

**RICHARD WARD**  
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**EA ENVIRONMENT**

In my last column I examined what the decision by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to give a conditional thumbs up to SnOasis meant for local culture and democracy.

I know wish to look at the employment issues raised by the Government's approval of this monstrously oversized scheme.

SnOasis shows that a claim to create jobs – any jobs – has become the big clunking fist of the planning system. The Government has shown that there is no argument against a development that it can't – and to it's mind – shouldn't be turned to dust by banging on about its amazing employment benefits.

Let us now examine if in this particular case the salesman's spin has any credibility.

Let's look at the issue of quantity; the numbers of jobs that a development such as SnOasis thinks it will create. The company behind SnOasis estimated that a significant number of new jobs were dependent upon its approval. Yet research by the Suffolk Preservation Society's sister organisation – the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England -showed that major schemes such as this one delivered barely half of the new jobs originally claimed.

Furthermore, evidence suggests that Suffolk has a long-term unemployment rate of about 2% or so, which is likely to be made up more of those switching jobs than those economically inactive over a number of months or years.

Therefore, Suffolk is hardly crying out for a deluge of new jobs. That is not to say that public and private bodies should be complacent, but surely wider consultation across the county is required if jobs creation is a major selling point for such a development?

Another key issue is the type of jobs likely to be on offer. There is no evidence that SnOasis will create many middle and upper skilled roles – and those that there will be are surely likely to be filled by executives drawn from outside Suffolk with relevant 'big' attraction experience.

How comfortably does the claim to generate a number of low paid roles sit with Suffolk's careful repositioning of itself as a location for educational excellence (eg UCS Campus) and skills?

The sustainability of the many of the new jobs is also open to question. Because SnOasis has been imposed on the Suffolk economy and has not grown naturally as most other of businesses have, the chill winds of an economic downturn – already blowing hard – are likely to be felt first and most harshly there. After all, the discretionary expenditure of a visit to an artificial ski resort is likely to be one of the first things to be dropped out of the family expenditure list!

Little thought has been given to the substitution effect of having a giant theme park in Suffolk. The inevitable marketing of the place could well dilute – if not undermine – the traditional marketing messages of the county as a place largely unaffected by the commodification of other counties. Do we really want to be seen as the Berkshire of the East?

Finally, if SnOasis lives up to its ambitions, there will be a huge impact on the already hard pressed road network, especially the A14 and A12. I wonder what would be the views of those local firms whose costs are pushed up and business is lost because of the inevitable traffic delays?

In short, far from being the answer to our employment prayers, the SnOasis decision could have serious implications for the long-term job market in the county.

*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)*