



Hart's Local Plan and Securing a better Future

It is indicative of the UK's convoluted national planning process that, at the time of writing, we are still waiting to adopt Hart's Local Plan.

The previous plan ran out in 2006 and in 2020 we are only now on the cusp of adopting its replacement. The latest delay was caused by the **General Election** and associated shut-down of government which has delayed the issue of the plan's final assessment report to us by the **Planning Inspectorate**.

Already proving its worth

Despite this, the Local Plan has already demonstrated its value by being part of the **successful defence** against inappropriate urban extensions in Hook and most notably at **Pale Lane**, on farmland adjacent to **Elvetham Heath**. Even as a draft, it has significant weight when considered at a **planning appeal**.

Sadly, political procrastination by the previous Conservative administration meant that we had no Local Plan to protect our communities from developments at Watery Lane and Grove Farm.

The Conservatives seem to have been happy to allow their preferred option of **urban extension**, the incremental **outward expansion** of **Fleet** and the **Crookhams**, to be brought about through 'planning by appeal'. This despite the fact that this policy cannot bring significant improvements in **infrastructure** – and typically, these **bolt-on** developments seek to leverage already **congested roads**, oversubscribed **schools** and GP surgeries.

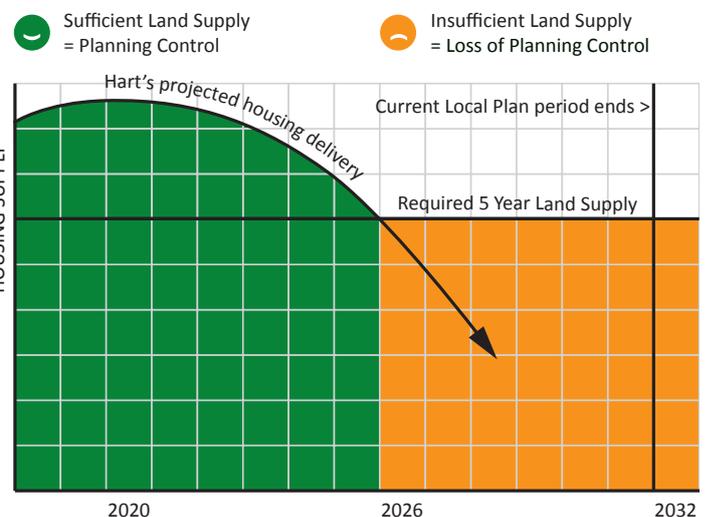
Time to relax?

With the imminent adoption of a new **Local Plan**, communities can be hopeful of a respite from such **ad hoc extensions** to our towns and villages. With its timeline covering up until 2032, residents can be forgiven for thinking that any further planning pressure has been safely pushed into the long grass. Certainly, that is the **false reassurance** that the Conservatives wish to push.

They would like us all to think that this is now done and dusted, that we can bury our collective heads in the sand and don't need to think ahead or plan for the future... **This would be a trap.**

Sadly 2032 is not the 'sell by date', it just represents the period over which the Plan addresses our projected **housing need**, based on census data that is due to be updated in 2021.

The very calculation the government use to reach our 'Objectively Assessed Housing Need' is expected to be radically modified in the near future. Any material change in this calculation of our housing numbers would render the Local Plan '**out of date**' and require Hart to fundamentally review its Local Plan.



Mind the gap

Hart is also required to demonstrate a 'five year land supply' at all times; a schedule of available and deliverable housing sites that will comfortably meet the projected **housing need** for the next five years. The graph indicates that the house building trajectory in **Hart will fall short** of this target by 2026, because developments such as **Hartland Village** will have delivered most of their new housing by this time.

Given that we are in 2020 and our previous Local Plan ran out in 2006, it would be reckless for your elected representatives at Hart NOT to be looking seriously at what comes next.

That is why the Community Campaign support the approach of carefully evaluating the possibility of a new **eco-friendly garden village** within walking distance of Winchfield station. **Only if needed**, this development could be used to deliver the bulk of any **additional housing** that may be required by central government in the period from 2026 onwards. As such, it must be very carefully planned to deliver all the necessary **infrastructure**. ■

Myth Busting around the 'new settlement' concept

by James Radley

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Many Hart residents will be aware of the ongoing 'controversy' around Hart investigating the possibility of building a new settlement in the Winchfield area.

Those who would rather see a continuation of the decades-old policy of incremental extensions to Fleet and Church Crookham have been very vocal in trying to portray this as a misguided folly. We would like to take the opportunity to set the record straight.

■ **Need** A new settlement is not needed as part of the new Local Plan. This is all about funding (with government grant support) a project to see what is possible. If the future government housing targets do not require such housing to be built – it will not be built. This is an insurance policy against Hart having to take on a higher housing quota in a few years' time.

If we do nothing, if we do not have a well-researched strategy, then we will have to fall back yet again on adding to the belt of new housing which surrounds Fleet. This would inflict further traffic congestion and overcrowding on Fleet's over-stretched infrastructure.

■ **Numbers** The Garden Village concept (working title 'Shapley Heath') is to build an eco-village of up to 5,000 homes. While some give misleading figures showing the site supporting 10,000 homes; this is NOT the intent. The intent is to build at low density to include green space and wildlife corridors. This would be well designed as a place people would want to come and live - if it were to be built.

■ **Infrastructure** Bolt-on urban extensions don't deliver infrastructure. They don't present the economies of scale to permit major road improvements, nor building a new secondary school, or doctors surgeries. In any event, you cannot retro-fit additional capacity into existing roads. Fleet is unique in the country for not being directly accessible from a major trunk road and is further limited by a canal running through the middle of it.

Calthorpe Park School is already in the process of being expanded to near breaking point – and Court Moor is on too small a site to be usefully expanded. So, whatever we do next has to be able to deliver adequate infrastructure that is designed in from the start. You can only do this with a larger scale new settlement – unfortunately nothing else works!

■ **Overpopulation** People argue that Hart is already full, so why should we seek another influx of people? We would agree, but this isn't our choice. Central government specify the number of houses needed in each local planning authority area and if you don't have a viable plan of where to put them, developers will be allowed to build where they like! Frequently, this is adjacent to their previous building site.

We feel that it is better to build homes within walking distance of a mainline railway station (such as Winchfield) than have commuters driving from the far edges of town to find that Fleet station car park is already full by 8:00am on a weekday morning.

■ **Ecology and Environment** 'Shapley Heath' is being investigated using government grant funding designed to promote eco-friendly garden villages. This is about learning from the disasters of the past and building semi-rural communities which are sympathetic to and supportive of, the local and wider ecology and climate. There will be integrated transport, rainwater harvesting, centralised heat and power plants, carbon efficient housing design, an emphasis on renewables and truly sustainable living.

■ **Why now?** We must not let the fact that we have a Local Plan in place make us complacent. We owe it to ourselves as a community and more importantly to future generations, to start to plan properly for their future. We cannot afford to carry on as we have before with a short term strategy and ignoring our strategic options. We have got to get better at addressing the needs of people and the environment - this is the only planet we have.

Having a plan means being prepared. If we don't need this housing, then it will simply not get built. However, if we *do* need the houses, isn't it better to have a viable plan ready, just in case? ■

If you care about where you live 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:

cchart.org.uk/get-involved

Fleet Town

Cherishing what matters

At the risk of causing controversy with a radical viewpoint; maybe Fleet as a town centre isn't all that bad.

It's not just we who think this. The People and Places Insight Town Benchmarking System found that "24% of town centre users travelled to Fleet for Comparison Shopping, noticeably higher than the National figure (5%) and an increase from the 2015 evaluation (10%)"

Undoubtedly, the retail sector faces challenges, not least from on-line shopping, high commercial rents and out-of-town retail parks.

However, there are fewer empty shops in Fleet than in many other nearby towns and a fair number of bespoke sole traders providing a unique shopping experience. The many coffee shops provide social amenity – and charity shops support good causes.

The truth about Regeneration

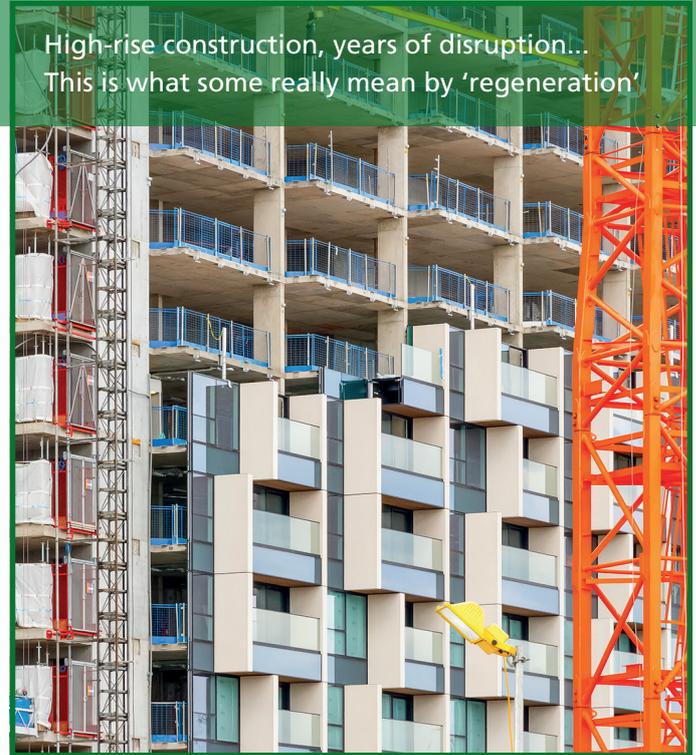
Some commentators can't help but talk down the vibrancy of Fleet as a retail destination. In doing so they risk undermining the value in our local town.

They talk of an 'urgent need to regenerate Fleet' and complain about a lack of 'rejuvenation plan', but won't explain what they mean by this. Perhaps because they know that their 'vision', to intensify the town centre population, means building unpopular high rise flats above new paradises of shops. Please don't wreck Fleet in the name of political ambition.

Not only would high-rises destroy what's left of Fleet's charm, it would also add to our existing infrastructure shortfall. When the Rural Hart Association (there is a clue to their agenda in their name) presented their pie-in-the-sky plans to redevelop Fleet town centre to the Local Plan Inspector, they got short shrift. Firstly, because they had no realistic way of delivering it – and secondly, because such intensive development would be wholly inappropriate in a town like Fleet.

Anyone who attended the Christmas Festivities will know that Fleet is already a much loved retail centre.

You don't revive a patient by ripping its heart out, especially if the patient isn't particularly sick in the first place



Making informed decisions

At election time the national parties like to use Fleet as a political football, trying to create issues where there are none; the perennial favourite being free car parking. The only legitimate reason to 'tweak' car parking charges is if it helps the retail sector. There is no point in a free period of car parking if it impacts the viability of shops, such that they close and the whole point of parking in the town is eroded.

Last year the Community Campaign promised a full-scale car parking review, which included the parish and town councils and importantly, Fleet's retailers. The retailers were adamant that a short period of free parking would negatively impact their footfall.

Whilst at first sight this appears counter-intuitive, there is logic to their concerns. With 30 mins free parking, people won't linger long enough to fully explore all that Fleet's diverse retailers offer. A full hour of free parking is still not long enough – and the corresponding impact on longer term car parking charges would make it less attractive to shop in Fleet. Statistics across the country show that retailers in market towns fare the best when the car parking charge for 2 hours is £1 – which is what we already have in Fleet. Free parking is still available nearby.

The Community Campaign will support the option that our much-cherished retailers see as the best choice for Fleet. Let's do what's needed to protect the commercial viability of Fleet's shops – and not pander to what looks good in an election leaflet. ■

Getting things done

At Hart council level, the Community Campaign aren't just fighting inappropriate development and looking for better ways to plan for the future; we also work proactively to represent residents' interests, in terms of the services Hart run for our community.

We often work through issues at an individual level, perhaps where someone needs to be rehoused, or has a concern about assisted bin collections for elderly relatives, or has parking issues outside their home.

We can't always be successful and in times of tight financial constraints there's often limited scope in what can be achieved, but this doesn't prevent us from trying... We simply get on quietly and give practical help for those individuals who need it most.

Practical support, hard work

Our councillors have been active in presenting evidence to key planning appeals; particularly those where the impact on the communities we represent would be most adverse. Notable was the submission and cross examination of Councillor Katie Davies at the public inquiry into Pale Lane; an appeal which has since, thankfully, found in our favour.

We await to see if our efforts over Cross Farm in Crookham Village have brought about rejection of the abhorrent care village proposal on this unsuitable site.

We don't shout about what we do on Facebook, or go out of our way to court personal publicity. Being a councillor is no ego trip for us, it's our way of giving something back to the communities we feel so lucky to be part of. We leave others to hop on the self-promotional bandwagon – we prefer to just quietly get on and help fix it, whatever it is.



To finish up we'd like to draw to your attention some facts about how the Community Campaign are running Hart on your behalf and, in particular, making the most effective use of your council tax contributions. The following bullets come from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, the central government department that oversees local councils:

- Due to careful financial management, Hart is now one of the lowest 20 spending local authorities per person in the country.
- Last year's cost of services per person in Basingstoke & Deane was £172; in Rushmoor it was £160; and in Hart it was £85.

We will need to continue to keep a tight rein on expenditure in coming years as the government plans to remove all funding from local councils. We will need to be self-sufficient on local sources of income and hence we will need to be run very efficiently, if we are not to burden the council tax payer.

If you wish to talk to us, our contact details are below. If we can help we will. If we can't, we will try to direct you to the Agency that can. ■

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