

# Council slashes number of new homes

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HART District Council has announced a 'massive reduction' in the number of new homes to be built across the district over the next 16 years.

The council said it has been working hard to reduce housing numbers by identifying more sites to be delivered on brownfield land and by helping neighbouring authorities meet their housing need in their own area.

It added that it will be adjusting the evidence base needed for the draft Local Plan to reflect the new housing figures, and will produce the new plan early in the New Year ready to go out to

consultation with the public.

Council leader Stephen Parker said: "This is good news. It is important to make sure we do not produce a Local Plan which delivers more homes than the district needs and ensure that we produce one that is right for Hart residents."

The council said that since consulting on a Refined Housing Options document in February, when it was thought that Hart might have to find land to build up to 5,000 new homes, it has been 'working hard' to find ways to reduce the number.

It added neighbouring Rushmoor Borough Council

was challenged to see if it could accommodate extra homes on the sites that it had identified.

Alongside this, work on identifying future housing need, which was supported by Hart, has also reduced the overall number of homes that Rushmoor will need to plan for.

Hart said that as a result, Rushmoor recently confirmed that it will look to meet its own housing needs and does not expect Hart to accommodate any shortfall, which had previously been in the region of 1,500 homes.

The council said Surrey Heath has also confirmed

that it will look to meet its needs.

David Turver of campaign group We Heart Hart said the announcement should bring the overall requirement that was stated in the last Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) down from 7,534 to 6,034.

"If this is confirmed it is brilliant news and vindicates the independent expert findings and what we have been saying for months," he added. "However, the council has also stated that the draft Local Plan will not now be ready for consultation until the New Year.

"It was expected that the

draft plan would be approved by a special cabinet on Wednesday (October 19) and endorsed by a special meeting of the council the following day. This latest delay is just the latest slippage in a long list of missed deadlines.

"The delay puts the council at odds with the Government, who have threatened to step in and produce Local Plans for councils who do not have them in place by 'early 2017'."

Winchfield Parish Council chairman Andrew Renshaw said he was 'very pleased' to learn of the big reduction in housing numbers.

But he was disappointed

that the draft Local Plan and associated papers were not published last Tuesday (October 11) as had been promised.

Cllr Renshaw said: "I believe that the concept of a new town at Winchfield has been found not to work for many reasons, including flooding, traffic and environmental issues.

"We had expected to get confirmation of this with the publication of the draft plan.

"It is time for the dark cloud of planning blight that has been hanging over our community to be lifted by Hart Council.

"There should be a

recognition of this so that the idea of a new settlement at Winchfield is taken off the table."

Asked about the Rye Common scheme, Cllr Renshaw said: "I think this is a non-starter.

"It is getting rather crowded in Hart with new settlements mooted at Pyestock, Murrell Green, Winchfield and now Rye Common, and in the current planning vacuum there may be more proposals to come.

"So although the overall reduction in numbers is welcome, the latest delay in the Local Plan is not all good news."