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DO LOCAL AUTHORITIES WANT LOW IMPACT DEVELOPMENT?

A REPORT BY ECOTRACK

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THE LAND IS OURS

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FUNDED BY THE LAND IS OURS CAMPAIGN, OXFORD.

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THE SURVEY ITSELF

The survey was undertaken towards the end of 1995 with the main aim of raising awareness of the opportunity Low Impact Accommodation (LIA) provides for implementing Local Agenda 21 and moving towards sustainable development. We also aimed to identify further LIA projects and contacts in Local Authorities. After explaining the opportunity we went onto briefly introduce LIA and different types of LIA project. The authorities were then asked to respond to a brief 'response sheet'. The survey was addressed to environment co-ordinators - those people mainly responsible for Local Agenda 21:

Introduction to LIA

Low Impact Accommodation is a term increasingly used to describe accommodation which has a significantly reduced eco impact, compared with conventional property, during its construction and use. It is applied to simple forms of construction that reduce consumption, achieve a greater degree of self sufficiency and reduce the need for transport. Much of the impetus for the interest in LIA has come from the need to meet the demands of Local Agenda 21.

Until now, LIA has been found to be particularly appropriate for rural areas and frequently is associated with small scale agriculture, though it can also be linked with craft industries, teleworking and tourism. LIA offers opportunities to provide affordable housing, whilst at the same time improving the rural environment; reinventing and diversifying the rural economy.

LIA is also associated with movements to provide more energy efficient ways of building and less dependence upon centralised services such as water, electricity and sewage. Whilst in the short term it can offer imaginative solutions to a number of social and ecological dilemmas, in the long run it is anticipating the kinds of changes in lifestyle that the quest for 'sustainability' imposes on society.

Examples from the UK

Some Local Authorities have already made moves to accommodate LIA. Below are examples of a few local policies and actions:

LIA policy - drafted by South Somerset District Council. The Council, having received applications for LIA associated with agriculture and permaculture projects, has drafted new policy stating that LIA may be permitted where applications conform with other local plan policies & in particular: structures should be temporary; vehicle movements should cause no nuisance; & the LIA should have minimal adverse effects on adjacent properties.

Autonomous housing policy - Newark & Sherwood DC are planning to permit 100 autonomous houses by the year 2000. Plans are already underway for 12 autonomous social houses using solar technology.

Earth sheltered LIA - There have been over 75 applications for earth sheltered dwellings. 48 of these applications have been passed & of these 15 were contrary to existing local development plans. Of particular interest at the moment is the LIA settlement underway in greenbelt land at Hockerton, Nottinghamshire. This is a development on farmland for 5 passive solar houses, dealing with their waste, generating energy & producing food.

Permaculture - Accommodation for a Permaculture project has been passed in the middle of greenbelt land at Pembury in Kent. In granting permission for a trial period of 3 years the Planning Inspector stated that the project is a useful experiment in achieving Sustainability, in tune with Agenda 21.

Sustainability centres - East Hampshire District Council is supporting work by the earthworks trust to establish an education and demonstration centre, supporting green tourism, local green business, permaculture and other green technologies.

Traveller communities - permission has been granted for accommodation in benders (tented accommodation) at Yoke Farm near Leominster. Conditions have been placed on sewage treatment with the council requiring a reed bed sanitation system as demonstrated at the Centre for Alternative Technology in Wales.

Small holding agriculture - Tinkers Bubble is a residential agriculture project near Yeovil which is currently seeking approval. It narrowly missed permission at the local level and is going through the appeal process with Department of Environment Inspectors recommending approval in the light of the special needs dictated by the lifestyle of the group.

Affordable self build housing - Walter Segal Method self build wooden houses are being built throughout the UK. 6 settlements have been completed since early 1994. 11 are currently underway and 4 are in the pipeline with funding. There are also individual projects underway. One project recently won the Green Building of the Year Award.

Lowland crofting schemes - In an attempt to revive the local rural economy and improve landscape, West Lothian District Council is allowing redundant farms to be subdivided by new belts of trees and run as individual lowland 'crofts'. Developments are well underway and similar policies are being taken up by other Scottish authorities.

Green buildings - There are numerous examples of more conventional ventures in sustainable housing. Many of these are covered in a forthcoming report by the Building Services Research Institute.

THE RESULTS AND CONTACTS MADE

District, metropolitan, and county councils were asked to respond to a briefing on Low Impact Accommodation:

- over 80% of respondents showed positive interest in the subject - requesting more information or indicating they would consider a project in their area (over 10% of 550 councils contacted responded);
- most respondents considered LIA fitted in with their Local Agenda 21 programme;
- one council indicated that it already has a specific policy on LIA written into the local plan – to expand an existing settlement by 1500 dwellings. 6 other councils indicated that LIA policy would probably be developed;
- a number of respondents cited LIA projects in their area, including a permaculture project in East Hampshire on ex military land, another permaculture project in Bradford, a non-residential low impact education centre in Hereford & Worcester and a millennium fund bid for LIA experiments in Devon.

The following respondents expressed particular interest:

- **Fiona Narburgh, Environment Coordinator, Hereford & Worcester CC** - the council is a partner in the completed Bishops Wood Environmental Education Centre which is a non residential LID in ancient woodland. She is keen to obtain information on LIA for this centre as well.
- **Bob Adsett, LA 21 Consultant, City of Bradford MBC** - the council have outline planning permission for LIA in the form of warden accomodation at their Springfield permaculture project. Bob expressed particular interest in self build / low cost LIA techniques which would be appropriate for this site and for the council to facilitate in the area in general.
- **Sarah Chapple, Senior Planning Officer, Stroud DC** - expressed an intention to submit a modification to the local plan - building in provisions for LIA. She needs more information.
- **Ian Hutchcroft, Environment Officer, Devon CC** - mentioned an 'eco settlement' millenium fund bid which if successful will give them the chance to experiment with LIA techniques.
- **Ruth Allen, Environmental Initiatives Manager, Mendip DC** - a strong interest and mentioned but did not specify an existing LIA in the authorities area.
- **Jane Gough, Senior Planning Officer, Vale of the White Horse DC** - strong interest and an intention to develop policy.
- **Richard Watts, Head of Strategy Group, Bedfordshire CC** - strong interest, particularly in criteria. Working on sustainable development design guide with local district councils. Provided a lot of information and clearly keen to develop things.
- **Ian Baret, Environment Coordinator, East Hampshire DC** - very active in their major permaculture project on ex military land.
- **F G Williams, Principal Planner, Rother DC** - interested in holding a meeting on the subject.
- **Hillary Jordan, Senior Planning Officer, Hart DC** - particularly interested in opportunities and proposals for combined live & work units.
- **Philip Anelay, Planning Assistant, Taunton Deane BC** - aware of what's going on and keen to keep abreast.

- **John Smerdon, Principal Planner, Forest Heath DC** - provided remarkable extracts from the Local Plan which have been used as part of a design guide for an expanded settlement at Red Lodge. The Local Plan states: 'the settlement shall be expanded to accommodate about 1500 extra dwellings. Proposals for the settlement should be based on the concept of creating a coherent, integrated, environmentally sustainable settlement'. The design guide includes the use of wildlife corridors and states that all buildings should be of a high insulation standard which may include the use of underground, grass road construction and other innovative methods.
- **John Ferguson, Environmental Health, Perth & Kinross DC** - expressed interest in LIA self build projects.

Many of the respondents who requested further information and could therefore be a useful contact for groups looking to set up LIA projects are included in the attached contact sheet.

FURTHER USEFUL WORK

The Land Is Ours is working on a Code of Practice for those wishing to start Low Impact Development projects. Contact TLIO on (01865) 722016.

Simon Fairlies report / book 'Low Impact Development: Planning for People in a Sustainable Countryside' will be out soon. A lot of research has gone into it and I highly recommend it to everyone interested in this area. It will be essential to anyone involved or planning an LID in the countryside. This is also available through TLIO on the above number.

Daren Howarth

LOW IMPACT DEVELOPMENT CONTACTS:

[REPLIES RECIEVED]

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