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So the cat is finally out of the bag. Or should I say, as this is a more appropriate feline analogy, that the snow tiger had left its lair and is on the prowl?

The decision by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to give a conditional thumbs up to SnOasis has shown the Government's new planning system for what it is. The whole rationale is now to deliver economic growth wherever and whenever developers and the Government want it.

The requirement upon the backers of SnOasis to provide clear evidence of their ability to make the development carbon neutral is frankly political window dressing. Issues such as the wishes of local people, the impact on the supporting infrastructure and the social and cultural implications of a mega-development have been either diluted or ignored.

It is this last point which I think is the one which has particularly serious implications for both the uniqueness of Suffolk and the effectiveness of local democratic institutions.

One supporter of SnOasis – who really should know better – has said that this development will put the county on the map! The question is whose 'map'? Suffolk is well-known by many types of visitors for all sorts of reasons; the beauty of its coastline, the exquisite nature of its market towns and its artistic heritage are just three. They come to stay with us because they know that the experiences they share in are not replicable anywhere else.

SnOasis promises to attract some very different demographic and age groups. There is nothing inherently wrong with them – far from it, but the SnOasis business model looks to maximise its 'share of wallet' by presenting a gated community culture, where customers are not encouraged to stray too far with their pounds or dollars or euros.

So there is unlikely to be any significant multiplier effect for neighbouring communities. Indeed, those partially reliant on spring and summer visitors may face a decline in income as more discerning and high net worth individuals and groups give that part of 'no longer quite' Suffolk a wide berth.

Furthermore, SnOasis is not unique. There are similar facilities being developed across the planet – including, most bizarrely, in Dubai. There is nothing to suggest that SnOasis will retain its appeal forever which raises the question as to how sustainable the site and the business proposition actually is. There is something especially degrading about a purpose built complex that has lost its shiny newness and fallen on hard times. If you want to see a European example, I suggest you go to the site of Expo'92 in Seville, now a ghost city of crumbling buildings and shanty settlements.

The Secretary of State's decision is also a hard blow against democracy in Suffolk. Aside from the strong planning-based objections of local groups having been ignored, the lack of any mechanism to involve the views of the much wider community is anti-democratic. If SnOasis really will put the county 'on the map', who consulted the county as to whether they wanted this to happen. Where was the analysis as to the impact on 'brand Suffolk' and the dilution of its values from an unique, functioning place to live and visit to a sort of poor man's Disneyland?

There has been a roar of disapproval against the supine decision of the Government over SnOasis. The question is can we ever again tame this tiger of greed and fast money?

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