

Petition by Hart's MP has kicked off election season early, say opponents with a call for regeneration

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FLEET, Hook and Yateley centres need revitalisation and regeneration, according to Hart's MP, who has launched a petition calling for "urgent action".

Council elections take place in May and the move has been criticised as an early start to electioneering by the Conservatives, who do not control the council despite having the most members.

In a statement, MP Ranil Jayawardena said the towns have "great potential, be that simply as

shopping destinations or, with the right infrastructure improvements, as great places for local young people to get their foot on the housing ladder".

He has launched a petition to the House of Commons in the name of "the people of North East Hampshire", which reads: "That urgent action must be taken concerning the regeneration of Fleet, Hook and Yateley centres; and further that Hart District Council should enable the regeneration of 'brownfield' land for new retail and residential development in these places. Wherefore your Peti-

tioners pray that your Honourable House urges HM Government to take all possible steps to urge Hart District Council to bring forward regeneration; further to make sure that Hart District Council can apply for the funds they need from the recently announced budget measures; and further to urge Homes England to intervene if Hart District Council do not deliver regeneration."

The council is led by Liberal Democrat David Neighbour, supported by Community Campaign Hart (CCH) councillors.

CCH's James Radley, deputy leader of the

council, said: "Surely to the annoyance of everyone it looks like the Conservatives are starting their election campaign early this year. Gathering together for a photo opportunity to try and make out that the gradual decline in town centre retail is something new and ignoring the fact that they themselves have done nothing to regenerate the town centre in decades.

"Except for the folly of the very expensive pink paving. What they should be doing, if they actually wanted to help rather than trying to generate social media 'buzz', is get behind Hart's local plan.

This would then allow us to introduce development plan documents which help guide how inward investment could regenerate the town centre.

"If they wanted to help constructively, which based on past experience I fear they don't, they could join alongside the Community Campaign and Liberal Democrats in working with Fleet Town Council to find a viable way of re-developing the area at the western end of Fleet Road. A new Harlington would bring an attractive arts venue to the town and free up the opportunity to look at building an anchor supermar-

ket to encourage footfall west of Victoria Road. Some of us actively engage to bring about positive change, which admittedly takes time. Others like to point and moan, mainly about all the things which did not happen when they were in charge."

Mr Jayawardena said: "We are lucky to live in a prosperous part of the country where almost everyone who wants a job has one. Looking to some of our local, district and town centres, however, it is clear to see that Fleet, Yateley and Hook are all in real need of revitalisation and regeneration.

I've been spending time speaking to your local councillors about this and taking a look at the work that needs to be done.

"If you want smart new shops, some new flats for local young people to buy above them and better car parking, then act now. Please sign up to my 'revitalise and regenerate' petition at <https://bit.ly/revitaliseregen> so that I can show Hart District Council that local people really do care about their area and want to regenerate 'brownfield' land for new retail and residential development that will benefit the local economy and the local community."



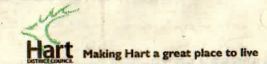
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