



Please vote to protect our countryside

Hart has just embarked on a new consultation asking us where we think we should put the 2,500 or so houses that remain to be built or permitted. We believe this latest consultation is flawed for a number of reasons.

First, the Government published revised population and household forecasts earlier this year and these showed much lower figures for Hart. The housing needs assessment is being revised but we won't know the results until the New Year. Independent expert Alan Wenban-Smith said our housing allocation should fall by around 2,000 units which would mean we don't need either an urban extension or a new town. So, we are being asked where we should put houses that we don't need.

Second, for some reason Hart has decided to reduce its forecast of brownfield capacity from the 1,800 it said in Hart News in September by 75% to 450 in this consultation. Hart has started work to identify more brownfield sites but the results of that won't be known until the New Year either.

Third, the consultation documentation doesn't explain the economics properly. Hart has a £78m infrastructure funding deficit and Hampshire as a whole is facing a £1.9bn infrastructure black hole. The local NHS is also under pressure with a predicted £47m per year budget deficit. We don't have the money to fund the likely £300m required for a new town of 5,000 houses.

Fourth, our local MP, Ranil Jayawardena has come out strongly against "large-scale top-down volume-led development" and would prefer it if we built on brownfield sites. He urged councillors to be more proactive and use compulsory purchase powers to buy up brownfield sites and utilise the profits to fund infrastructure.

Fifth, this consultation doesn't address the points raised by Peter Village QC who said it was inconceivable for a sound local plan to emerge without consulting upon important issues like employment, retail, transport and infrastructure. This consultation does not ask those questions.

Finally, Hart have ignored the WeHeartHart petition of 2,130 Hart residents who asked for a brownfield option to be included in the consultation.

Nevertheless, Hart has decided to go ahead, so we must respond to the consultation in the best way we can.

There are a number of complicated options that have been put forward. It isn't quite as clear as it might be that a new town opens us up to 3,000 extra houses from Surrey Heath and Rushmoor.

As our housing allocation is likely to reduce as a result of the new Government figures, the most appropriate strategy would be to avoid committing now to a new town or an urban extension. The damage to our environment would be enormous. Instead we should focus on finding more brownfield sites such as Bramshill, Hart's offices, the derelict buildings on Fleet Road and Pyestock.

Think carefully about how you respond to the consultation. Once our countryside is concreted over, we can't get it back.

More information can be found at wehearhart.co.uk.