

Call for resignations over Local Plan policy concerns

HART CAMPAIGNER SAYS INSPECTOR'S 'DAMNING' COMMENTS ARE 'COMPREHENSIVE'

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A CAMPAIGN group has said "heads must roll" over Hart District Council's Local Plan development blueprint fiasco.

Government planning inspector Jonathan Manning has said he has "a number of fundamental concerns" with regard to the soundness of Hart's Policy SS3 - supporting a new town at Winchfield - in a post-hearings letter.

We Heart Hart said details of the Inspector's findings were "damning" and councillors and officers should take responsibility for the time and money they have wasted.

Spokesman David Turver said the inspector's criticisms of Policy SS3 were "deep and comprehensive", and he has called for a "root and branch reform".

"The portfolio head for planning, Graham Cockarill, and the council leader, David Neighbour, have allowed themselves to be the puppets of Community Campaign Hart

(CCH)", he said in an article published on the group's website headed "Local Plan Examination: Heads Must Roll!"

"They have lost all credibility and authority and should immediately resign their cabinet positions and consider whether they should continue in their role as councillors".

Mr Turver added the track record of the "puppeteers" in CCH is "woeful". "They delayed the draft plan, that didn't include the new town, produced by the Conservatives in late-2016", he added. "This put Pale Lane and Bramshill at risk and wasted money".

Mr Turver said CCH has been revealed as "an empty vessel that makes a lot of noise but has no substance". He also criticised the role of council officers.

"In 2012, they recognised that a new town at Winchfield would require new studies, more land, infrastructure assessment and testing", he said. "Seven years on, and all that work has either not been completed or failed. We should remem-

ber that their 2013 Local Plan failed at Inspection. They too have pursued inappropriate appeals that were doomed to failure. In 2015, they said that there was capacity for only 450 dwellings on brownfield land.

"Since then permission has been granted for thousands of homes at Hartland Park, Sun Park and many office conversions".

Hart council leader Cllr David Neighbour declined to comment on the accusations. "I'm not giving them the oxygen," he added.

Cllr Cockarill said the inspector's letter "gives us a clear indication that, subject to the council agreeing a couple of important modifications, we are close to having in place a sound Local Plan".

"This is great news for both the council and its residents because at long last it will give us a sound basis to make future planning decisions and it removes the threat of planning by appeal," he added.

CCH leader James Radley said: "The planning inspector has written to Hart suggesting he will be finding

our plan sound and acknowledges that we have sufficient housing supply - such that we no longer need to fear planning by appeal.

"This is fantastic news for the people of Hart who have faced years of unconstrained planning blight because the previous administration failed to knuckle down and face up to the arduous task of getting a sound plan drafted. Hart has not had a new Local Plan since 1996, which accounts for why we have struggled to defend many planning appeals in recent years.

"It is disingenuous therefore for some politically motivated commentators to be painting this as if it is some kind of failing. It is a major strategic and meaningful win for the people of Hart.

"The inspector, contrary to some of the misinformation doing the rounds, has also identified a new settlement is an appropriate option for Hart to consider pursuing."

The district council said it does not comment directly on other people's articles.