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**EA ENVIRONMENT**  
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For my final column on the fallout from the Government's decision to give its conditional backing to SnOasis, I want to examine what it says about the unequal relationship between the Government and the governed.

The anti-SnOasis group representing the many local communities ran a five-star campaign and even managed to raise the incredible sum of over £100,000 to fight their corner.

That such a well-funded and carefully thought-out campaign and professional against the development, backed by well researched and carefully articulated planning objections during both the planning application and inquiry stages, should have been so easily dismissed, shows which side the planning system favours!

And it is only going to get worse. The Government's planning control freakery is taking away even the strangled voice currently 'enjoyed' by local communities.

The proposals in the current Planning Bill for a Commission on Planning Infrastructure will radically reduce the local voice in major planning decisions such as that over a future Sizewell C. Meetings of the Commission will not even be held in the locality affected making it physically more difficult for objectors to be put their case!

The recently approved Regional Plan for the Eastern Region points the way to this rigid top-down approach. There has been little involvement in its construction by parish and town councils and so little overt recognition of the specific interests that local communities have when faced with a major development on their doorsteps.

The language used – aside from being highly technical and infected by the most unhelpful jargon – makes clear that the Regional Plan is there to deliver the Government's own programme for population growth and employment creation. In other words: 'if you don't like where the growth is going, tough!'

Of course, the precise details as to where all these new houses and business units will end up have been left to the district council's Local Development Frameworks. But let's be honest, there is little evidence that local communities are having much of an influence even at this level.

In part, this is because parish and town councils and the communities they represent still tend to get involved too late in the planning cycle to properly influence events. Once a planning application has been received and it is broadly in line with the agreed use to which the land can be put, there is not a lot that campaigners can do to stop on those grounds.

However, let's not despair entirely. Well organised campaigns – arguing from a planning perspective – can still significantly modify an application, if not stop it in its entirety.

And the system itself is not unchangeable – it just takes the political will to allow the governed a greater degree of influence over decisions which they will have to live with for generations.

The question is will that shift in direction come from the present Government which has shown such a contempt for the local voice, or from a change in administration? In either case, it needs to come quickly before Suffolk and its people are damaged for ever and without consent.

*The above views are those of Richard Ward himself and not necessarily those of the Suffolk Preservation Society. Richard would be pleased to hear your comments on this article and can be contacted on (01787) 247179 or at [richard@suffolksociety.org](mailto:richard@suffolksociety.org)*