



## We Heart Hart Campaign

For immediate release – 15 January 2016

### **Hart Council abandons Local Plan Consultation: Latest event in a catalogue of mismanagement**

What should we think about Hart Council's decision to call off the Local Plan consultation with only a day to go before it was due to close anyway? Well, to misquote Churchill, this consultation has been a farce in a fiasco inside an omnishambles. Never has so little been achieved by so many with so much of our money.

But, this is only the latest entry in a catalogue of mismanagement and failure.

Back in April 2015, [Peter Village QC described Hart's position](#) as "hopeless" and precious little has changed since then. This abandoned consultation has not even covered the areas that he said should have been covered, namely, employment, retail, transport and infrastructure. Hart Council failed at the last Local Plan inspection, [have missed every deadline](#) they have set for themselves for this Local Plan and the quality of the deliverables is sadly lacking.

I have had many people send me Facebook messages, tweets and emails saying what a farce the process has been and what a waste of time and money. One correspondent has even been moved to write a [poem](#), saying they thought our leader has led us up the garden path and couldn't even run a bath. In short the council is a laughing stock. Many people have also come to the conclusion, rightly or wrongly, that the reason the consultation has been called off is that the people were giving the 'wrong answer'. There is no confidence in the council, the credibility of the whole Local Plan process is subterranean, with some complaining of "consultation fatigue".

The Local Plan process is so far behind schedule that we are running the risk of Central Government stepping in and doing the Local Plan for us. Moreover, the Government is currently consulting on plans to remove the New Homes Bonus from councils that do not have a Local Plan, so this further failure may result in a hit to services or increases in council tax. It is clear we need a good Local Plan and quickly.

But before we can move forwards it is imperative that we fix the management and governance failings that have led us to this unhappy place. It is simply untenable for the current incumbents to carry on as if



nothing has happened. The whole Local Plan Steering Group, who have presided over this sorry mess, should be replaced with a new group made up of an appropriate mix of urban and rural councillors. The position of the leader is untenable and senior officers of the council should be considering their position. It is also clear we need to hire an experienced full time project manager and hire some more experienced people to make this Local Plan happen. It is inconceivable that the consultation can be re-run in late January as some have suggested.

We know that the evidence base is being revised with a new Housing Market Assessment and Employment Land Review due in mid-February. This gives time to get the project plan revised and resources to be hired before a new consultation is run on a more accurate view of the housing need we have to meet.

This new consultation should also include a proper brownfield option, as was requested by the 2,130 signatories of the We Heart Hart petition. It was simply not right that many brownfield sites were arbitrarily excluded from the last consultation in favour of green field sites that were not even developable. A brownfield solution is much more likely to deliver the types of housing we should have to meet the needs of the growing elderly population and of the young struggling to get on the housing ladder, as demonstrated in the [Stonegate report](#) commissioned by Hart. Proper brownfield redevelopment will also deliver infrastructure funding to those communities with the largest funding deficits as well as council tax that can be used to support Hart residents rather than business rates, most of which have to be surrendered to Central Government. It seems clear that the only reason that a brownfield option was excluded in the last consultation was a bias amongst urban members of the council in favour of a New Town and against redevelopment of our decaying town centres. The council should also set out in clear terms the infrastructure costs of all the various options before us and how these costs are going to be funded.

Only root and branch change of process and personnel will restore confidence and give enough credibility to create a sporting chance of getting a good Local Plan on time.

Ends



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#### Notes to editors

- 1) The objectives of the We ♥ Hart campaign are:
  - a. To reduce the overall housing allocation for Hart District
  - b. Demand that the Council develops a vision and strategy for Hart that retains its role as a rural, green hinterland for NE Hampshire that respects the separate character and identity of Hart's settlements and landscapes and preserves the green spaces as amenity space for the urban settlements.
  - c. To require that the housing need is met by building on brownfield sites and increasing density in our existing urban areas
  - d. To request that future housing stock reflects the needs of the changing demographics of the district.
  - e. To demand the council and government do not plan for any new settlement in Hart that will act as a sink for the unmet housing need in neighbouring areas.
  - f. To hold Hart Council to account to ensure the process is legal and transparent and properly consults all of the residents of Hart.
- 2) More detail can be found at: [wehearhart.co.uk](http://wehearhart.co.uk)
- 3) Social feeds: @WeHeartHart and <https://www.facebook.com/groups/IHeartHart>
- 4) We ♥ Hart logo can be downloaded from here <http://wehearhart.co.uk/get-involved-with-we-heart-hart/>
- 5) More details about the Winchfield Action Group can be found here: <http://winchfieldactiongroup.org>