

Making critical progress towards our Local Plan

The UK government determines the number of houses to be built in each district of the country.

They keep changing the rules on how this is to be done and try to make it look as if councils have a real say in this. Ultimately we don't, because housing numbers are confirmed by a **government planning inspector** – and can be revised upwards by legislation, potentially leaving a Plan 'out of date'.

When a Local Plan is deemed out of date, or does not exist, developers can more easily **succeed in appeals** and be allowed to build on even the most sensitive sites. The recent appeal decision to build on **Grove Farm** being a particularly bitter example.

Why we had to take control

Hart's Local Plan, which defines where the required housing growth will go, has been delayed for far too long. Hart's Conservatives, who had been running the process for years, were in turmoil over whether it was better to build a **new settlement** (which brings better **infrastructure**) or to continue their decades-old policy of **urban extensions** (which doesn't).

While brownfield development may seem a panacea, it fails to deliver significant infrastructure. The current situation at 'Hartland Village' being a prime example.

To some, it appears that they were prepared to deliberately delay Hart's local plan, so that their urban expansion policy would continue to cause further blight via lost planning appeals.

Sadly, this ploy has been all too effective, allowing several major developments in this area. Hence, at the Hart council AGM in May 2017 the Community Campaign joined forces with other like-minded councillors to oust the Conservative administration. We did so with the primary objective of getting the long delayed and important Local Plan in place.

Emerging Plan passes major hurdle

Thankfully, the long-suffering residents in Hart are now a major step closer to getting back **control of the planning process**.

Despite attempts proposed by Fleet Conservatives (Cllrs Parker and Forster) during the final debate, to

get the new settlement option removed or rendered impossible to deliver, Hart councillors voted in favour of the latest draft local plan – which now moves into the final stage of consultation before submission to the Government. Had the Hart Conservatives' 'wrecking' amendments to this resolution succeeded, it is likely our plan would have been found 'unsound' by the Inspector, opening the door for yet more urban extensions like **Elvetham Chase at Pale Lane**.



Taken at Watery Lane; another site lost at appeal, while Hart's local plan was 'out of date'

The new settlement option

The new Local Plan is future proofed, in that it kick-starts the search for a new settlement in the **Winchfield / Murrell Green** area, to make the plan robust against the inevitable increase in government-set housing targets in future years.

It has been a source of great frustration to residents for many years that the Local Plan has taken so long to reach this stage, having suffered many false starts and wrong turns along the way. It is testament to the focused determination of your Community Campaign and Lib Dem new joint administration that we have finally been able to make this happen – and within the timescale we had promised.

Soon the new plan policies can carry weight in determining local planning applications.

Housing numbers have been revised in the new version of the plan. This has allowed controversial sites, such as the **Cross Farm** development in **Crookham Village**, to be removed from it.

The emerging plan has also enabled Hart to issue a robust refusal for the 700 home development at **Pale Lane**, which had threatened the 'green lung' of countryside west of **Elvetham Heath**. ■

Public access to Long Valley and Tweseldown

by James Radley JamesR@cchart.org.uk

There is naturally some concern with plans, now very much underway, to fence-in part of the local Army training area near Church Crookham.

Many will know that the Community Campaign have had a long history of engaging with the MoD to preserve public access to the much loved Bourley Road and Tweseldown areas.

The Army feel acutely aware of the need to maintain the safety of both the public and their troops when they are exercising on the area.

With an intensification in local training, together with the new faster vehicles being driven around Bourley Long Valley, they have concluded that they need to keep the public off certain parts of the estate, when active training is taking place.

About the restrictions

They have informed me that they only intend to fence in some of the training land north of the Bourley Road and that this would not include Tweseldown racecourse, nor the adjacent Rushmoor SANG.

There is also no intention to fence off the area south of Bourley Road and hence, provided they abide by the by-laws, local people can still enjoy unhindered access to the staggering views from the top of high points like Caesar's Camp and the surrounding land.

In regard to the area being fenced, it is the intention of the army to allow public access to this area when it is not being used for military training. The important matter of how readily the promise of continuing to allow public access is granted will be a subject for monitoring and on-going discussion.

Finally, the MoD point out that they have already given up over 700 acres of prime training estate to public accessible space in recent years.

A local perspective

On a personal note, my family and I have enjoyed the use of these lands for over 25 years – and we will be as devastated as anyone else to see them fenced in and public access restricted.

It has to be recognised that this is a consequence of the army consolidating their resources in this part of the country, as they withdraw troops from a wider presence in Europe and elsewhere.

Therefore, I'm very relieved to see that it is the Army's intention to continue to allow the access to this area for public enjoyment, whenever it's safe to do so.

It remains to be seen whether this would include the reopening of the much-missed Bourley Road car park when the army are not using the land. If this happens, this will undoubtedly require that dog walkers take a responsible stance on clearing up after their dogs. ■



Contractors making way for the new fence on the Army training area

Tired of party politics?

The Community Campaign (Hart) are registered as an independent Residents Association party. With councillors elected to Hart District Council since 2004, we are passionate about protecting the quality of life in our towns and villages. We are not driven by political motives, we do this simply because we care about where we all live.

We care about our community.
If you do too, why not join
the Community Campaign?

Contact our Membership Secretary, Gill Butler
on 786108, email GillB@cchart.org.uk
or you can find out more and join us at:

www.cchart.org.uk/get-involved

Rejuvenating Fleet Town Centre is now on the District Council's Agenda

It seems a popular pastime for opposition councillors to suggest that the needs of **Fleet town centre** are being neglected and that it needs to be redeveloped. **We prefer to see the positives in our local town.**

While it is true that we may worry about the viability of some of the **town centre shops**, it is also true that parts of Fleet's 'high street' have maintained their Edwardian charm and continue to thrive. The less attractive elements tend to be those which have been **redeveloped unsympathetically** in the past.

There are well-documented reasons why high street retail is under pressure; **high rents** and **online** competition being just two. While both of these are beyond the control of the council, we do have the opportunity to help the town draw in more shoppers.

The most **successful high streets** in the UK are those that have differentiated themselves and become a destination which includes leisure, food and retail. A pleasant environment to live, sit and play, as well as to eat, drink and shop – for all ages.

Practical support for Fleet's vision

Through our influence with the District Council we are keen to help **Fleet Town Council** (FTC) to find a viable means of moving out of the existing Harlington and into a new **arts and community** hub.

While such a development is not without controversy, such a move enables the District Council to redevelop the old **run-down Harlington site** to bolster retail opportunities in the town. The New Harlington would then become an integral part of the high street and provide a **key destination** for visitors to the town.

Redeveloping the old Harlington site, potentially with the unloved **Hart council offices**, would make it possible to build a new **mixed retail/residential** development that maintains public space, community facilities and additional **public car parking**.

This would help draw shoppers into Fleet and would encourage more people west of **Victoria Road**. Such an initiative would be of real benefit to the vitality of our retail economy and would certainly be a better approach than bulldozing Fleet's heritage to generate more high-density housing. Already, some of the flats along **Fleet Road** and side roads are uncomfortable neighbours to **Fleet's night time economy**.



Fleet Town Council's proposal to reinvent the Harlington

Alan Oliver, as both a Hart District and Fleet Town Councillor, is working hard to help both councils to manage and reduce costs by promoting a pragmatic, innovative approach to implementing the scheme.

Alan says; "I know that some people in Fleet worry about the costs involved and question why the existing **Harlington** can't be refurbished. Unfortunately, the cost of refurbishment is almost identical to that of a new purpose-designed facility. It would also require the Harlington to close for an extended period – and leave the **community groups** and local events that use the building homeless. Once you consider the opportunity to **benefit the retail** and leisure businesses, as well as creating a superb **new community theatre/music venue**, the balance is tipped in favour of a new build."

Regarding the future of the youth facilities provided by **Fleet Phoenix** and the play school, we'll make sure HDC and FTC work together to provide suitable accommodation nearby in the centre of Fleet.

FTC will be holding another consultation for residents before commitment to any building works – and the final scheme will only go forward if supported by you.



Alan Oliver is keen to improve Fleet's appeal

Facebook is for friends, not politics

We recognise that social media has become prevalent, with vibrant Facebook communities such as Fleet Parents, groups for the residents of Elvetham Heath, Crookham Park and others.

Unfortunately, some of these local groups have been hijacked for self-promotional and political messaging, very often ill-informed, deliberately misleading or defamatory in nature. While sadly some may be taken in by these individuals, the Community Campaign have made a deliberate decision not to engage in such dialogue for now, for a number of reasons.

Firstly, we don't feel that the innocent majority of forum users wish to be subjected to politically motivated sniping or self-promotional 'advertising'. They seem to be getting enough of that already.

Attempting to defend ourselves or to counter political misinformation, even occasionally, would inevitably escalate to the point that we'd be going against our heartfelt principles. We have no desire to use forums for this purpose. It is just not why they were set-up.

Secondly, keeping 'on top' of forum posts would take up a great deal of our time – and we are sure residents would prefer we invest that time in activities that bring about tangible beneficial results, rather than judging our popularity by counting 'Likes'.

Occasionally, aware members of the public do wade in on our behalf, for which we are grateful - we do appreciate the support of the majority who value what we do. We are aware that often doing so draws unwanted venom from the small core of activists who wish to hammer home a particular agenda. Apologies to those who have been subjected to that.

Picking the right channel

So if you have a local concern, a question or an observation that you wish to make to us, please either send it by e-mail, or phone us directly.

We are very happy to listen and, as those who have previously contacted us will testify, give a friendly, open and detailed response. Thank you. ■

Your local CCH Councillors



From left: James, Chris, Gill, John, Jenny, Tony, Wendy, Simon, Richard, Alan and Sara

www.cchart.org.uk



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