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30th March

'New town' plan savaged by council

Village leaders reject attempts to 'dump' houses in fields

by Stephen Lloyd
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VILLAGE leaders have delivered an 'eloquent and devastating attack' on plans to build a new town in the Hart countryside.

Winchfield Parish Council said it had 'a number of significant concerns' with aspects of Hart District Council's Local Plan consultation, most notably surrounding the proposed new settlement at Winchfield.

In its representation, prepared under the guidance and direction of Stevenage-based JB Planning Associates Ltd, the parish council said there was a lack of evidence to justify the need for a new settlement.

"It is premature for the district council to be asking consultees to identify their preferred approach for meeting its housing need, when serious questions remain over the housing provision target for the plan period," it added.

Village leaders also pointed out there is a 'significant level of uncertainty' over the level of unmet housing need from Rushmoor and Surrey Heath boroughs needing to be considered as part of

Hart's duty to cooperate and argued Winchfield is not a suitable location for a new settlement.

"The district council appear to have given significant and disproportionate weight to the presence of a railway station at Winchfield, yet there is no evidence to demonstrate that there is spare capacity at this station, and South West Trains has suggested that the railway station may need to be relocated away from Winchfield and expanded," said the parish council.

It also warned a new settlement option is not a viable approach as the list of infrastructure projects required to support it is 'clearly extensive and the costs will be substantial'.

Village leaders said that instead, Hart should be identifying opportunities to develop under-used and unviable brownfield land, and pointed out that focusing growth in, and adjacent to, Hart's main settlements would boost investment in infrastructure and regeneration where it is needed most.

Winchfield Parish Council chairman Andrew Renshaw said: "We have submitted a well-thought out, rigorous

and professional planning case which demonstrates why a new town at Winchfield is a non-starter.

"If Hart had only done a couple of pages of analysis to show whether it would work, they would not have wasted three consultations on asking people whether they would like to dump the district's housing in our fields."

David Turver, of the We Love Hart campaign, said: "All in all, this is an eloquent and devastating attack on the whole idea of a new town and is very much in-line with what we have been saying for months.

"We can only hope that the councillors will take heed of such an important report from professional planning consultants and get the Local Plan back on track to being found sound at inspection."

Hart's relaunched Local Plan consultation, which ended on March 18, received more than 4,600 responses.

The council was forced to abandon its original homes survey at the last minute in January after errors were found in the consultation material.

Hart will now verify the responses, analyse them and publish the outcome in May.