issues.

Agree work plan for and dates of subsequent meetings.

Background Policy Review and information gathering.

Meeting No 2 - 22nd /23rd October (Programme to be agreed)

Main purpose of Meeting : *site visits to other areas to analyse problems and policy approaches.*

Site visit to Spalding area of Lincolnshire to compare problems/issues.

Meeting No 3 - Thursday 6th November (Programme to be agreed).

Main purpose of Meeting : *site visits to gather information on uses.*

Visits to local sites in Wychavon.

Meeting No 4 - Thursday 27th November (Programme to be agreed).

Main purpose of Meeting : *round table discussion with affected parties.*

Feedback from site visits.

Meeting No - 5 Tuesday 9th December at 5pm.

Main purpose of Meeting : *to follow up site visits and compare policy approaches elsewhere - are they effective?*

Agree an approach and format for final report.

Meeting No 6 - Tuesday 6th January (Time to be agreed).

Main purpose of Meeting : *to agree a final report.*

Agree on findings.

Agree on areas for policy development.

Agree on feedback to Council.

Officers to draft final report and agree with Panel Members

Present report to Development Control Committee on 29th January 2004

**WYCHAVON DISTRICT COUNCIL
VALE OF EVESHAM AGRICULTURE AND FOOD DISTRIBUTION
POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL**

**GROUPS TO BE INVITED TO ROUND TABLE DISCUSSIONS ON
27TH NOVEMBER 2003**

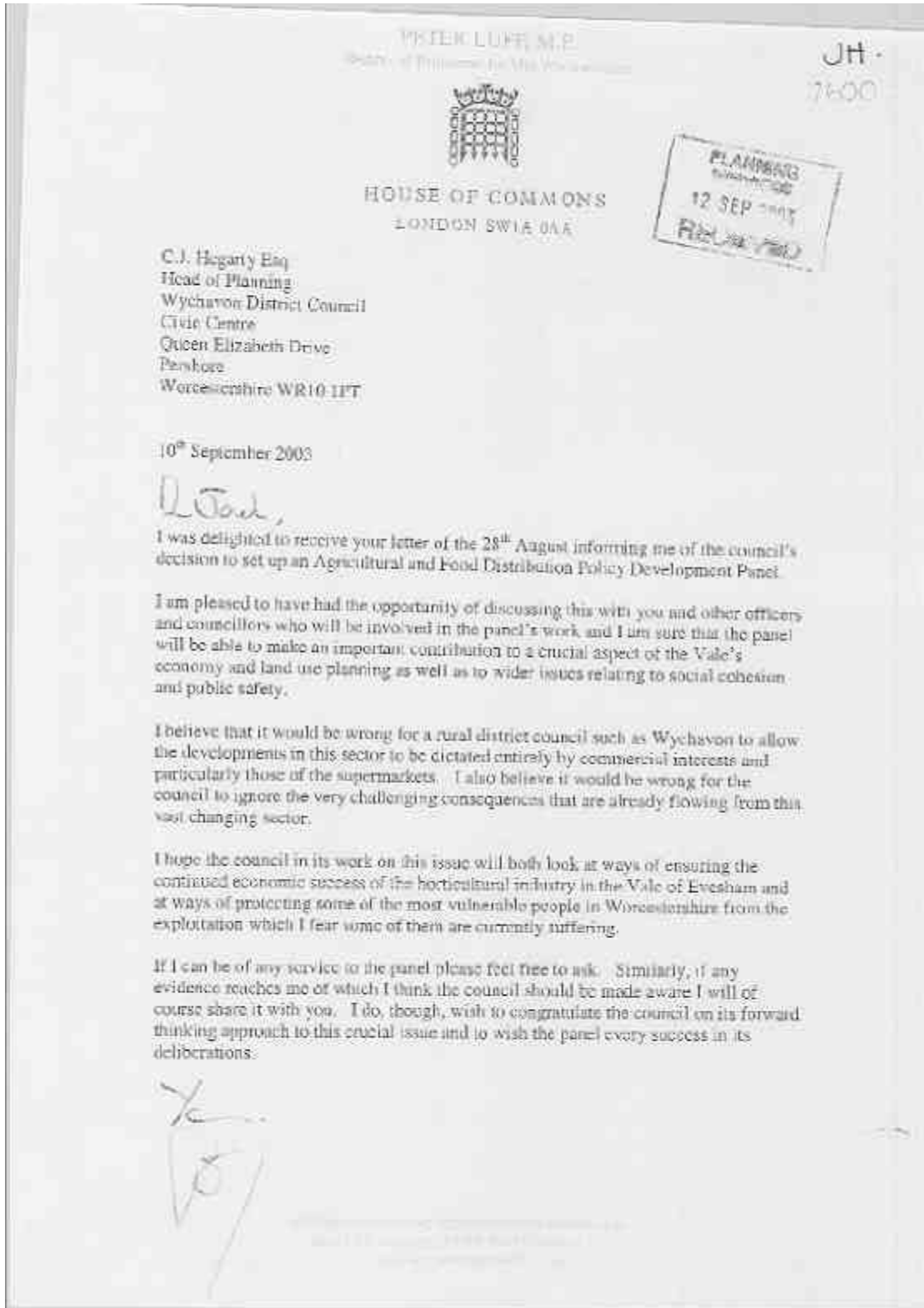
- DEFRA
- Representatives of Parish Councils.
- CPRE
- South Worcs Traffic Forum
- Evesham and Pershore Town Councils
- Cotswold and Stratford District and Gloucestershire and Warwickshire County Councils
- Worcestershire H P U
- Supermarket Representative
- Zad Padda
- NFU
- Road Haulage Association
- Freight Transport Association
- CLA
- Evesham Foods
- Spiers and Hartwell
- Kanes
- Evesham Vale Growers
- Simms and Woods
- Primafruit
- Police
- Red Star Growers

**AGRICULTURE AND FOOD DISTRIBUTION POLICY
DEVELOPMENT PANEL**

MEETING NO 1 – 25TH SEPTEMBER 2003

LIST OF IMPACTS ON INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES.

01. Increased use of narrow roads and lanes through rural areas and villages by HGV traffic. This causes congestion, noise and general disturbance for local residents and may pose a hazard to highway safety. This increase in traffic movements extends into the night and early morning.
02. Increasingly produce is being brought into sites from beyond local sources, including mainland Europe. Foreign drivers may get lost and block local roads or irritate local residents by seeking directions.
03. Increases in the number of immigrant workers and problems in finding them accommodation. This leads to planning problems such as proposals for hostels, caravans etc.
04. Sense that agricultural producers no longer regarded as "custodians of the countryside" but are motivated by profit.
05. Breakdown in traditional relationships between farmers and local village residents, as cheap immigrant workers supplant local people on local farms.
06. Increasing reliance upon the services of illegal "gangmasters" to provide labour with the attendant fears of local residents for security of property and people.
07. Many immigrant workers are unable to communicate in English and have problems integrating into the local community.
08. Widely acknowledged that the large supermarkets insist on scrupulous attention to detail, including food hygiene and compliance with contracts to supply on time every time. This has increased the pressure on producers to intensify their production and to extend their working hours.
09. Other planning problems include compliance with Development Plan policies for the location of larger industrial activities. These tend to be on allocated sites away from rural areas and away from residential properties.
10. The visual intrusion caused in respect of large areas of hardstanding, lorry parking, external storage, additional plant and machinery and intensive illumination at night can be harmful to local visual amenity.



Press Release from Peter Luff

MP for Mid Worcestershire



Thursday, 18 September 2003

SUPERMARKETS AND GOVERNMENT "IN THE DOCK" OVER ILLEGAL LABOUR - LUFF

Mid Worcestershire MP Peter Luff today welcomed a Commons report from the cross-party Environment and Rural Affairs Committee that condemns both supermarkets and the government for neglecting the exploitation of vulnerable people by so-called gangmasters.

Commenting, Peter Luff said,

"Casual labour is vital to the Vale of Evesham's growers and food processors. As British people turn away from this often back-breaking work farms and firms do have to use other nationals instead. We should welcome and care properly for these "economic migrants", many of whom come only for a few months from, for example Eastern Europe. Inevitably, many of these workers will be provided by gangmasters.

"But the government's simple neglect of a growing scandal, and the supermarkets' ruthless drive for lower prices have combined to create a situation in which vulnerable people – some of them asylum seekers, some illegal immigrants and some just too disadvantaged and powerless to argue back – are suffering often horrendous exploitation, and even danger.

"And while we must remember that there are very good gangmasters, there are many who don't just exploit their workers but also avoid millions of pounds in income tax and VAT. So we all lose out from their cavalier disregard for the law.

"This report demonstrates there is a real problem – but the government doesn't even begin to know how bad it is.

"The supermarkets must clean up their acts and start to practice ethical trading, not just talk about it. The government must take this issue much, much more seriously.

"This is a report that is of great importance to my constituents and the government must act on it urgently to prevent further abuse, exploitation and even tragedy."

ENDS

The report "Gangmasters" (HC691) was published today and is available through the Parliamentary website, www.parliament.uk

Contact 07626 801685 (pager), 01905 763952 (office/home) or 07835 340345 (mobile)

Note to editors: All Peter Luff's press releases are posted on his website – www.peterluff.co.uk

APPENDIX NO. 2

WYCHAVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

NOTES OF MEETINGS UNDERTAKEN AS PART OF THE VALE OF EVESHAM AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD DISTRIBUTION POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL SITE VISITS TO THE SPALDING AND BOSTON AREAS OF LINCOLNSHIRE ON WEDNESDAY 22ND AND THURSDAY 23RD OCTOBER 2003

Meeting with representatives of South Holland District Council at its Offices at 1pm on Wednesday 22nd October 2003

Present: (for part of meeting Councillor Roger Gambba-Jones, Planning and Regulation and Councillor Nick Carter, Community and Economic Development), Ansar Ali, Community and Regeneration Manager Tony Harper, Planning and Enforcement Officer, David Cowie, Planning Policy Officer, Steve Williams, Head of Planning and Development and Peter Jullien, Economic Development Officer, South Holland D C

The Wychavon contingent.

The following main points arose from the discussion:-

Steve Williams/Tony Harper

- Competitive pressures and less subsidy had resulted in fewer but larger agricultural businesses, which were not as labour intensive as previously, particularly in the last 15 years. Pace of change has been very rapid and is an important issue.
- Food processing had expanded and small outlets tended to become large ones dealing with everything from carrots to pizzas e.g. Geest.
- Supermarkets increasingly demanded and got a continuous supply of quality produce. This required specialists to be involved in the supply process.
- Supermarkets now had strategically based warehouses for distribution nationally. There were perhaps 8 or 9 major centres in the Country. The logistics of supply to these warehouse was very sophisticated.
- Intensification of the industry had meant an increase in the number of lorries required to transport produce. Number of HGV's taking produce to different parts of country. Traditionally one vehicle would have collected produce.
- A number of factories were now geared up to supply just one supermarket chain.
- Generally there were no written contracts between suppliers and supermarkets.
- Supermarket requirements for continuity of supply coupled with lengthy contracts meant that foreign imports, particularly out of season were essential. Many growers were now importing flowers.
- The area had a good road network which linked with major routes and was well placed geographically to serve appropriate East Coast ports and other areas of the Country. Locally there was a port at Sutton Bridge, which had been developed and included grain export.
- The vast majority of outlets dealing with flowers had planning permission and enforcement action was currently being investigated with regard to the remainder.
- The degree of imports was such (90 per cent was not uncommon) that ancillary activity usually amounted to 10 per cent only.

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- The use of labour was intensive, but generally on a short term basis. The services of gang masters were required to secure adequate labour levels as and when required.
- There were complaints from local businesses because some firms were zero rated for business rates.
- Exploitation of labour was evident because whilst the equivalent of reasonable hourly rates were included in gang master payments, they in turn could make deductions from workers pay to cover housing and other costs, sometimes leaving employees with very little after working long hours sometimes 7 days per week.
- To determine whether a change of use had taken place it is necessary to establish the primary and ancillary uses. Reference was made to the recent Red Star Growers decision (within Wychavon).
- Limited tolerance on infringements of Planning Policies is allowed in view of high level of employment in the industry. However ways are found to control and regulate some infringers and the worst are closed down.

Peter Jullien

- Reference was made to WDC policy of encouraging relocation from rural sites to the Vale Business Park. South Holland D.C. also encouraged relocation but did not have any alternative allocated land available.
- There were no suitable locations for the relocation of firms who were occupying sites unsuitable for their operations.

Steve Williams/Tony Harper

- The Authority tried to work with firms to resolve problems in view of their importance to the local economy.
- There was a local enterprise park, but it was expensive.
- Some firms find sites that are not near residences.
- The Authority requires firms to pay business rates where applicable.

Ansar Ali

- The labour supply is generally low skilled.
- Reference to the Rural Action Zone (RAZ) concept which aims to raise the profile of rural areas and is based on a partnership programme with EU funding available to support rural businesses. Set up with County Council, first in country.
- Referred to Leader Plus Project, which is to encourage young people to stay in area.
- Broadband-talking to County Council.

Steve Williams/Tony Harper

- The rapid expansion of the food industry in recent years has generated a demand for imported labour from abroad because it is not available in sufficient quantities, locally.
- Whilst Government Policy is to restrain housing development in the area, more will be required to accommodate temporarily or in some cases permanently, the growing numbers of imported labour.

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- There is less chance for additional affordable housing in the new development plans.
- The Government is seeking to raise the profile of rural areas through partnership working.
- The Leader Plus Scheme had generated some £4m of investment for the area.
- The area had plans for a Food Heritage Centre, which will support the food sector. Supported by DTI and RDA

Peter Jullien

- There was nowhere in the area to buy local produce.

Steve Williams/Tony Harper/Ansar Ali

- The Food Heritage Centre will be based within an edge of town retail park with 5/6 producers on site for farmers mini market, to celebrate food in a retail environment.
- The location of the Heritage Centre was accepted locally and some of the income derived from it was used to help restore Spaldings's Flower Festival gardens.
- DEFRA and other partners wanted a voluntary registration scheme for appropriate concerns to be introduced. There were to be 3 pilot schemes within the County and South Holland would be one of them.
- Both Bradford and Barnsley were examples of centres from which gang labour was provided.
- Those labourers who wished to stay permanently in the area, were generally immigrants.
- The issue of RAZ input would be addressed within the Local Plan.
- Rural diversification required sustainable settlements close to centres of employment e.g. Lingarden.
- Immigrant labour mainly originated from South Africa, Eastern Europe and South America.
- The Learning and Skills Council would be looking to provide educational support for immigrant workers.
- The Boston Authority had 3,000 Portuguese immigrants, who created additional demands for schools and other services.
- Police action with regard to illegal immigrants appeared to be low key.
- Operator's now required year round accommodation to be provided for immigrant workers, with some for seasonal workers. This would have land use planning implications in terms of additional rural housing and caravan sites.
- A policy on houses in multiple occupation had been drafted as an SPG.
- There was a question about the control of Hostel accommodation and the new trend of "hot bedding" and how this can be controlled.
- The Geest Company employed 9,000 workers, locally (e.g. 500 at one factory – chilled).
- Geest was a large food operation, which was mainly prepared meals.

APPENDIX NO. 2

- Parish Councils were split with regard to flower operators, with some supporting them and others favouring the representations of local residents.
- Complaints arose from vehicle movements e.g. damage to roads.
- Many depots were specially adapted for a quick turnaround of lorry loading and unloading. Restrictions on hours of operation caused lorries to park outside depots, with refrigeration units running on those containing frozen produce.
- Applicants requests for reasonable hours of operation were looked at sympathetically.
- Planning permissions often contained Section 106 requirements with regard to vehicle operations, although self-regulation seems to work very well.
- There was widespread support for and flexibility towards the operation of the food industry in view of its contribution to local employment, which amounted to 60 per cent of local employment. ("Lifeblood of the area") Producers recognise need to get on with locals.
- Plug in power sources at depots were required to avoid refrigeration units being unnecessarily being run on lorries.
- Farm diversification needed to be recognised and a policy on the use of redundant buildings was required. Developers needed to know what could be done with a building before they invested in diversification.
- The question of planning gain needed to be addressed, although given remoteness of many of the operator's sites from residential areas, this would be difficult to achieve in the South Holland area.
- There was a need to react positively to local demand.

Meeting with Managers of Lingarden , Weston at 4pm.

Present: Robin Harris, Site Service Manager, Ian Kerr, Financial Director, Alan Christie, Managing Director of Veridian and Produce, John Stokes, Director of Procurement, Sandra Webb, Human Resources Manager and Caroline Stuffin. Human Resources Admin Assistant.

The Wychavon contingent.

The following main points arose from the discussion:-

- That the company had been established for 35 years.
- It was originally a co-operative, but had been a PLC for the last 3 years.
- There were 3 divisions dealing with onions, flowers/shrubs and plants.
- Prepack slice and dice onions for supermarkets (eg Tesco) and McDonalds
- Flowers, bouquets, tubs and shrubs mainly went to Supermarkets and were nearly all imported. 80% of cut flowers from all over the world, very little local plants mainly from Europe.
- Goods were transported by lorries, which returned empty.
- The Company had 300 hourly paid workers and 100 salaried employees. Some 50 to 300 additional people were hired as and when required on a contract labour basis.

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- Excellent links existed with labour providers.
- The only Labour providers used were those that had passed the Company's Contract/Audit vetting procedures, to ensure they were officially sound.
- Supermarkets were involved in the process for labour providers and undertook ethical audits and interviews.
- E.T.I. base code minimum standards were observed.
- Senior management of the Company undertook ethics courses.
- Independent audits were undertaken in respect of high risk countries, where more help was required.
- Have high turnover of staff because area of full employment – a lot of competition.
- Most labour was bussed in from South Yorkshire. The journey time was about an Hour and a half.
- The Company operated on a 7 day a week, 24 hours a day basis.
- It was sensitive to local views on e.g. disturbance.
- Was involved in an education/business partnership.
- Some casual workers stayed overnight within 30 minutes travelling time of their work. The Labour providers secured the accommodation for these workers and owned properties for this purpose.
- There was an increasing ethnic population, but the workforce included locals also.
- A lot of flowers are packed in the Country of origin. This amounted to 50 per cent for flower imports just brought in for labelling and distribution.
- No foreign exports from this site, but some were sold locally. Other site nearby exports daffodil bulbs.
- Business planning was ongoing and identified growth areas, constraints, customer and labour considerations/availability.
- Transport was important and depots were required. There were 250 lorry movements each day with as many as 750 at Christmas/Valentine's Day
- Some restrictions on movements were self imposed by the Company, but about half were requirements of planning permissions.
- Growth in horticultural flowers was more than 10 per cent, but much less with onions, which was a mature market with tight margins.
- Gaps in terms of success widened between the largest and smallest companies. Rationalisation was required and would occur eventually because of cost pressures, overtime payments etc.
- Onion supplies tended to be on a sole contract basis. 70% of U.K 's onions grown in area. Use U.K. onions for 10 months of year.

APPENDIX NO. 2

- Cutting and preparation of onions likely to continue in the UK rather than the country of origin of the imported onions. This is the result of the high fixed costs of production equipment.
- Have worked hard to cultivate nearby residents, eg. reduced hours for certain operations. Annual school presentation contributes to career fayre and also contributes to business education partnership.

Meeting with Boston Borough Council on Thursday 23rd October 2003 at 9.30am.

Present. Stuart Birkett, Forward Planning Manager, Andy Fisher, Housing Manager and Roger Wellbury

The Wychavon contingent.

The following main points arose from the discussion:-

- Jack Hegarty advised the meeting that there was a feeling that Wychavon's Local Plan did not fully reflect changes in agriculture and that the Authority was lagging behind changes in the food sector as regards fitting its Planning policies.
- A view was given that Boston Borough Council did not regard agriculture as a problem. Rather it was the fringe activities which cause problems. New legislation to deal with waste disposal will have an effect in future.
- Local Planning policy objected to the use of greenhouses for farming processes.
- There were occasional problems with over intensification of poultry houses.
- The SPG addressed Housing in the Countryside, change of use, in-filling etc.
- There were problems with Transport getting to major roads. This could often take 1 hour in view of the poor road structure, road-works etc.
- Major suppliers lorries were reducing, so there were now more foreign lorries.
- It was alleged that there were some 4,000 Portuguese migrant workers in the Boston area. These workers were required to work in the packing houses. Locals do not want to do the work.
- Housing for migrant workers could be a problem. Cultural differences needed to be understood and accepted by local people and migrant workers.
- The use of Gangmasters was essential. However a register of Gangmasters was required and dialogue on this was necessary.
- Employers tended to pay the minimum wage of £4.70 or more per hour for the workers supplied by Gangmasters. However Gang masters made deductions for Housing and other services. There was a need to remove unscrupulous Gangmasters from the supermarket's perspective
- There was some pressure to house the single homeless, as numbers joining the housing register were increasing.
- Enforcement was a major matter, in view of the increasing number of unlawful HMO's and lack of resources.

APPENDIX NO. 2

- There were some 550 houses in multiple-occupation. These were often occupied by up to 20 migrant workers in a 2 up 2 down property. "Hot Bedding"
- Direction Orders did not impact on those registering for Housing accommodation.
- Enforcement action now centred on houses in multiple-occupation entirely.
- Immigrant workers could often take home after deductions only £20 or £30 per week.
- The local MP Mark Simmonds was sponsoring a Bill in the House of Commons re 'Enforcement,' but view expressed about who would enforce, if it was enacted?
- There was no alternative accommodation available and the Borough had had a bad press in the housing field.
- All immigrant workers documents were verified in special offices within the local Police Station.
- Boston was an LSVT (Housing Management only) Authority.
- Boston's population was 55,871.
- The County Crime Safety Officer was of the opinion that there was no major crime within the Boston area. Social issues are a myth.
- Area was traditionally mono-culture – people born and bred in the fens.
- The 2001 Census revealed that only 2 per cent of the population were Non-British and that the largest ethnic Group was Chinese. (Students of Boston College) Recent massive influx of immigrants.
- Clearly some Portuguese came to Boston for financial reasons or to secure better housing accommodation. They tended to perpetuate the Portuguese practice of the extended family living in the same property.
- The Portuguese use interpreters – it is corporate policy to communicate with immigrants in their first language.
- Local cases had shown that some of the Portuguese were in fact Brazilian.
- Homelessness involved mainly single people, but some families were homeless.
- There were no apparent tensions between the homeless and others on the Housing Register.
- Some 20 per cent of applicants failed the habitual residence test.
- There was no separate policy for immigrants.
- Language Interpretation services were available, when required.
- There was no explicit policy to deal with Gang Masters.
- The local Health Care Trust had published a paper on the health of Migrant Workers.
- Boston had appointed a working group to look at the whole issue of Migrant Workers, so the current position was re-active, not pro-active. It was hoped that common ground could be reached.

APPENDIX NO. 2

- There were no problems with the Immigrant student population.
- There was a Homelessness Hostel available for everyone, retained by the Council. The charity 'Centrepoint' was also active locally
- The workforce was now regular as opposed to seasonal.
- The guidelines for Planning diversification were discussed.
- There was an SPG document, "Housing in the Countryside."
- Holiday lets were few, but growing in number. A lot of visitors were anglers from Sheffield.
- The average cost of a 3 bed semi-detached house was £115-120,000.
- Boston had a policy to make land available for industrial purposes and for the re-location of depot's. (In new Local Plan). The Haulage yard would need to be near the main road. If not a recognised site, the applicant would need to demonstrate they could not be located elsewhere.
- Grants were given in appropriate circumstances to help firms to re-locate.
- The number of HGV's continues to reduce in favour of large tractors with mini processors.
- Pizza Hut has relocated .
- The local area Master Plan for the Town is now being extended to include the Rural areas.
- Employment in Boston is more diverse than Spalding, including manufacturing, port, retail and administration.
- Transport is poor e.g. rail services and this makes accessibility to the area difficult.
- The Local Plan caters for an improved role for the Quality of the Countryside and ways of improving its landscape. There is a suggestion to landscape with woodland unattractive areas surrounding Boston and to recreate the traditional Fen land landscape and nature habitats. It will also try and improve a deficiency in informal open space. Also it will consider a roof tax in Section 106 agreements for each additional house above 5, where there are more than 5 houses in a development.
- Industrial land is in low demand locally and of low value. Few planning applications are received for packhouses. Traditionally these were regarded as ancillary to agriculture and changes in use may not always be apparent. Given the isolated location of most sites, changes may have occurred for years before the LPA becomes aware.
- Setting up local strategic partnership with South Holland- pioneering all issues, migrant workers, transport, etc.

WYCHAVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

NOTES OF SITE MEETINGS OF THE VALE OF EVESHAM AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD DISTRIBUTION POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL HELD ON THURSDAY 6TH NOVEMBER 2003 AT 9.00 AM.

PRESENT:

Councillors:-

G F Boume
Mrs J C Dowty
Mrs D A Mackison
Mrs M A Smith
Mrs A Steel

Officers:-

Gill Collin
Jack Hegarty
Mark Lynch
Phil Merrick
Chris Wilkes

1. Vicarage Nursery, Bretforton

Messrs Padda (senior and junior) described how business developed and outlined labour provider issues. Victoria Plain, from DEFRA, was also in attendance.

- Local relationships in Worcestershire and nationally e.g. Birmingham and South Holland, Lincs.
- Need to build bridges with local community and overcome local prejudices/misconceptions
- Admitted local relationships poor – Parish Council.
- Activity low (end of season).
- Fifteen new modern minibuses offered for community transport. Currently used to transport workers in early morning and evening. Not used during rest of day.
- Discussed migrant worker training issues (Fusion Personnel – labour provider).
- With DEFRA has devised code of practice for labour providers (Vicky from DEFRA on secondment). To be trialed in S. Holland – hopefully voluntary and not legislative.
- All workers bussed in from Birmingham therefore no accommodation issues.
- Z Padda approached local colleges to provide basic reading/writing courses – little joy so wants to provide education on site for workers.
- Infrastructure very different from Lincs.

APPENDIX NO. 3

- Whilst don't like term Gang master, accepts they are. However see themselves as providing a service to the Industry, they are there because the Industry needs them, especially as Local labour not generally interested. Office employees are, however Local.
- Have suffered some vandalism/thefts, but not sure if racially motivated.
- Want to provide alternative access to site to reduce vehicle movements on Bretforton Road
- Consider they do the job right and want to promote this within the Industry and with Government/Local Authorities because some other providers have a bad reputation.
- Recognise current low ethnic makeup of area and have not sought to house workers locally but to transport them from and to Birmingham.
- Want new training centre on site together with improved office/worker staff facility

2. Kanes Foods, Middle Littleton

- Dr Randall distributed statement of history of company and photos of site.(attached)
- Presentation of Kanes Growers Association - 8 members – Westland Nurseries, Offerton; Mauro, Offerton/Harvington; Pilades etc. It believes that all Local suppliers, with the exception of Westland Nurseries would have otherwise gone out of business.
- Panel had tour of factory including high risk and low risk areas, water recycling and reed bed, and bean sprout production area. Majority of water recycled.
- Success of member growers e.g. Westland Nurseries – trialling new leaves for supermarkets – Westland supplies many growers – guaranteed minimum price.
- Contracts with Asda/Sainsburys.
- Imports from abroad winter months.
- Dr Randall believed there is need to expand business further – would not increase traffic (HGVs) – has bought Christian Salvesson depot, Vale Park.
- Traffic/distribution problems – Littletons/Offenham.
- Very good canteen facilities for staff.
- Staffing – about 1000 employees, a major employer. - Some local, the rest foreign students and other workers
- Has research kitchen by offices.
- Has agronomist , who works with growers
- Lorry Movements now to be less than previously, despite expansion of site because Vale Park to be used for storage pending distribution of long life products

APPENDIX NO. 3

- A number of houses immediately surrounding the site have been purchased by the Company to house its workers.
- Some workers living adjacent to Site have purchased old bangers.
- The Company must expand to survive
- Wants to improve relations with Local parish council and would be happy to attend one of its meetings

3. EVG, Lower Moor

- Mr J Powell represented Company. He gave introduction (this was the only site in the Vale to have own railway link in the past).
- Tour of bunching sheds/refrigerators – chilling/despatch – chopping/washing - sealed unit/conveyor belt.
- Contracts – Morrisons, Asda, Sainsburys and through agents, Tesco.
- Onion/leeks here – significant acreage around site – about 600 acres.
- Imports November to April (1 lorry/day from airport).
- One loading bay – dock leveller.
- Site at Blackminster – tomatoes, etc (dry/clean site).
- Labour – Eastern European students– operate machine, but others from Far East etc. 40 employed with 80 at Blackminster site.
- Bunching shed – labour force from Birmingham.
- Good relations – multi national – Chinese, Sikhs, Indians.
- Toilets – spartan staff rest room. Accepted facilities well below modern standards, but wish to improve when current planning issues resolved.
- Not happy with new regulations restricting height of buildings
- Saw salad onions from Egypt and Mexico and also home grown (late crop).
- Communicate with migrant workers in Russian
- Owner originated from Sicily and one of first from abroad in the Vale

Overall Issues raised from Site Visits

- Language barriers. Charlton rail crossing deaths cited by Zad Padda
- Development of a Code of Practice for labour providers.

APPENDIX NO. 3

- Dependence of growers on supermarkets/reduction in traditional markets (but these improving).
- Increasing hygiene/record keeping standards/requirements.
- Increasing need to produce new product lines (competition).
- Training /Language needs.
- Importance of distribution for vitality of industry, Consider the Vale to have largest concentration of food distribution outlets/transport in Country
- Acceptance that this is a low wage Industry and that its labour force has to be sourced from immigrant /temporary overseas workers because few Local workers interested
- Spin-offs? Community transport, but Licensing/Management and effect on other operators, implications?
- Accommodation problems of workers? Assimilation problems? More prevalent in S. Holland.

The meeting finished at 1.00 pm.

CW

WYCHAVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

NOTES OF A MEETING OF THE VALE OF EVESHAM AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD DISTRIBUTION POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL HELD ON THURSDAY 27TH NOVEMBER 2003 AT 9.00AM IN THE CONSERVATORY AT THE CIVIC CENTRE, QUEEN ELIZABETH DRIVE, PERSHORE.

SESSION 1

PRESENT:-

Councillor - Mrs A Steel - Chairman

Councillors -

G F Bourne

Mrs J C Dowty

Mrs D A Mackison

Mrs M J Smith

Non-Member:-

Councillor -

M C Meikle

Officers:-

Jack Hegarty

Gill Collin

Mark Lynch

Phil Merrick

Chris Wilkes

By Invitation

Hazel Mitchell, Bretforton Parish Council

Ted Grazier, Charlton Parish Council

David Mortimer, Cleeve Prior Parish Council

Richard Neath, Defford and Besford Parish

Council

Tom Macdonald, Fladbury Parish Council

Chris Roberts, Hill & Moor Parish Council

Grenville Burrows, Offenham Parish Council

Colin Emms, North & Middle Littleton Parish

Council

Anne Mitchell, Pinvin Parish Council

Peter Edmunds, Wick Parish Council

Alison Williamson, Wyre Piddle Parish Council

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTES

There were none.

7. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were none.

8. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman read a Members' Briefing note.

The Chairman informed/advised the Meeting that:-

- Asked everyone to introduce themselves.
- Submissions had been received from 2 Parish Councils who were not able to attend the Meeting.
- Advised the purpose of the Panel and its need to report to the Council's Development Control Committee by the end of January 2004.

- Advised that the Panel had visited the Boston and Spalding area of Lincolnshire as part of its fact finding work.
- That this initiative was Wychavon District Council led and not Government led. However, the report of the Panel would be made available to all appropriate interested parties, including Government.

9. **DISCUSSION**

The following main matters arose:-

- That there was a growing problem with lorry numbers and movements and major accidents had occurred.
- Bidford Bridge was used by heavy lorries despite the weight restriction Order on it.
- The number and frequency of 44 tonne lorries from other countries, was increasing.
- It was known that some foreign lorries were in the area late in the evening, but (before 11.00pm) because the drivers often stopped to ask locals for directions.
- That appropriate signage should be erected at the M5 junction with the A44 advising that this is now the Principal trunk road.
- Residents of Bretforton experienced noise problems, late at night, caused by vehicles travelling to the Honeybourne Airfield.
- The freight industry was benefiting from a sum of £10,000 for the purchase of maps in different languages. A multi-lingual web-site was also being established.
- That in essence there was a 24 hour problem with heavy lorries in Bretforton.
- Fladbury and Hill & Moor Parish Councils were very concerned about the growth of the Packing industry in their areas. Both growers businesses and food processing outlets were getting bigger and generating more traffic, including minibuses and fast-track tractors. *[Tom Macdonald undertook to let the Council have a paper re the above].*
- In addition to heavy lorries there was an increasing use of 40ft trailers. There were also more mini-buses, which were used to transport workers to and from their place of work. It was estimated that these numbered 10/12 per day at Wyre Piddle, arriving at the site between 4.00am - 6.00am and leaving it between 6.00pm - 8.00pm.
- There was some concern about the lack of toilet provision for employees, working in the fields and the consequent hygiene problems that resulted.
- Some workers were transported in 50 seater vehicles and there had been an accident at Bickmarsh.
- The local Parish Council had had discussions with Kanes Foods.
- There was a poor road infrastructure in many places, but excessive vehicle speeds was also a problem.
- That Salters Lane was unsuitable for the transport use required to service Evesham Vale Growers packhouse.
- There was a major problem with Wychavon's road infrastructure and density of population.
- One Parish Council considered the growing industry gave no value, only nuisance to villages - immigrants, asylum seekers, cheap labour.

APPENDIX NO. 4

- Others considered the industry added value to the area and its benefits went beyond growers.
- It was apparent that cheap immigrant labour was required and employed.
- Evesham had been a transport centre for some time and a lot of drivers were employed in employed in the local transport industry.
- Kanes Foods can't get enough local labour because of its rapid expansion, hence the need for foreign workers.
- Workers are bussed from A to B to do their jobs in the industry, but need support to do a good job.
- There would still be a traffic problem, even if the local haulage/packing industry did not exist.
- There is a problem with "add-ons" in terms of development, to normal farming holdings, eg: packhouses.
- Generally the industry is seen as being a value to the area, but there is a problem with the number of large lorries generated by imported goods.
- Large amount of various types of accommodation now required for workers.
- Housing for workers is not really a problem, because the vast majority are bussed in and out. Also some growers have caravans for seasonal workers eg: students. Generally these caravans are stored in the winter months.
- Students on the whole fit in very well with the local community.
- There has been a problem with the use of the recreation ground at Littleton by foreign labour, who without permission used it to play football.
- Generally immigrant workers are well able to communicate in the English language, particularly the eastern European ones who are skilled in Internet usage also.
- There are exchanges of agricultural students/workers world-wide.
- Some students have automatic rights of entry to the country.
- Not may growers provide portaloos and there are hygiene problems in places.
- There used to be a huge excrement problem with Redland Nurseries, but this is now much better. Nappies have been found in this locality and this may be cultural.
- Gangmasters usually sign for workers, but there is no-one present to enforce hygiene standards.
- Workers from outside the local area do not have the same duty of care as local workers.
- Hygiene appears to be satisfactory in the packhouses but not in the fields.
- Training as regards health/language/education would help.
- Growers should have a duty of care.
- Workers tend to be exploited by the gangmaster system.
- Employers are reluctant to introduce language training because of the cost and time constraints.

APPENDIX NO. 4

- There will be a voluntary code of practice for gangmasters shortly.
- The question of the minimum wage is on the Wychavon District Council Agenda.
- There could be a problem with the teaching block at Vicarage Nursery. *The WDC planners will look at the possibility of regulating this.*
- Wychavon's Planning Policy appears to demonstrate short-term thinking as regards development in the industry, much of which is seen as inappropriate to it. A long-term Planning view is required to ensure that development takes place on appropriate sites and in an appropriate manner.
- Kanes Foods is seen by some to be too large for the Littletons. The growth of imports/packing enterprises has made the situation worse.
- Much development has taken place generically without the need for planning permission because no change of use has taken place.
- The system for issuing Operators licences is thought to be chaotic. Wychavon has no control over this and the County Council for example has given up trying to make comments to the Licensing authority as it takes no notice of them.
- There was some local opposition to the conversion of a property into a hostel in Offenham. However, accommodation is not generally a problem in the villages, as most hostels are located in the towns or outside the area.

Conclusions/Suggestions

- The planning system needs carefully to define how the industry can develop. Piece-meal development has tended to take place, whereas organised development is favoured.
- The early re-opening of the road at the Fish and Anchor bank, Offenham would help to ease the concentration of lorry movements in the locality.
- Accommodation is not generally a problem in the villages, as most hostels are located in the towns or outside the area.
- The forthcoming enlargement of the European Union will mean an influx of additional workers/transport from abroad.
- There is a need to rotate growing within the fields available for it, according to growing conditions.
- There needs to be strong control on transport use of inappropriate roads.
- The industry is a value to the local economy. It employs many people both locally and outside the area. Practises have changed over the years and many growers would like new accesses to their fields in order to improve transport arrangements.
- Immigrant workers don't generally integrate into the local community, but this could change when the European Union is opened up eg: Polish workers.
- There is a problem with local signage being restricted to English. The use of other languages would be beneficial.
- Strong planning regulation is required as this can prevent in-appropriate development which cannot be supported by the local infrastructure.
- The ideal situation would be to group as many growers/distributors as possible on 1 site, with good transport access.

- Many growers use the same distributors, eg: IDS. Why could they not group to reduce vehicle movements?

SESSION 2

PRESENT:-

Councillor - Mrs A Steel – Chairman

Councillors -

G F Bourne

Mrs J C Dowty

Mrs D A Mackison

Mrs M J Smith

Non-Member:-

Councillor -

M C Meikle

Officers:-

Jack Hegarty

Gill Collin

Mark Lynch

Phil Merrick

Chris Wilkes

By Invitation

Tom McDonald –Councillor for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE)

Geoff Cox – Worcestershire Highways Partnership Unit

Inspector Steve Brooker - Police

Stuart Williamson – Stratford – on – Avon District Council

Hazel Mitchell – South East Worcestershire Traffic Forum

(N.B. Several invitees from the first session were also in attendance at the invitation of the Chairman).

10. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman made the following:-

- Asked everyone present to introduce themselves.
- She explained the purpose of the Panel and its need to report to the Council's Development Control Committee by the end of January 2004.
- That this initiative was Wychavon District Council led and not Government led. However, the report of the Panel would be made available to all appropriate interested parties, including Government.

11. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were none.

12. **DISCUSSION**

The papers referred to in Appendix A to these notes were tabled.

The following main points arose:-

APPENDIX NO. 4

- That legally there appeared to be little flexibility with regard to the possibility of including languages other than English on highway sign-posts. *However the Highways Partnership Manager would be happy to investigate this, if required.*
- Reference was made to the modern practice of using pictorial signs on highway signposts, which could be widely understood by different nationals. This was favoured by the meeting.
- If it was possible to incorporate a second language to English in highways signposts, then Spanish was favoured.
- It was considered that requests for weight restriction orders should be initiated by the local District/Parish Councils.
- The Highways Partnership Manager undertook to investigate whether signs could be erected indicating the direction from the M5 Motorway to the new A44.
- Alternative access to farmers fields was basically a planning matter.
- Stratford-on-Avon District Council had a similar road network to Wychavon.
- Stratford-on-Avon District Council had refused a planning application for a distribution centre at Luddington. The company was now looking at the possibility of relocating to Vale Park Evesham or Spa zone (helped by local planning policy). Test case - permission may be granted where benefits to local communities outweigh harm by HGV movements.
- There was no increase in HGV movements within the Stratford-on-Avon development zone.
- The Luddington application was the first test of Stratford-on-Avon's policy in this area and *Stuart Williamson would keep Jack Hegarty informed of developments.*
- The police had concerns with regard to both transport operations and illegal labour.
- The police often found that transport used within the industry was not taxed or insured and drivers not licensed. This was because a substantial number of foreign workers were ignorant of the law and many did not have driving licences.
- The police were aware of some disorder involving immigrant workers at a local night-club in Evesham. The leaflet entitled 'Welcome to the Vale of Evesham', as referred to in Appendix B to these notes had been issued to help improve the situation. The leaflet would also be circulated in various languages and would be included in the pay packets of Kanes Food employees.
- There had been serious incidents between nationalities both on growing sites and at night-clubs/kebab houses. These incidents had helped produce an increase in violent crime figures in the last twelve months.
- There was a need to educate immigrants not to carry knives and to contact the police if they had a law and order problem.
- There had been a number of cultural clashes between immigrant groups.
- Gang Masters, usually did not know the name or nationality of the workers they contracted to growers.
- There was no evidence of an increase in burglaries.
- The police had local knowledge with regard to the operations of Gang Masters.
- A briefing note from the Council for the Protection of Rural England, was referred to.

APPENDIX NO. 4

- There was a feeling that public authorities had been slow in responding to long-standing planning related problems within the last two decades and tended to be reactive instead of proactive.
- There was a need to balance economic needs with the problems caused by HGV movements.
- There was a need to strive for balance between a vibrant countryside and its protection. The CPRE did not see planning law as very effective.
- Growers were considered to be a valuable asset to the area.
- Locals could not accept the existing quasi-commercial sprawl. There was a feeling that planning was operated in retrospect and could be much improved.
- Stratford-on-Avon were now working more closely with the larger distribution organisations (Bomfords). The authority would prefer sites to be located near main trunk roads. Have no land allocations for re-siting distribution companies, nor financial support - still reactive in that sense.
- The police did not want to deter the labour force, but wanted to ensure that Wychavon was a safe place in which to work and live. They considered that education would help the situation and their objective was to make Wychavon a safe place in which to live and work.
- Stratford-on-Avon did not offer financial assistance for firms to relocate, but did offer Officer time and help.
- Bomfords would be located in the Vale of Evesham control zone.
- The Highways Partnership Unit was aware that HGV's were causing enormous damage to its road network.
- Enforcement of weight restrictions was a matter for the police and is difficult : Respond to complaints. However, whilst the police assessed a matter when a complaint was received, they did not automatically take action.
- Enforcement of operator's licences was not a matter for the Highways Partnership Unit, but the Traffic Commissioners.
- The police usually worked in partnership with the Traffic Commissioners.
- Stratford-on-Avon District Council had observed a high number of accidents involving agricultural vehicles.

Conclusions.

- Police 'Welcome to the Vale of Evesham,' leaflet, widely circulated to foreign nationals and included in firms pay packets.
- The Parishes need to communicate with the Worcestershire Highways Partnership Unit with regard to road signs.
- The above could be assisted through the Freight Quality Partnership.
- The Council of Protection of Rural England (CPRE) want to see accountability and responsibility controlled from the top down the line. The responsibilities of Gang Masters needs to be clear and enforceable.
- The Transport Forum wanted to know how many HGV licences there were within the Vale of Evesham?

APPENDIX NO. 4

- The Freight Quality Partnership had noted better representation with a meeting held at Bretforton than previously. It wanted to widen its field of activity. The Highways Partnership Manager would feed back more information in this respect.
- That further information from invitees should be submitted to the District Council by not later than Thursday 18th December 2003.
- The Police would be involved in the review of Gang Master operations.
- Stratford-on-Avon was not aware of the specific economic benefit of the industry.

SESSION 3

PRESENT:-

Councillor - Mrs A Steel – Chairman

Councillors –

G F Bourne
Mrs J C Dowty

Mrs D A Mackison
Mrs M J Smith

Non-Member:-

Councillor -
M C Meikle

Officers:-

Jack Hegarty
Gill Collin
Mark Lynch
Phil Merrick
Chris Wilkes

By Invitation

David Howatson – DEFRA
John Howell, Road Haulier's Federation
David Price, Country Land & Business
Association

Charlie Morton, NFU
Neil Jackson, Midland Regional Growers

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTES

There were none.

13. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were none.

14. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting, and asked each person present to introduce themselves. She explained that this initiative was Wychavon District Council led and not Government led. However, the Report of the Panel would be made available to all appropriate interested parties, including Government.

15. DISCUSSION

The following main points arose:-

- That the farming industry was still recovering from the foot and mouth epidemic outbreak.

APPENDIX NO. 4

- That agriculture was now disconnected to the consumer?
- Agricultural incomes were often below the minimum wage.
- The government had a strategy for sustainable farming and food production.
- Key farming staff were located in Worcester.
- Advantage West Midlands was seen as an expensive way of providing assistance to the industry.
- Sustainable farming required people with agricultural experience and relevant skills and education.
- Whilst there had been a decline in agriculture in recent years, some 4000 people were employed in agriculture and food processing in Wychavon representing 8% of the workforce (based on where live nor work). Some 86% of these employees were employed in small businesses which had between 1 to 10 employees.
- Local workers are gradually being replaced by European workers. Lack of willingness of local people to do more mundane jobs.
- The general infrastructure for the industry was considered poor and the lack of red meat chilling facilities did not help margins.
- The infrastructure needed upgrading to accommodate modern practices.
- Imported food and European workers were essential to the survival of the industry.
- Hard-standing areas were required in fields to allow to improve the efficiency of produce and vehicle movements.
- Food was processed locally, if possible.
- The ornamental growing industry was intensive, dealing with trees, shrubs etc and employed about 1000 people in the area.
- Local transport operators provided a service both locally and nationally.
- There was an increase in foreign vehicles, with some returning laden and others unladen. Will take return load if can, but need to find something that will fit in to the schedule.
- There now tended to be less commercial vehicles. However 44 tonne lorries were probably the maximum weight that would be used.
- There would inevitably be an increase in foreign lorries in consequence of the forthcoming enlargement of the European Union.
- Good place direction signage was essential to efficient lorry movements.
- The haulage industry was now using multi lingual maps.
- There was pressure on drivers to meet deadlines and in consequence they would take the shortest and or quickest route.
- There was more transport in the daytime than at night.
- The industry was affected by European wide legislation. Working time directive will reduce driving time and night time deliveries.

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- Key routes in the vale needed to be looked at.
- Drivers needed to be encouraged to use the most appropriate roads.
- Visually good notices indicating weight restrictions, needed to be erected at appropriate locations to help prevent drivers going down inappropriate roads, having to stop and in some cases turn round with some difficulty.
- Some 50% of hauliers were members of the freight transport industry bodies.
- Some 80% of all people drove a car in the area because of lack of reliable public transport in the rural areas. There was however, a need to access the rural areas.
- The numbers who had less than a mile to travel to work in the area was larger than the national average, and was estimated at 9% of employees.
- Horticulture in the area was trading satisfactorily.
- Supermarket food demands meant that a constant supply was necessary and this required imports as and when necessary.
- The ornamental growing industry was intensive and was increasingly looking at Eastern European countries for its workers. However there was a problem with accommodating them.
- There appeared to be little training available for the ornamental industry and NVQ qualifications were not really suitable.
- There were concerns as to where the increasing number of workers would be housed.
- Pershore College was a private company and tended to concentrate on conferences etc. Horticulture was not now its main undertaking.
- Rural businesses were seen to be on a downward slope and there was uncertainty as to how revised regulations to be introduced in 2005 would affect them.
- Local labour was insufficient during busy months and little or no skilled labour was entering the industry.
- Inevitably transport was required to be on a bigger scale.
- More local food to local people was favoured but farmers markets were seen as being too small in scale to have any significant impact. They had to comply with appropriate regulations.
- Governments in Holland and France gave very helpful assistance to the ornamental industry.
- The ornamental industry employed 1000 workers in the area, but also an additional 1000 casual workers.
- The government saw agriculture/horticulture as being an endemic part of the rural economy.
- Agriculture tended to generate low value jobs.
- More and more people were leaving the agricultural industry. but the horticultural industry was maintaining existing numbers.
- Proculture had a large area of glass cultivation and paid some £25 – 30,000 a year for its Managers. *An information document on the company would be forwarded to Wychavon.*

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- Whilst the agricultural industry had represented 5% of gross domestic product in the 1950s and employed some 6% of the nations' workforce this was now 0.7% of gross domestic product and 2% of the nations' workforce, respectively.
- Some 10% of the workforce in Wychavon were employed in agriculture.
- There was a need to educate people in Wychavon as to the value of agriculture to the area.
- Until FMD tourism was linked with the farming industry, need to find link again.
- Many new farm holdings would include tourism or IT, but this had taxation implications - need to look at taxation - introduce a new council tax business band for mixed uses and not tax separately.
- The planning department needed to take an in depth look at rural businesses. Planning is too restrictive. Needs to be positive not negative.
- The industry wanted the introduction locally of broad band, as soon as possible.
- The restructure of the industry required clear guidance in planning policy terms. There were some 1800 full time farmers in Wychavon and some 1300 holdings.
- Identification of enabling measures to assist farming business to be done was required.
- The re-use of agricultural buildings was an issue.
- Clarification as to what represented a brown field site was required.
- The "Vale of Evesham", was a brand which attracted tourism and this helps support village shops.
- The proportion of disposable income spent on food and drink had reduced from 30% to 10% in the last ten years.
- Supermarket dominance over the industry was acknowledged. Won't take load of time slot missed. Won't allow consolidated loads. Therefore can have 4 vehicles from same holding with different pallet loads and different time slots.
- Local consolidation of the industry was required and savings through commercial structures was desirable.
- There was increasingly a water shortage issue and the industry was now having to resort to mains supplies.
- When product shortages, supermarkets import and absorb price increase. Farmers do not get opportunity to increase prices when product shortage.
- The value of the national industry was estimated at £160 billion of which the farmer only received £15 billion.
- Planning was seen as enabling development, but also protecting the environment.
- Supermarkets in Britain were national organisations, but tended to be more local on the continent.
- DEFRA did not have a scrutiny role in development plans.
- The common agricultural policy review and rural development programme, meant a reduction in the resources going into the wider countryside operations.

SESSION 4

PRESENT:-

Councillor - Mrs A Steel – Chairman

Councillors –

G F Bourne
Mrs J C Dowty

Mrs D A Mackison
Mrs M J Smith

Non-Member:-

Councillor -
M C Meikle

Officers:-

Jack Hegarty
Gill Collin
Mark Lynch
Phil Merrick
Chris Wilkes

By Invitation

Zad Padda, Vicarage Nurseries
Sally Lampitt, Evesham Foods
Chris Hartwell and Roy Pritchard, Spiers &
Hartwell
Dr John Randall and Tim Randall, Kanes
Foods
Paul Billie, Evesham Vale Growers

Neil Jackson, Neil Jackson's Nurseries
James Massingham, Simms & Woods
Sean Foy, Primafruit
Chris Simms, Red Star Growers
Jim Powell, Consultant

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTES

There were none.

16. **DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

There were none.

17. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman asked everyone to introduce themselves. She informed the meeting that this initiative was Wychavon District Council led and not Government led. However, the report of the Panel would be made available to all appropriate interested parties, including Government.

18. **DISCUSSION**

The following main points arose: -

- The transport industry had problems with inadequate local roads.
- There was no incentive to move to Vale Park because of the additional costs involved.
- Lorries had to travel through villages to collect produce from the packhouses within them.
- From a transport point of view it would be better if all packhouses could be centralised.
- Consideration needed to be given as to how packhouses recoup their investment.

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- Supermarkets tended to award contracts to one haulier, i.e. Corby Chill had the Sainsbury's Chill contract. Inevitably this produced more vehicle movements.
- Vehicles travel to Evesham from various locations including Bristol and Lincolnshire which required more vehicles to park up.
- When arriving in the Vale, many drivers were looking for directions to their locations.
- Vehicles could be required to collect half empty crates from the pack-houses.
- Comment was made about financial assistance from Brussels to assist with the relocation of pack-houses because otherwise they could not afford to move.
- Vale Park is used as a lorry park as there is no where else.
- That Central government should be lobbied with regard to regulating lorry movements at the weekends.
- There was no co-ordination of road repairs or traffic signals and an urgent input from the industry in this respect, was required.
- Better road signs were required.
- The industry could not justify Vale Park prices because of competition, e.g. Lincolnshire.
- The Vale of Evesham was an ideal central location within the U.K. for the distribution industry.
- Kanes Foods is a 24 hour a day, 7 days per week operation for contracts. In the 1990's it trebled its business, but it tried to secure full vehicles, still within the 80 included in its planning permission. As not a commercial distribution company, can manage loads.
- Round the clock operation at Kanes was required to secure jobs.
- The requirement of supermarkets to maximise availability could often require additional lorry movements, with lorries going out full and being empty on the way back.
- Kanes Foods could make further improvements on vehicle volume by using bigger vehicles and storing long life produce in one distribution centre.
- The industry had no exports, but all imports.
- There was an ethical training initiative to alleviate some abuses. Issues involved were transport, minimum wage and taxes on wages.
- *Jim Powell undertook to provide Wychavon with figures on mini bus numbers.*
- The minimum wage was an issue.
- Agencies could provide drivers with a better wage and more flexibility of hours worked.
- Evesham Foods were now using Portuguese workers during an experimental 12 week period of employment. However, there was nowhere for them to live in the Evesham area. They were in fact employed through an agency based in Worcester.
- Supermarkets were beginning to audit labour providers to ensure better practices. However there was a need to help with the perception of labour providers.
- Some 80% of workers not born in Britain had been in the country for 5 years or more.

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- Kanes Foods did not employ agencies or gangmasters and ensured their growers did not also.
- Pressure from the supermarkets for high standards in the industry ensured good practices in the Vale because firms could not afford to lose contracts.
- There were also audited ethical issues.
- Kanes Foods had been inspected by local Parish Councillors.
- Zad Padda advised that he would like a meeting with local Parish Councils.
- The industry was gradually improving, but appropriate measures were not talked about sufficiently.
- Home Office Immigration officials had visited Kanes Foods to check for illegal immigrants, but had found none.
- There should be a clearly advertised Home Office contact point for advice on immigrant labour.
- Wychavon would like the industry to be more proactive.
- The food industry in Lincolnshire was greatly supported by locals and local authority officers, but there appeared to be a different perception of it in Wychavon. Better information to local people was required.
- Youth recruitment in skilled areas was difficult to achieve.
- Better communication between the industry and public authorities was required.
- Evesham College should be looking at providing appropriate agricultural training courses, but even if they did, the pay back would be long term.
- The NVQ courses offered by Evesham College were no good to the industry.
- The education sector appeared to put no value on manual work, even though it did have value.
- The qualifications obtainable from many educational institutions were inappropriate to the industry.
- The area needed affordable housing for the industry's workers.
- Consolidation of the industry was continuing because there were now fewer suppliers.
- Operations needed to be closer to major roads in the future, because this was more easily accessible to transport.
- The local economy demanded local hostels.
- Language was a problem because many workers did not speak English.
- It was considered that Wychavon District Council should facilitate better press/industry relations.
- Wychavon assisted with cultural understanding through local festivals and Wychavon would be promoting one in Evesham in 2004.
- It was considered that the Wychavon Magazine could include an appropriate feature on the industry.

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- A plea was made for the industry to devote one hour a day for English lessons for its workers, e.g. at lunch time. In this respect, Kanes Foods considered that workers must have a minimum grasp of the English language and consciously broke up ethnic groups, in order to sponsor this. The company also monitored their progress and gave paid time off for training.
- Evesham Foods had an adult literacy scheme, but this was difficult to apply to temporary workers.
- Zad Padda wanted a general recognition within the industry of the need for English training, but commented that local colleges needed to improve their services in this respect.
- All firms represented confirmed that they would be prepared to work with Wychavon on joint initiatives, to help sponsor and improve the industry.

The meeting ended at 2.52 pm

CEW

WYCHAVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

**VALE OF EVESHAM AGRICULTURE AND FOOD DISTRIBUTION POLICY
DEVELOPMENT PANEL - THURSDAY 27TH NOVEMBER 2003**

Session 2

- 1) Worcestershire Highways Partnership Unit in Wychavon – Briefing Note
- 2) Information - Welcome to the Vale of Evesham – West Mercia Constabulary leaflet, supported by Kanes Foods Ltd, Prima Fruit and Samsara.
- 3) Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) – Briefing Note
- 4) Councillor Tom McDonald, Fladbury Parish Council (Past Chair Hill and Moor Parish Council) – Briefing Note.

WYCHAVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

NOTES OF A MEETING OF THE VALE OF EVESHAM AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD DISTRIBUTION POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL HELD IN ROOM 23, CIVIC CENTRE, QUEEN ELIZABETH DRIVE, PERSHORE ON TUESDAY 9TH DECEMBER 2003 COMMENCING AT 5.00 PM

PRESENT:- Councillor Mrs A Steel - Chairman

Members:-

Councillors -

G F Bourne

Mrs J C Dowty

Mrs D A Mackison

Mrs M J Smith

Non-Member:-

Councillor Mrs J A Pearce

Officers:-

Jack Hegarty

Gill Collin

Mark Lynch

Phil Merrick

Chris Wilkes

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTES

There were none.

19. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were none.

20. NOTES

The Chairman informed the Panel that she had received a telephone call from Mr Paul Billie of Evesham Vale Growers advising that James Powell was not a representative of any of the growers present at Session 4 of the last meeting of the Panel on 27th November 2003. She advised the Panel that Mr Billie and the other growers considered they had good relations with the Council and they all wished these to continue.

Further to the schedule of meetings contained in Appendix B to the Notes of the meeting of the Panel, held on 25th September 2003, Jack Hegarty confirmed that arrangements had now been made for an additional meeting of the Panel on Thursday 18th December 2003 at 10am in Room 23 for the purpose of having discussions with representatives of Asda Superstores.

AGREED

- | | |
|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| CEW | (1) That the Notes of the first meeting of the Panel held on Thursday 25 th September 2003 be received. |
| PM | (2) That Phil Merrick be asked to invite representatives from Pershore College of Horticulture and Evesham College of Further Education to a separate session to be held as part of the additional meeting of the Panel on Thursday 18 th December 2003. |

CEW (3) That the meeting of the Panel scheduled to take place Tuesday 6th January 2004 in Room 23 be held at 5pm.

21. **VALE OF EVESHAM AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD DISTRIBUTION POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL – REPORT OF PANEL – JANUARY 2004**

The Head of Planning tabled a skeletal Panel Report. He discussed the report with the Panel paragraph by paragraph and took note of its comments with regard to the chapters and additional information to be included in the final report.

AGREED

JH That the skeletal report be received and a revised, detailed report awaited.

The meeting ended at 6.41pm.

CEW

APPENDIX NO. 6

- Chris McCann explained that his retail experience had mainly been in clothes, but was now in food.
- Over recent years, ethical issues had become more prevalent eg use of child labour, slave labour, discrimination, working hours.
- Asda wished to sell their goods at the best possible price.
- Asda had its own risk assessment system with regard to countries and companies. For example countries such as Burma and Zimbabwe were considered high risk. Whilst the UK had previously been a low risk country, it was no longer so because of changes in immigration/work practices/gangmasters etc.
- Retailers had a responsibility to ensure that their supply chain adhered to a Code of Practice.
- There was no guarantee that countries would change their practices on entry to the European Union.
- China was a member of the World Trade Organisation, but this did not guarantee that human rights would be respected or accommodated.
- It was important, if possible, that all participants observed the same rules.
- Ethical trading considerations were now driving companies policy issues.
- There was not a huge amount of pressure from Government with regard to ethical trading, but this tended to come from trade unions and customers.
- The recent DEFRA Select Committee report had made it clear that joined-up Government did not exist at the moment.
- Better world wide communication had highlighted human rights abuses.
- World trade was probably the best device to promote human rights.
- Commercial organisations tended to be better than some Governments as regards observance and promotion of human rights.
- There was perhaps a degree of cultural imperialism through the extended family in the Third World. However campaigns were being organised to support the extended family.
- Child labour in the Third World was seen as a necessary evil, but in the West was seen as being wrong.
- A child was defined as anyone below 14 years of age in Third World countries, but 15 years of age in developed countries. There was an ETI web site with regard to a Code of Practice for employing children. ETI experience had shown that exclusion of children from certain companies could mean they ended up on the street.
- Efforts were made to try and link the family to work and replace children with adult members. if possible and also to provide them with education.
- The ETI was searching for a programme of remediation.
- Working hours and remuneration should be based on a living wage, although this was rarely specified.
- There was a legal minimum wage in the United Kingdom.
- Asda did not employ illegal immigrants.

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- Audits were important, but who should be audited, the farmer, labour providers/agency?
- Agencies needed to be registered.
- A comprehensive audit programme would take place in 2004.
- The gangmaster network was like a spider. There was an urgent need for a national registration body for gangmasters. Until this was established there was a need to use a third party to do audits.
- There was no information with regard to the wages paid by gangmasters.
- The use of gangmasters was now a responsibility for consideration by all concerned.
- There was still a responsibility for retailers to do an audit and check on gangmasters or the producer eg 10% sample. Factory certification was based on 3 core values.
- Asda was very positive towards ethical trading, but this was not necessarily the case with other companies.
- Retailers increasingly will be driven to improve human rights standards.
- The UK was considered to have a tight labour market and labour laws were enforced.
- Worldwide a number of companies required workers to work 7 days a week, with no minimum wage or contracts.
- Asda where possible wished to cut out the middle man to reduce costs and improve payments to farmers.
- The whole retail industry was very price conscious.
- There was pressure for sole suppliers [*Chris McCann would be happy to answer any e-mails to him in this respect*].
- The reasons for supermarkets preferring one supplier was that this produced stability for the retailer, with no peaks and troughs.
- The commercial side of the company should not take precedence over the ethical side of it.
- Asda's average profit margin was just 5%.

The Chairman thanked Chris McCann for this presentation and he then left the meeting.

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting George Marston, who had previously been employed by Tesco and asked everyone present to introduce themselves to him.

The Committee received a verbal presentation from George Marston.

The following main points arose:-

- George Marston had worked as a student on Stokes Bomford Farms between 1964 and 1968, with John Swift for 10 years in growing, also with John Hughes, with GMS for 5 years in marketing and with Tesco between 1983 and 2003.
- Supply Chain Management had changed.
- In 1983 there were many suppliers all over the place with a complex distribution, management etc set up and resource problems.

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- There was a need to raise standards in view of legislation.
- Product quality must all meet the same criteria.
- In 1983 there were some 250/300 suppliers.
- In 2003 there were just 100 suppliers, primary (direct working relationship with), (delivery, quality safety, legality), (feeding to secondary suppliers).
- Due diligence to primary suppliers, then down to the secondary suppliers.
- Primary suppliers tended to grow rapidly.
- Bomfords used to serve the High Street, but now mainly supplied Tesco. In consequence its volume was now massive. The company had expanded massively and its business now included countries such as Egypt, and some in South America and other continents.
- Primafruit was based in Evesham and imported produce for Tesco in massive amounts.
- Evesham was an attractive location for distribution as it afforded easy access to the rest of the country and had lower costs than London.
- Companies had to give more value to their supply base, invest appropriately and remain price conscious.
- Companies had to be mindful of ethical requirements of their suppliers and their reliance on a casual workforce. This had become particularly prevalent in the last 10 years.
- There was pressure on the supply chain, but in, communication during the working day, working conditions and health and safety considerations such as environment, canteens, toilet facilities, rest periods and paying the right wages.
- Complex legislation/practices applied to both local and immigrant labour.
- There was a need to provide support eg housing.
- Gieves in Cambridgeshire provided accommodation/catering facilities for its employees.
- Pressure for good quality harvesting, still largely manual, not mechanised, so casual workforce was fundamental.
- There were however problems with health and safety, low wages and control of immigrants.
- The expansion of the European Union would produce massive problems. Tesco was running training sessions to assess these and also ones for its suppliers.
- The impact of the above on the business needed to be assessed.
- Local Authorities needed to be aware of companies supply chain requirements.
- The Vale of Evesham as a growing area had changed drastically in the last 40 years. However, its specialisms were significant eg: salad onions, plums and top fruit.
- Supply bases included Bomfords, Primafruit, Walsh Mushrooms, Kanes Foods (a sophisticated production unit), Simms & Woods and Evesham Vale Growers.
- Big players were few and far between.
- Bomfords had taken on land from Hughes.

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- Need for right facilities and standards.
- Add real value to understand the size and value of the organisation.
- Customer profile, who is it, the demands of the retailer.
- Facilities have to be provided to a minimum standard.
- Councillors need to understand the scale of the operation.
- Must be an annual audit of the primary supplier by the retailer.
- Kanes was audited annually, but other companies may be audited less frequently by either internal or external auditors.
- Tesco had a check list documentation audit proforma.
- For some 20 years plus there had been a 100 suppliers working with Tesco. Tesco detailed its crop requirements and process. There was an import season involving countries such as Mexico, Egypt, etc and also the UK season. The changeover from seasons could be a problem, eg: UK season longer in one year than in another.
- The fresher the produce the better.
- Sourcing from the UK was preferred, but could not be guaranteed because of availability requirements.
- Margins were tight within the industry and a twelve month planning cycle was required. There was a need for a local/international split.
- Production centres were required to move to better products because supermarkets required minimum standards and reviewed production standards. They would advise if facilities were not right. Post harvest cooling had evolved from cold store to rapid chill on site.
- The producer had to be practical as regards what land etc was required to grow a particular crop.
- Legislation was an important driving factor for standards.
- Tesco had to protect its brand and that of its suppliers too.
- Tesco had to plan accordingly to take account of changes in legislation etc.
- Chop, cut and dice were high risk areas, where a known testing programme was required. Salad onions were low risk.
- From 2001 an independent laboratory micro test programme was applied to all products.
- In the future further consolidations within the industry were expected eg: acquisitions take over of Safeway by Morrisons.
- Changes in legislation would impact on food safety.
- High risk equalled high impact. Whilst low risk was OK, there was a risk of water/manpower supply problems.
- Some 75/80% of products were packed at source abroad.
- Some 40% of UK crops from local producers went to Tesco.

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The Chairman thanked George Marston for attending the Meeting.

The Meeting ended at 12.10pm.

CEW

WYCHAVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

**NOTES OF A MEETING OF THE VALE OF EVESHAM AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD DISTRIBUTION
POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL HELD IN ROOM 23, CIVIC CENTRE, QUEEN ELIZABETH DRIVE,
PERSHORE ON TUESDAY 6TH JANUARY 2004 COMMENCING AT 5.00 PM**

PRESENT:- Councillor Mrs A Steel - Chairman

Members:-

Councillors -
G F Bourne
Mrs J C Dowty
Mrs D A Mackison
Mrs M J Smith

Non-Member:-

Councillor -
M A Jennings

Officers:-

Jack Hegarty
Mark Lynch
Phil Merrick
Chris Wilkes

By Invitation:-

David Blades, Principal, Evesham College
Heather Barratt-Mold, Principal, Pershore Group of Colleges

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTES

There were none.

25. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were none.

26. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting David Blades and Heather Barratt-Mold and asked everyone else present to introduce themselves.

27. PERSHORE AND EVESHAM COLLEGES – PRESENTATIONS

The Panel received written and verbal presentations from the Principals of these Colleges together with an information pack from Pershore College.

The Chairman gave a résumé of issues raised at previous meetings of the Panel with regard to educational issues.

The following main points arose:-

- Pershore College offered a full range of land based courses eg horticulture, enterprise, sports, conservation.

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- The College had progressive routes for students ranging from 14 to 18 years of age, including a foundation course to GCSE/A Level standard and a vocational course to HND, HNC standard.
- The curriculum was land based.
- Horticulture/agriculture was given a high importance and included various facets such as landscaping.
- Pershore College undertook regular research to establish whether its courses were appropriate.
- The College worked closely with LANTRA (the training organisation for landbase industries e.g. farming, forestry) and other industries, who provided constant feedback.
- The take up of courses varied, but some were full.
- Students were drawn from international, national, regional and local areas. Some 50% of them originated outside the counties of Hereford and Worcester.
- Pershore College provided accommodation comprising 120 beds at Pershore and other accommodation elsewhere.
- The College offered sponsorship for local industry.
- The *paper appended to these Notes* was circulated by the Principal of Evesham College.
- The College was a commercial organisation, but took advantage of sponsorship. Fees were levied on employers for employee training.
- There was little demand for HGV training, but the College was now looking at the possibility of introducing an apprenticeship scheme in conjunction with interested local companies who would sponsor apprentices.
- The College took advantage of financial support through bids eg ESF, whereby free training could be provided.
- College courses were provided in response to requests from employers.
- Both Colleges were not adverse to criticism as this could stimulate the work they did.
- Pershore College was able to custom build courses for industry and was responsive to it.
- Reference was made to a chapter within the information pack for international students, with regard to the West Midlands Regional Nursery. Growers of BTS which covered such areas as health and safety, first aid, pesticides, business practices etc.
- Pershore College offered a complete range of qualifications, plus short courses.
- The College was responsive to micro business requirements eg one person operations.
- The College was able to devise appropriate courses and deliver them at the work place.
- Hygiene training was provided eg bed and breakfast establishments.
- The Colleges had a limited number of overseas students and these were usually self referred.
- Overseas students were predominantly migrant workers who generally stayed for not more than 12 months. Their main requirement was to be taught English.

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- The College Principals agreed that in response to requests from gangmasters, they could help with language training and basic skills for their employees. Literacy and numeracy were seen as the main requirements.
- The Colleges confirmed that they had worked with gangmasters.
- The Colleges noted the comments made by invitees at meetings of the Panel and responded accordingly.
- It was noted that positive interaction had taken place between the outside concerns attending the Panel's round table discussions in November.
- The Colleges wanted to sponsor a rural hub whereby people got to know each other and gained confidence in training.
- Members were impressed with the IT courses provided by Evesham College.
- The Colleges noted the long work and travelling hours of immigrant workers, but were optimistic that on site training could be provided on request, subject to funding. There was a possibility that funding could be obtained, whereby the employer would be paid for releasing its staff.
- NVQ training placed high responsibility on the employer to organise training at the work place.
- Modern apprenticeships in agriculture were undertaken at Belbroughton.
- A large number of Vale of Evesham companies were involved in College courses.
- Primafruit was involved in NVQ management courses and were charged a minimal fee for this.
- All Colleges in Hereford and Worcester contributed to a one stop shop skills station, which any firm could ring, for information and advice.
- Evesham College employed 150 full-time staff with 350 part-time staff. This provided flexibility with regard to course provision.
- Both Colleges had no problems with offering training for manual workers, provided the employers clearly stated their requirements in this respect and subject to funding.
- Generally manual workers required basic skills.
- Both Colleges sought to be responsive to training requirements, subject to funding.
- There was a high volume of demand for IT compared with other programmes.
- The Government wanted employer contributions to training to be increased from previous levels of 10% to 50% of the cost of courses.
- The Colleges confirmed that any approach made to them direct for training would be referred to the appropriate skills station.
- Both Colleges had Learn Direct centres and courses were available via the internet, libraries. The programme offered was flexible.
- Reference was made to training needs analysis ie was there a gap in what we needed to know? The Colleges agreed that this would be a good exercise to undertake. They had the tools/techniques to do it and funding was available. It was an exercise that could be undertaken jointly.

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- It was noted that the resources devoted to training in the UK were very low compared with other EU countries.
- The rural hub just involved Pershore and educational requirements were discussed. Staff were available to go out to rural farms to undertake training.
- Some people in need of training could be hard to contact and it was difficult to guarantee that all potential students could be released.
- The Colleges welcomed the opportunity to work with Zad Padda, if and when he established an on site training facility at Bretforton.
- The Colleges confirmed that they did work with the Learning Skills Council.

The Chairman thanked both Principals for attending the meeting of the Panel, which they then left.

28. **DRAFT REPORT OF THE PANEL**

Copies of the draft report of the Panel, which at this stage was private and confidential, were circulated.

Jack Hegarty presented the report and invited Members to let him have any comments they wished to make as soon as possible and by not later than Friday 9th January 2004.

Jack Hegarty advised the Panel that the final draft report would be submitted to the meeting of the Development Control Committee to be held on Thursday 29th January 2004 as an exempt private and confidential document, pending legal clarification of certain sections of the report. The full document would be submitted as a public report to the public meeting of the Executive Board in February 2004.

AGREED

- JH** (1) That the draft report be received.
- JH** (2) That Members submit to Jack Hegarty any comments they have on it as soon as possible and by Friday 9th January 2004.
- CW** (3) That an informal meeting of the Panel be held on Tuesday 13th January 2004 at 5.00 pm at Evesham Community Contact Centre for the purpose of considering updates to the draft report prior to submission to the Development Control Committee on 29th January 2004.

29. **NOTES OF MEETINGS OF THE PANEL**

The Panel noted that Notes of recent meetings of the Panel were currently being finalised.

AGREED

- CW** That a pack containing the Notes of all meetings of the Panel be circulated at the informal meeting to be held on Tuesday 13th January 2004.

The meeting ended at 6.37pm.

CW

VALE OF EVESHAM AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD DISTRIBUTION PANEL

1. INTRODUCTION

The following summarises the support provided by Evesham and Malvern Hills College to employers in the Agricultural and Food Distribution Sector.

2. LINKS WITH EMPLOYERS

- The College has links with a wide range of local employers in this Sector. Staff make regular visits to companies to discuss their training needs and organise specific programmes.
- The types of programmes provided include:
 - Basic, Intermediate and Advanced Food Hygiene
 - First Aid at Work
 - Information and Communication Technology
 - Management NVQs
 - Fork Lift Truck
 - Agricultural and Motor Vehicle Engineering
 - Mechanical and Production Engineering
 - Garden Machinery
 - Customer Care
 - Payroll
 - Languages for Business

3. PLANNED DEVELOPMENTS

- We are establishing a partnership with a private employment agency to provide an apprenticeship programme with transport distribution companies. This will provide training in Driving Goods Vehicles, Fork Lift Truck and Distribution and Warehousing.
- The College is involved in a number of ESF projects which can provide free training needs analysis and training for companies involved in manufacturing.

4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The College is committed to serving the training needs of local employers and aims to increase the number of employers in which it is presently engaged.

WYCHAVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

**VALE OF EVESHAM AGRICULTURE AND FOOD DISTRIBUTION POLICY
DEVELOPMENT PANEL.**

**ALPHABETICAL LIST OF PARTICIPANTS AND THOSE WHO HELPED IN
THE PANEL'S DELIBERATIONS**

Our thanks go to the following:

1. Ansar Ali – South Holland District Council
2. Heather Barratt – Mold – Principal Pershore Group of Colleges
3. Paul Billie – Evesham Vale Growers
4. Stuart Birkett – Boston Borough Council
5. David Blades – Principal Evesham College
6. Cllr G F Bourne – Wychavon District Council
7. Inspector Steve Brooker – Police
8. Grenville Burrows – Offenham Parish Council
9. Cllr Nick Carter – South Holland District Council
10. Alan Christie – Lingarden, Weston
11. Gill Collin – Wychavon District Council
12. David Cowie – South Holland District Council
13. Geoff Cox – Worcestershire Highways Partnership Unit
14. Cllr Mrs J C Dowty – Wychavon District Council
15. Peter Edmunds – Wick Parish Council
16. Colin Emms – North and Middle Littleton Parish Council
17. Andy Fisher – Boston Borough Council
18. Sean Foy - Primafruit
19. Cllr Roger Gambba – Jones – South Holland District Council
20. Ted Grazier – Charlton Parish Council
21. Tony Harper – South Holland District Council
22. Robin Harris – Lingarden, Weston
23. Chris Hartwell – Spiers and Hartwell
24. Jack Hegarty – Wychavon District Council
25. David Howatson – DEFRA
26. John Howell – Road Haulier's Federation
27. Neil Jackson – Midland Regional Growers
28. Peter Julien – South Holland District Council
29. Ian Kerr – Lingarden, Weston
30. Sally Lampitt – Evesham Foods
31. Mark Lynch – Wychavon District Council
32. Cllr Mrs D A Mackison – Wychavon District Council
33. George Marston – former Chief Buyer of Fresh Produce for Tesco
34. James Massingham – Simms and Woods
35. Chris McCann – Asda
36. Tom McDonald – Fladbury Parish Council and CPRE
37. Phil Merrick - Wychavon District Council

APPENDIX NO. 8

38. Anne Mitchell – Pinvin Parish Council and South East Worcestershire Transport Forum
39. Hazel Mitchell – Bretforton Parish Council
40. David Mortimer – Cleeve Prior Parish Council
41. Charlie Morton – NFU
42. Richard Neath – Defford and Besford Parish Council
43. Mackhan and Zad Padda – Vicarage Nurseries
44. Victoria Plain - DEFRA
45. Jim Powell - Consultant
46. David Price – Country Land and Business Association
47. Roy Pritchard – Spiers and Hartwell
48. Dr John Randall – Kanes Foods
49. Tim Randall – Kanes Foods
50. Chris Roberts – Hill and Moor Parish Council
51. Chris Simms – Red Star Growers
52. Cllr Mrs M J Smith – Wychavon District Council
53. Cllr Mrs A Steel – Chairman of the Panel, Wychavon District Council
54. John Stokes – Lingarden, Weston
55. Caroline Stuffin – Lingarden, Weston
56. Sandra Webb – Lingarden, Weston
57. Roger Wellbury – Boston Borough Council
58. Chris Wilkes – Wychavon District Council
59. Steve Williams – South Holland District Council
60. Alison Williamson – Wyre Piddle Parish Council
61. Stuart Williamson – Stratford-on-Avon District Council

WYCHAVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

**VALE OF EVESHAM AGRICULTURE AND FOOD DISTRIBUTION POLICY
DEVELOPMENT PANEL**

**LIST OF THOSE ATTENDING ROUND TABLE SESSIONS AND MAKING
ORAL SUBMISSIONS**

27th November 2003 – Session 1

Hazel Mitchell, Bretforton Parish Council
Ted Grazier, Charlton Parish Council
David Mortimer, Cleeve Prior Parish Council
Richard Neath, Defford and Besford Parish Council
Tom Macdonald, Fladbury Parish Council
Chris Roberts, Hill & Moor Parish Council
Grenville Burrows, Offenham Parish Council
Colin Emms, North & Middle Littleton Parish Council
Anne Mitchell, Pinvin Parish Council
Peter Edmunds, Wick Parish Council
Alison Williamson, Wyre Piddle Parish Council

27th November 2003 – Session 2

Tom McDonald – Councillor for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE)
Geoff Cox – Worcestershire Highways Partnership Unit
Inspector Steve Brooker – Police
Stuart Williamson – Stratford – on – Avon District Council
Hazel Mitchell – South East Worcestershire Traffic Forum

27th November 2003 – Session 3

David Howatson – DEFRA
John Howell, Road Haulier's Federation
David Price, Country Land & Business Association
Charlie Morton, NFU
Neil Jackson, Midland Regional Growers

27th November 2003 – Session 4

Zad Padda, Vicarage Nurseries
Sally Lampitt, Evesham Foods
Chris Hartwell and Roy Pritchard, Spiers & Hartwell
Dr John Randall and Tim Randall, Kanes Foods
Paul Billie, Evesham Vale Growers
Neil Jackson, Neil Jackson's Nurseries
James Massingham, Simms & Woods
Sean Foy, Primafruit
Chris Simms, Red Star Growers
Jim Powell, Consultant

18th December 2003

Chris McCann – Asda
George Marston (formerly of Tesco)
(appeared separately)

APPENDIX NO. 9

6th January 2004

Heather Barratt-Mold, Principal, Pershore Group of Colleges
David Blades, Principal, Evesham College

WYCHAVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

**VALE OF EVESHAM AGRICULTURE AND FOOD DISTRIBUTION POLICY
DEVELOPMENT PANEL**

SUMMARY OF WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS TO THE PANEL

- 1) Advantage West Midlands-Food and Drink Cluster Strategy-Regional Delivery Plan
- 2) Charlton Parish Council
- 3) Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) – Wychavon District Group – Briefing Note
- 4) Councillor Tom McDonald, Fladbury Parish Council (Past Chair Hill and Moor Parish Council) – Briefing Note
- 5) Evesham College
- 6) Pershore Group of Colleges
- 7) Freight Transport Association
- 8) Honeybourne Parish Council
- 9) Information - Welcome to the Vale of Evesham – West Mercia Constabulary leaflet, supported by Kanes Foods Ltd, Primafruit and Samsara
- 10) James T Powell
- 11) Kanes Foods
- 12) Midland Regional Growers
- 13) Neil Jackson's Nurseries
- 14) Press release from Peter Luff MP
- 15) South East Worcestershire Transport Forum
- 16) White Ladies Aston Parish Meeting
- 17) Worcestershire Highways Partnership Unit in Wychavon – Briefing Note