



### **Please vote to protect our countryside**

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. The progress on Local Plan has been slow, with the timescale pushed back again. But as you may know, 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.

However, we believe this latest consultation is flawed for a number of reasons.

First, the number of houses we need is under question. The Government published revised population and household forecasts earlier this year and these showed much lower figures for Hart. Further, the latest jobs figures were reported in September and as expected we are not creating jobs at anywhere near the rate predicted and so the number of houses we need should reduce substantially. 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 any urban extensions and would not need a new town either. So, we are being asked where we should put houses that in all likelihood we won't need.

Second, for some reason Hart has decided to reduce its forecast of how many homes we can build on brownfield sites from the 1,800 it said in Hart News in September by 75% to 450 in this consultation. It is saying we can only count brownfield sites that are "deliverable" now, despite offering for consultation many green field sites that are "not currently developable". Hart has also kicked off some work to identify even more brownfield sites but the results of that won't be known until the New Year either.

Third, the consultation documentation offers scant information about the economics of the various proposals. We know that Hart has a forecast £78m infrastructure funding deficit, Hampshire as a whole is facing a £1.9bn infrastructure black hole. The local NHS is also under pressure with a £47m per year budget deficit predicted in five years. It is clear that we do not have the money to fund the infrastructure associated with big housing schemes. Yet, the consultation glosses over the likely £300m funding requirement for a new town of 5,000 houses when the funding available from developers will likely only be around £40-50m.

Fourth, Hart Council doesn't mention that 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 the many vacant unused and redundant commercial sites across the district. He urged councillors to take a more proactive role by using compulsory purchase powers to bring these sites back into productive use and utilise the profits to fund infrastructure projects.

Fifth, this consultation does not address fundamental points raised by Peter Village QC in his legal opinion on our Local Plan process. He 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 our opinion on any of those issues.

Finally, Hart have ignored the WeHeartHart petition of 2,130 Hart residents that called for a formal brownfield option to be included in any forthcoming consultation.

Nevertheless, despite these issues, Hart Council has decided to go ahead anyway, 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. One is for fair dispersal across the different parishes on a mix of green field and brownfield sites, another is for more



strategic urban extensions on green field sites and the final one is to concrete over vast swathes of Winchfield and create a new town. There are other options that combine these basic options. Hart makes clear that a new town on its own cannot meet the currently assessed housing need. It isn't quite as clear as it might be that a new town opens us up to potentially 3,000 extra houses from Surrey Heath and Rushmoor.

Given that our housing allocation is likely to reduce as a result of the new Government figures, it seems that the most appropriate strategy would be to avoid committing now to a new town or an urban extension given the damage that it will do to our environment and instead focus our efforts on finding more brownfield sites.

We should also ask Hart to listen to Ranil and try much harder to find brownfield sites. Hart have discounted the former police college at Bramshill, seemingly preferring that the Grade-1 listed building and the old 1970's accommodation blocks decay rather than be redeveloped into attractive homes. The councillors might also look closer to home at the complex of buildings that includes Hart offices and the Harlington Centre for a new mixed use development as recommended by Fleet First and be much more muscular with the owners of the derelict buildings on Fleet High Street and Pyestock so we can build affordable homes for our young people and the elderly in sustainable locations and protect our beautiful countryside.

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

If you would like more information, please visit our website at [wehearhart.co.uk](http://wehearhart.co.uk) or see the Hart consultation at [hart.gov.uk/consultations](http://hart.gov.uk/consultations).