

Woking – a Beacon Council for promoting sustainable communities through the planning process

The Beacon Scheme, managed by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), identifies excellence and innovation in local government. In March 2007, Woking Borough Council was awarded Beacon Authority status for Promoting Sustainable Communities Through the Planning Process.



Through strong civic leadership, setting clear priorities and a commitment to widespread public engagement, Woking Borough Council has fostered a 'can-do' attitude within its planning service, ensuring development meets local needs and responds positively to environmental challenges. This approach is reflected in a willingness to think and operate laterally, and where necessary, innovate, in order to find solutions.

Woking's solutions

- Adopting a wide range of techniques to create a vision-led approach to shaping new policies for planning and encouraging the public to express their aspirations for the Borough's future.
- Ensuring local needs are met through development, including the provision of over 270 affordable homes within existing communities, and securing more than £7 million in contributions from developers for affordable housing.
- Establishing high standards of energy efficiency and renewable energy in all new developments and promoting a 'climate neutral' approach to development, encompassing both carbon reduction and adaptation to changes in climate.
- Positively encouraging higher density developments in Woking town centre, whilst securing improvements to the town centre environment.



The Centrum building, Woking



2007-2008
*Promoting Sustainable
Communities Through
the Planning Process*



Photovoltaic cells from the air, Albion Square, Woking

- Creating innovative approaches to delivering its policies, such as establishing its own housing development company and creating an online tool for developers and planners to assess the carbon impact of a scheme in the context of local planning policy.
- Working in partnership with Natural England to ensure the protection of the Borough's rare heathland habitats (Special Protection Areas) from new housing developments. This has become a model adopted by other local authorities.

Marianne Hood, Chair of the Advisory Panel to the Beacon Scheme, congratulated Woking Borough Council and said: *“Well done on your good work in promoting sustainable communities. This award recognises your authority's innovation and best practice, as well as your commitment to sharing your work with other Best Value authorities to improve services across the country.”*

Speaking after the award ceremony, Ray Morgan, Woking Borough Council's Chief Executive, said: *“To be recognised as a Beacon Council for promoting sustainable communities is a fantastic achievement. It would not have happened without years of hard work and commitment from councillors, officers and the support of local people. Of course, this is excellent news not only for the Council, but also the Borough's residents, as our work today will shape the future of Woking for generations to come.”*

As part of its role as a Beacon, the Council will now work closely with the IDeA to host a series of events and provide mentoring to other local authorities who are keen to learn from Woking's experiences.



Source: G Sweetnam,
www.surreywildlifetrust.org

In 2005, Woking Borough Council was awarded Beacon status for Sustainable Energy. The award recognised the Council's achievements in the area of energy efficiency and sustainable living. A separate factsheet about the Council's work in this area is available.