**Let’s Make the Local Plan the Best it Can Be**

Hart District Council has a big problem. Its last attempt at creating a Local Plan was rejected by the Planning Inspector because Hart failed in its duty to co-operate with neighbouring councils. This means that Hart is at the mercy of developers who can push through almost any development at appeal because Hart does not have a valid Local Plan in place.

This means it is vital we get a new Local Plan in place quickly. However, if we are to retain the best of Hart – the essential rural nature – that makes this such a great place to live, then the plan has to be a good one.

According to our Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA), in the plan period up to 2032, we have to build more than 7,500 houses in Hart. These houses have to be in the right place and have to be of the right type to meet the needs of the changing population.

In addition, the councils with which we have to cooperate, Surrey Heath and Rushmoor have said they can’t build all of their allocation on their own patch and want to force Hart to build an extra 3,100 houses for them, pushing Hart’s total up to over 10,600 dwellings.

Hart has decided, on the basis of only 550 respondents out of a population of over 90,000 people that it would seek to place a big proportion of its housing allocation in a new town in Winchfield. We Heart Hart has raised a petition opposing this decision and has already received over 750 signatures – more than the total number of respondents to Hart’s consultation.

We believe Hart’s decision is flawed for a number of reasons. First, a new town, anywhere in Hart will make it impossible to fight off the demands for an extra 3,100 houses from Surrey Heath and Rushmoor. Second, a new town will turn the northern part of Hart into a single continuous urban sprawl, coalescing the towns and villages of Fleet, Church Crookham, Crookham Village, Hartley Wintney, Hook, Odiham and Winchfield into an ugly mess.

Third, it will destroy our environment by concreting over our green fields and putting in danger the Thames Valley Heath SPA, our SSSI’s and sites of interest to nature conservation. Finally, there will be intolerable pressure put on our infrastructure such as road, rail, hospitals and schools for which there is already a £78m funding gap.

There is another way.

We need to oppose the overall housing allocation by pushing back on Surrey Heath and Rushmoor and challenging the housing numbers in the SHMA. Careful examination of the numbers reveals that the overall allocation has been pushed up using some dodgy data. They have used inward migration data that covers the time when Hart was already building over the regional and national averages and assumed that we will have a rate of jobs growth nearly twice that achieved during the boom times of 1998-2008. Making more realistic assumptions could push our housing allocation back down to around 5,000 houses.

We also need to focus much more on brownfield development. The council’s approach to this is patchy at best with many of the vacant office blocks and shops not even appearing in their land database. All of the councils also assume very low housing density on brownfield land of around 30 dwellings per hectare (dph). Studies in London have shown that vibrant communities can be created with their own green space if housing density is pushed up to 160-400dph. A study by a local architecture student has shown that if Rushmoor were to take up this type of scheme, they could build all of their housing needs and those of Hart without touching a single green field. Moreover, if Hart were to follow suit, most of our housing needs could be met by building on the existing brownfield sites. This has to be a better way forward than concreting over our green fields and destroying what makes Hart such a great place to live.

If you would like to ask Hart to think again and make our Local Plan the best it can be, then please get involved with our campaign at [wehearthart.co.uk](http://wehearthart.co.uk) and sign our petition at [you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/we-hart](https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/we-hart) or contact us at [wehearthart@gmail.com](mailto:wehearthart@gmail.com).