

Hart draft Local Plan misses the mark

AFTER a series of missteps, Hart Council has finally published the draft Local Plan for consultation. We would like everyone to have their say by the deadline of 5pm on Friday.

Although clearly a lot of work has gone into the plan, there are several issues that need to be addressed before the plan is finalised.

First, and most importantly, we need to address the ridiculous housing target. Hart has decided to plan for a colossal 10,185 new houses in the period up to 2032.

This is 2,000 more than the over-inflated number in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA).

These extra 2,000 houses mean we have to plan to concrete over many of our valuable green fields. If Hart's approach to the housing target was repeated across the country, we would be building twice as many houses than we need.

Even the 8,000 houses in the SHMA are too many and will result in Hart building thousands of houses for people who not only currently live outside the district but most of whom will also work outside the district.

Independent expert Alan Wenban-Smith has said the housing target should be around 4,347 houses. Personally, I would increase this a little and build some additional social rented housing to cater for those who currently cannot afford to even rent their own home.

Second, most of our office blocks are of poor quality, with a high vacancy rate.

In policy ED2, Hart has set out plans to protect most of them from redevelopment. It is plainly daft to protect derelict eyesores on brownfield sites at the expense of concreting over our green fields.

Third, Hart has said that town centre redevelopment must be a priority but has not laid out any plans to make that happen.

Fleet is one of the richest towns in the country, yet its retail offering in the Hart Centre lags behind. Despite the new leisure centre, high-quality cultural amenities are lacking.

Surely, it would be much better if Hart completed the brownfield study it promised and set out a vision to attract investment to redevelop the centre of Fleet.

There is no reason why a prosperous town such as Fleet can't have a decent theatre. A similar approach could improve the centres of Blackwater, Yateley and Hook. This approach would revitalise our town centres and protect out green fields as recreational areas for everyone.

Finally, we all know that our infrastructure is creaking.

Local councils are duty bound to plan for improved infrastructure alongside extra housing. But the draft Local Plan contains no financial analysis of our infrastructure requirements and doesn't lay out a plan for delivering them. This is a gaping hole in the planning process.

This Local Plan will shape our district for decades to come, so it is important we get it right. I do hope you take the time to respond to the Local Plan and register your concerns with the council.

You can find out more about our ideas to change the Local Plan at www.wehearthart.co.uk.



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We Heart Hart

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OPINION
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Despite the new leisure centre, high-quality cultural amenities are lacking, says David Turver