

Westminster View

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POINTS OF VIEW

REGULAR readers of this column will know that, as someone who grew up in Hook and who spent many years as a councillor and deputy leader of Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council (BDBC), I have always taken a keen interest in the built environment of North East Hampshire – both as a means of beautifying our surroundings and of serving the needs of residents and businesses.

Not far from here, in my colleague Leo Docherty's constituency of Aldershot, Rushmoor Borough Council (RBC) is embarking on an ambitious regeneration programme for Aldershot town centre. This will completely transform a town with latent potential, into an attractive and dynamic space that meets the needs of residents and businesses in

the 21st century.

Indeed, it will do this in part because much of the redevelopment is mixed-use, meaning people will actually be living alongside the businesses which serve them. In the internet age, when people are less willing to travel in order to go shopping and eat out, this is the best way of ensuring the continued survival of our high streets – and, subject of course to planning permission through the local council, this is exactly what will be happening in Aldershot. The High Street multi-storey car park, along with The Arcade and the Gallery shopping centres – empty for a decade I understand – are expected to be transformed into a development of 600 new homes, retail units, and a public square.

RBC has also made use of all the powers at its disposal to effect this fresh vision for Aldershot, including the contingency of Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) when it has been unable to convince landowners to sell up. This is exactly what happened on the nearby Union Street – which had been identified as no longer attractive to major retailers and had many empty units – after the council unsuccessfully attempted to purchase a number of properties for redevelopment. Once the council instructed Savills to carry out CPO valuations of all units, the purchases were successful.

BDBC has taken a similar approach to the successful regeneration of Basingstoke, and I have personal experience of this. When I served as deputy leader, I kicked off

the regeneration of Basing View – including the new Waitrose and John Lewis there – drove forward the process for the regeneration of Basingstoke's Leisure Park and began the revitalisation of the 'Top of the Town'.

Much of this has continued since my election to Parliament, with innovative regeneration programmes such as the scheme to build a new headquarters for the pharmaceutical firm Eli Lilly in Basing View and rent it back to them – thus securing 400 good jobs locally and a long-term source of revenue for the council.

These successful regeneration projects, which are bringing in new businesses by redeveloping brown-field sites, are only possible because BDBC and RBC both have strong

and comprehensive visions for their districts.

Many residents tell me that they would like Hart District Council to be bolder and play its role in developing a regeneration vision for Hart, just as their neighbours have done.

They needn't start from scratch. They can build on some of the work that has already been for them by, for instance, Hook Parish Council and their Neighbourhood Plan. It can be done!

As ever, I would be interested to know your views on this, as well as how you would like to see your area regenerated.

You can email me (email@ranil.uk) or attend one of my 'Tell Ranil' events.

Details, as ever, on my website www.ranil.uk