

5th January 2018

HART TAKES IMPORTANT STEP FORWARD FOR LOCAL PLAN

Hart Council decides to proceed to the next stage of consultation with its Local Plan

At the Full Council meeting on 4th January, Hart decided to submit the current version of the Local Plan, including a proposed new settlement, to 'Regulation 19' consultation. This is an important and significant step forward to establishing its Local Plan and putting the council back in control of the planning process.

The Local Plan (Strategy and Sites) defines Hart's strategy to addresses future development needs, especially for housing, while ensuring that the special qualities of the District are conserved and, where possible, enhanced. It defines policies for planning the development of Hart up to 2032 including where, how, and how much development will be allowed to take place.

The urban extension at the brownfield Pyestock site will go ahead, further urban extensions to Fleet and Hook will be limited, and a site for a new settlement will be sought in an area around Winchfield and Murrell Green.

This is important because it provides a framework for proper planning, dealing with infrastructure requirements, preventing further speculative development applications and putting Hart back in control of the planning process. The new settlement will allow for planned development in the longer term although it is not expected to be started for several years.

The plan including supporting documents will now be opened to a further round of consultation before the draft and comments from the consultation are

presented to a government inspector for approval. Comments must be made between 9 February and 26 March 2018.

Debate

A number of views were expressed at the council meeting and there was some useful debate. Two proposed amendments were not adopted. At the end of the meeting a cross-party consensus was reached and on a majority vote it was decided to move forward with the current state of the plan.

The main area of debate was the long-running issue that has dogged and divided local politics and communities for the last seven years. The fundamental question was “should Hart allow for the inclusion of a new settlement in its future planning policy or not”. Although it was at times emotional, councillors largely stayed focused on the arguments for or against the inclusion of a new settlement in planning policy to allow for a longer-term planned development approach. At the end of the night the arguments ‘for’ swayed the day particularly after calls for a longer-term approach by Conservative, Lib Dem, Community Campaign Hart and Independent councillors.

There were two amendments proposed. The first amendment, proposed by Cllr Parker and seconded by Cllr Forster, was to remove Policy SS3 on the development of a plan for a new settlement. After debate, this amendment was defeated in a recorded vote by 22 votes against, 9 votes for and one abstention.

The second amendment was that Policy SS3 should have added to it the Town and Country Planning Association Garden City Principles. This was rejected by Cabinet on Wednesday evening, but resurfaced again at the Council Meeting. This amendment was defeated in a recorded vote by 22 votes to 10. The main argument against was that this Policy already defines principles for the planning of the new settlement and imposition of the specific TCPA principles may be inappropriate at this stage. The planning department will consider which guidance is most appropriate at the next stage of definition which is to produce a ‘Development Plan Document’ for the new settlement.

At the end of the meeting Hart Council voted 27 to 5 to recommend that the Local Plan goes forward with the new settlement development policy in it. The

level of support for finally proceeding with the plan (albeit reluctantly from some councillors) was very high and the proposal gained significant cross-party support

Next Steps

The Local Plan will be adjusted numerically to take into account the latest population growth figures, the (expected) new version of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and government guidelines on housing allocations. The 'Regulation 19' consultation will run from 9th February and will last 6 weeks. This will allow all interested parties to express their views and concerns once again.

The plan will not be further revised but it will be submitted, together with consultation responses, to the government inspector appointed by the Secretary of State, at which time it will have some validity in local planning decisions. An 'Examination in Public' over the summer of 2018 will then decide the final way forward for the Local Plan and approve its adoption.

FACE IT Position

This is the fourth time a Regulation 19 plan has been promised (Oct 2015, winter 15/16, autumn 2016 and winter 17/18) but the first time it has actually been delivered.

Hart has suffered in the last few years and the delays in delivering the plan have enabled developers, rather than Hart Council, to lead the planning process, resulting in Watery Lane, Grove Farm, North East Hook and other urban extensions that the majority of people did not want.

FACE IT co-Chairman Tony Gower-Jones commented:

“It was great to hear all sides of the argument discussed. With such an important decision, which will affect everyone in the district, it is essential that all angles are considered. We noted that on a number of occasions councillors spoke for the need for a plan, and that having a plan is essential for Hart to take back control from the developers. We understand that the decisions involved in creating the local plan are difficult and we know there will never be a local plan that pleases everyone. However this is an evidence-based process where the

will of the residents as represented through their elected representatives needs to be heard. There have already been three consultations allowing the people of Hart to express their wishes.”

Co-Chairman Max Clark added:

“After a long period of preparation, consultation and debate, with contributions from all sides, FACE IT is pleased that Hart is now at last taking a pragmatic and forward-looking approach to its local planning to regain control of the planning process. We are hopeful that this long-term approach will stop the forced urban extension activity which has taken over the area in recent years”

FACE IT is pleased to see that good use will be made of brownfield sites including Sun Park at Frimley and ‘Hartland Village’ at Pyestock. However we are still concerned at the lack of infrastructure and affordable housing that these bring, a deficit which will need to be made up elsewhere.

FACE IT notes that there is still work to do: to make the best job of progressing the plan to the next stage, starting the long search and evaluation, consultation, planning and design process for a new settlement, avoiding many of the recent planning pitfalls, and ensuring that such issues as coalescence, infrastructure, transport and environment etc. are suitably and properly addressed.

--- Ends ---

Note to Editors:

FACE IT is a local campaign group for the Fleet and Crookham areas of Hart with an increasing membership and profile. The group has been actively engaged in the planning process and has encouraged Hart to review and improve local plans for the benefit of the community and the environment.

The FACE IT group is campaigning for a better local development plan for Hart that provides full and balanced arguments for and against all the potential development sites in Hart and not just for those to the west of Fleet. A key aim of FACE IT is to make the critical information that needs to be considered for planning housing available and understandable to everyone so that they can actively influence local decision-makers.

The sheer number of homes being approved, many on appeal against the Council’s wishes, is of great concern and currently includes over 400 homes at

Grove Farm adjacent to Crookham Village and West Fleet, and 300 homes approved at Watery Lane, Church Crookham. These are in addition to a further phase of 170 homes at the 'Edenbrook' development to the west of Fleet, and 1500 homes which are agreed in principle at 'Hartland Village' (the old Pyestock site) to the East of Fleet.

The Proposed Submission Local Plan, Sustainability Appraisal and supporting documents are available online at www.hart.gov.uk and in hard copy (Local Plan only) at Hart District Council Offices in Fleet, at Town and Parish council offices, and at libraries within the District.

For further information contact chairman@faceit-group.org or see the FACE IT website at <http://www.faceit-group.org>