

Updates from Harrogate Local Government Association conference 30th June- 2nd July2014 – (based on sessions attended)

The “D” Word

This year’s conference opened with a meeting of the Independent group of councillors of which I am a member. The meeting considered the challenges of how we can carry on trying to bring some sense to government when we feel they have overstepped the mark, for instance the conversion of offices to homes in towns not requiring planning permission and the licensing regime were the current policy requires local tax payers to subsidise the running of hearings because of the current fee structure, just to name two.it was not long before the debate was dominated with the word Devolution , English devolution.

This year all debates and sessions revolved around this theme, the transferring of powers from Westminster to the counties & regions post the settlement with Manchester known as Devomanc.

Lord Heseltine informed us that it was our responsibility, to map out how a devolved settlement could look in our area and to try to make it fit against the government’s preferred model; he had little to say on how a county such as Suffolk could fit into the model that centres on cities and directly elected mayors.

He did suggest we submit to government a model that works for us.

Health Matters

Jeremy Hunt government minister for Health and Simon Stevens the c.e.o of National health England outlined how health and social care are coming together to drive out savings and join up services.

Much of the debate reaffirmed our individual responsibilities for our own and our communities’ health & wellbeing, for instance there are 8 lonely funerals per day in England, these are funerals where someone dies alone and no living family is traceable and the state organises the funeral.

For instance 1 in 10 school children are obese when they start primary school, by the time they are school leavers 1 in 5 are obese!

16% of parents live in the house owned by one of their children; on the continent this figure is double.

The meeting laid out how we will be challenged to make sure our neighbourhood will be challenged to be more self-sufficient.

Houses, Houses, Houses

Many of the sessions focussed on the need for housing growth, many incentives have been increased and a number of obstacles have been removed to try to build more than 200,000 homes to bring supply more in line with demand.

Most of these debates renewed the need for infrastructure to match the needs arising from these proposed developments.

There was also huge concern regarding the government’s move to allow the right to buy to be extended to housing associations.