

EAST GRINSTEAD TOWN COUNCIL

Notes of a meeting convened by East Grinstead Town Council held in the Meridian Hall, East Grinstead, on Tuesday 30th May 2006 at 8p.m to discuss the East Grinstead Area Action Plan.

Present: Councillor James Baldwin (in the Chair), C J Rolley, (Town Clerk)
169 Councillors and local residents, including some from the immediately surrounding areas.

Councillor James Baldwin, Leader of East Grinstead Town Council welcomed all present to a most important meeting on behalf of the Town Council. He said it was important as he hoped it would mark a new phase in the consultation process established by the District Council. He said that not only must the community tell Mid Sussex District Council what it thinks about their Plan but must offer an alternative to it that addresses the key issues it raises.

Councillor Baldwin emphasised his wish to see the meeting as a positive and constructive starting point for the Town coming together to work on alternatives to the District Council's Plan, a Plan for the Town and a Plan that the Town can support. He reminded that the previous Town Meeting on November 1st followed the rejection of the last draft Area Action Plan by District Council members on October 19th led by local Councillors. It had helped to define an alternative agenda through the resolution passed that night.

Councillor Baldwin said that everyone had hoped the District Council would listen to local Members. The Town Council had urged a 'fundamental and substantive' change in their approach after the October vote and saw the November resolution as a real basis for moving forward. Regrettably he said things had not moved forward as hoped and the East Grinstead community has been left disappointed and let down. Let down on housing numbers because the draft AAP still proposes far too many houses; let down on traffic relief as none of the routes deliver the relief that East Grinstead wants and there is now the added twist of the Worth Way option to devastate town as well as country; and let down on infrastructure. Where he asked is the assurance the Town can cope when even the developers make plain their own doubts?

So he said it has been necessary to meet again, as promised in November, but in a spirit of determination to persuade the District Council to listen this time. To make them listen with a constructive and coherent way forward based on local consensus and not District Council or developer diktat. Accordingly he urged the meeting to say no to the Plan and also to say what the Town wants for its future.

With all of this in mind Councillor Baldwin identified the purpose of the meeting as being to hammer home again the opposition of the Town to this AAP in its latest guise, to agree what an alternative AAP should look like, and to pass a further resolution to give shape to the agreement. To assist in this all present had received a document comprising a summary of the current position against the November 1st resolution prepared by the Town Clerk and a draft resolution prepared after wide consultation to provide a structure for discussion. So, he hoped it would now be possible to begin to build the right future for the Town. To start the discussion he called upon Town Mayor and District Councillor Jim Joyce Nelson to say a few words.

Councillor Baldwin asked Councillor Jim Joyce-Nelson, the Town Mayor, to speak first. Councillor Joyce-Nelson said that as Town Mayor, a District Councillor, Town Councillor, and above all resident of East Grinstead he had chosen to live in East Grinstead and was delighted to do so. He said he had a high regard for the town and its people. He recognised

that there were real issues associated with the Town and its future that need addressing including homes, employment and traffic relief. He considered it essential that the Area Action Plan should meet local needs and protect the unique identity of East Grinstead. As a District Councillor he had tried to persuade Mid Sussex District Council to focus upon fewer houses, more jobs and a greater emphasis on regeneration. In his view issues cannot be solved in isolation. What happens in East Grinstead has a knock-on effect to other towns and villages in the community. East Grinstead can say no to what is proposed but must be prepared to put something in its place. In this regard it is essential, in his view, to avoid piecemeal development supported by developers, which takes its focus from developers needs and wants and not from those of the community. He wished to encourage real public participation and urged those present to tell Mid Sussex District Council what they really think about the proposals. For his part he said that he will continue to listen to what is being said and do all he can to actively represent the best interests of the community that he felt privileged to serve.

Richard Barnby, a prominent member of the PRC and a resident of the Stone Quarry area, began by thanking the Town Council for calling the meeting. He felt that this was a useful follow-up to the previous meeting held on 1st November. He wished to remind the meeting that the first Area Action Plan that was rejected on 26th October 2005 at Mid Sussex District Council was not fit for purpose and indeed was unlawful. This second Plan regrettably, he felt, was now out for consultation following an inadequate timetable and scrutiny to enable District Members to properly consider the content and whether it reflected the changes they had requested first time round. In fact he stressed there were very few changes and that many facts had been exposed as fantasy. For example he was disappointed that traffic figures comparing on the basis of 2016 and not 2004, that we are now looking at 4,500 houses not 2,500 and yet the transport figures only take account of 2,500. Also he said the transport model assumes 800 commuters out of East Grinstead but this number will in fact be nearer 5,000. This will have a huge adverse impact on the A264 between East Grinstead and Crawley. He said that none of the options offered provide proper relief nor meets the objectives of the Structure Plan. There would be enormous blight on those affected. He considered that the scheme will not work and that there needs to be a new scheme, meeting real community needs – fewer houses, a proper development plan and real traffic relief.

David Jonas, a resident of central Forest Row said it is essential to note the real adverse implications for Forest Row consequential upon the traffic options proposed. He felt that there are no feasible solutions as all will damage either Forest Row or the forest surrounding.

Des Smith, introduced himself as a local resident not affected by any specific route. He wished to agree with the draft resolution that he understood would be voted on later in the meeting. He reminded the meeting that the Area Action Plan must comply with the West Sussex Structure Plan both in terms of houses and the relief road. He was aware that in addition to the proposed site west or south west of East Grinstead land to the east of Crawley is another option. He felt this should have been better explored as most people who will be living in the new houses will be working in the Crawley Gatwick area and on sustainability grounds it would make more sense for them to live closer to where they will be working. Councillor Baldwin said he agreed with this point and was one that had been made regularly by the Town Council in the past.

Steve Collins, a resident of the Charlwoods Road area said he was concerned about the proposals and their impact on East Grinstead. He had looked at the Mid Sussex District Council exhibition in the Library earlier in the day and had an opportunity to speak with the new Leader of Mid Sussex District Council, Councillor Shanahan and his colleague. Councillor Shanahan had told him, in response to a question, that the strategic development of 2,500 houses are proposed to be build where they are because that is where the developers have their landholding.

County Councillor Mrs Margaret Ball said that the Area Action Plan is not a political matter but should be one for East Grinstead to decide. She asked Councillor Baldwin how many times he had been in touch with Councillor Christine Field, the former Leader of Mid Sussex District Council and he replied none. He said that although the Town Council had asked to be a fully participating member of the Joint Members Action Group initially Councillor Field had refused this request. However subsequently the Town Council had been invited to participate as an invitee. He said that East Grinstead was fortunate in having 11 excellent District Councillors who were able to fully represent local views to Councillor Field and her senior colleagues.

David Shepherd introduced himself as a long-standing resident living on the edge of the Worth Way. He said he did not want a relief road along the back of his garden and that we should learn from history. He said that the Beeching Way cost £4 million pounds to build although initially budgeted at only £2 million pounds. This road had made the traffic problem worse in London Road. What East Grinstead needs, he said, is a proper by-pass to rid the town of heavy vehicles and other traffic that does not need to use the Town Centre. It was unfortunate he said that the A22 was declassified about 1970 and therefore the Department of Transport is no longer responsible with responsibility now vested in the various county councils who cannot afford to provide a proper by-pass. As for St. Margaret's Loop he said this is a "Hornets nest". Prior to Local Government reorganisation in 1974 East Grinstead Urban District Council were going to dump rubbish in the loop. The residents took them to court however and won and a protection order was placed on this. To date he had been unable to find any of the papers although Waughs Solicitors acted for the residents. He is still investigating. In his view the Worth Way is a sick joke created by developers. He too agreed with the latest draft resolution placed before the meeting. In his own mind he was clear that this development is being foisted on East Grinstead because Mr Prescott had wanted it. He referred to many problems of infrastructure, not least water. In recent times he had discussed this issue with both District Councillor Mrs Field and County Councillor Mrs Ball. Councillor Baldwin thanked Mr Shepherd for his comments which he felt were helpful. He affirmed that there is a strong link between the houses and the Relief Road and that the data produced to date would appear to clearly show that there is no relief, which meets the objectives of the Structure Plan, from any of the routes proposed. He said he had noted the recent comments of Mr Soames that the development needs to be proportionate to the infrastructures ability to cope with new development and in his view this must inevitably mean a much smaller scale of development.

Heidi Brunsdon asked whether it would be possible to reclassify the A22 as a truck road in order that the government can assume funding responsibility for the necessary infrastructure required?

Sharon Hoskins of Burns Way said that the Town deserves a proper and well thought-out Plan to meet its needs. She said that Bolnore Village at Haywards Heath which is a recent major development within Mid Sussex still has no primary school despite initial promises and that this is proving extremely problematic for the young families who have moved onto the estate in the expectation that this would be provided. She said that East Grinstead must not get into the same position and that if there is to be any sort of development there must be very clear legal safeguards to ensure that promises made now are kept.

Councillor Lee Marmara, a Town Councillor, said we should ask ourselves what we would like included in an Area Action Plan. He thought affordable housing, which is reflected in the current AAP, is one area that must remain. Speaking on behalf of those who have grown up in the town and cannot afford to live here he said it is essential that there is a constant supply of new affordable housing including housing for rent and part ownership and that this must also meet the needs of key workers. He also felt that any new Plan, unlike the one currently tabled, must properly address issues of local employment. He said that 4,500

homes will produce at least 5,000 workers. However the 10 hectares of new employment space proposed, some of which will be required to accommodate those units removed from Charlwoods Industrial Estate, might only ultimately reflect 4.3 hectares of new employment space and that this is likely to only meet up to 860 jobs. He was concerned at the shortfall of 4,140 jobs locally, the impact of which is not currently addressed. A Plan must he said meet the employment needs of East Grinstead.

Councillor Stephen Barnett, a Member of Mid Sussex District Council and East Grinstead Town Council, told the meeting that the South East Plan that has recently been published for consultation and which covers the period 2006-2026 requires the economy of this area to be less reliant upon Gatwick. The amount of employment at the airport, and associated with the airport, is not necessarily on a continually upward trend. Insofar as traffic relief is concerned he advised the meeting that the one amendment that had been approved at the Mid Sussex District Council meeting on 26th April, and which he had personally moved, was to ensure that within the sustainability document all traffic figures compare the 2016 scenario with housing and the 2004 scenario without. Regrettably notwithstanding the Council's own policy agreement to this amendment being carried the final version did not reflect this which he felt must raise questions as to the validity/legality of the Plan. Whilst he recognised that in the main traffic figures within the report are full and correct they are open to various interpretations and could have been made clearer. He said that he could support some aspects of the Area Action Plan including, for example, affordable housing, he stressed that there is some commuting into East Grinstead from outside not only from local villages but from farther away and the housing needs of those individuals also need to be taken into account on a sustainable basis. He regretted that affordable housing has not necessarily been addressed as adequately as it might have been in recent years. He also mentioned the requirement within the Plan for an enhanced Imberhorne Secondary School and a new Primary School to be provided. He said such provision would need to reflect the number of children to be served within the catchment area in order to ensure viability.

Councillor Ian Dixon, the Deputy Town Mayor, a District and Town Councillor, said that he had been impressed with much of what had been spoken about at the meeting. He had particularly noted the comments of Mr Shepherd. He did not think any of the relief road on offer would work nor provide the relief required in the Structure Plan. His view was only a full ring road would work and clearly he recognised the fact that this is unlikely to be affordable or supported by the local authority. He said that East Grinstead must learn to say no to what is being proposed. He considered East Grinstead to be a most pleasant town and environment, a delightful place and it mustn't be carved up. He urged everyone present to make their views known clearly to Mid Sussex District Council and assured the meeting that local East Grinstead Members are strongly opposed to the Plan.

Mr Marcus Allen a resident of Queens Road said that Queens Road is designed to carry a huge amount of traffic. Pressure on the road and the local infrastructure will increase markedly if Martells redevelopment plans go through. He advised the meeting that the redevelopment of the site for retail would, in spatial terms, exceed the floor space currently being occupied by Waitrose, Sainsbury's and Homebase together. In addition he said that there would be some 120 houses. The by-pass would not in his view help any of this and would not divert any traffic away from Queens Road similarly the by-pass would have no positive affect when the Bluebell Railway comes into East Grinstead, a development which he said he welcomed. He mentioned the relief road proposal 3B from the Dukes Head to Ashurst Wood bends at Brambletye. He felt this was only a preferred option because it is a road almost solely within West Sussex. The more obvious and better solution would be a road from the south of Forest Row to the east of East Grinstead (all within East Sussex) to a route north of Felbridge (within Surrey) and then following the Gatwick flight path to Crawley. This would not be built however as it would fall within County Councils which are not responsible for the AAP, which have no accountability for the Structure Plan and which are not affected by the house building. The westerly routes have been proposed because they

are within West Sussex and because they serve the proposed development. These preferred routes within the Area Action Plan would not in his view provide any relief. He wondered whether this was all about politics. He said that East Grinstead have had some 1,000 houses in the last 10 years but there had been no noticeable infrastructure to go with this although he did observe that we currently have a hosepipe ban. He also expressed concerns that some local Members may be considered to have predetermined the issue if they make strong statements against the plans in one place and then have to reconsider elsewhere. Councillor Barnett assured him that this is not the case given that Members properly declare their interests. Councillor Baldwin observed in support of Mr Allen's comments that piecemeal development does not produce the scale of infrastructure that goes with holistic and larger scale developments.

Bill Glenister of The Meads asked whether in the light of Councillor Barnett's response to the question of predetermination that Mid Sussex District Council are breaking the rules in the light of their initial dialogues with the developers, the developers involvement throughout with the Plan and the District Council's responsibility for producing this. Councillor Barnett observed that in his view they weren't although he recognised that this was a difficult area.

Peter Brooks of Buckhurst Way and a lifelong resident of East Grinstead asked how we can get relief from additional housing without a relief road. He was concerned that even without a strategic development of 2,500 houses there would still be 2,000 more houses, which would produce additional traffic from which there would need to be relief. He could not see how internal solutions only could produce this. He questioned whether any traffic relief is deliverable.

Christine Armstrong asked whether the traffic studies show origins of journeys and destinations. She had a suspicion that most traffic was local although she recognised that there would be some through traffic including lorries and large goods vehicles. Councillor Baldwin said that Savell, Bird Axon had produced a very detailed strategic transport assessment report and that what Mrs Armstrong had observed was correct namely that much of the traffic within East Grinstead is local.

Peter Smith of Turners Hill Road said he was supportive of the draft resolution to be put before the meeting later but wondered how the Town Council would be able to take forward recommendations in relation to developing an alternative approach to housing growth and traffic relief for East Grinstead? Councillor Baldwin said that clearly responsibility for the Area Action Plan is Mid Sussex District Council's. However the Town Council had included a sum for traffic consultancy within their budget that could be used to tailor advice into a plan framework sufficiently viable and well thought-out that the Town Council could facilitate and co-ordinate using community expertise as appropriate.

Tim Bull, a member of the Association of Imberhorne Residents gave the meeting some background history. He said that the Inspector had been told at the Public Inquiry that East Grinstead supported the proposed Strategic Development, he had also been told that all previous identified sites were built on and that no others were available other than the Strategic Development site, and he had also been assured that a suitable route for the Relief Road was available. All of these had been proven to be untrue and he noted that Route 3A which had been previously proposed as a preferred option in the now rejected first draft Area Action Plan was no longer a preferred option for reasons which the local community had clearly identified long before the principal authorities had. He said that there was much talk of a by-pass, as opposed to a relief road, but he said that this required central government funding and this is just not available notwithstanding central government's release of its funding embargo on such schemes. A by-pass for East Grinstead is not on the central government radar and would be many years in advance if at all. Whilst in his view this could be the subject of a valid debate about whether we need a by-pass or not this cannot be, and is not, an issue now. Conversely issues like employment and affordable housing are valid

local concerns that do need to be urgently addressed. He observed that the first talks between Mid Sussex District Council and the developers had taken place in 1997 and it was from those initial discussions that the strategic development site was included in the Structure Plan and why we are now debating the issue of 2,500 houses. From that and from the infrastructure gain that can be produced we now have a "ballpark" figure for a road. Similarly arising from that and the scale of development proposed we have 750 affordable homes (30% of the total provision) and 800 local jobs, not because these represent local needs but because they all directly flow from out of the developer's proposals. In his view none of this works nor is it related to local needs but it is developer influenced and inspired. As such he was sure this plan would fail. He urged that Mid Sussex District Council should start again and set targets, and specific needs to be programmed. Also he said that it is important to keep a watch on developments at Crawley and Gatwick, areas that may be prepared to take additional housing. He said that they are regenerating and that we need to be aware of that. Similarly Mid Sussex District Council and West Sussex County Council need to be aware of what is going on immediately over the border from East Grinstead.

Town Councillor Edward Belsey said that he wished to endorse everything that Tim Bull had said. He felt that East Grinstead needs to be constructive in this debate and that any houses must integrate with improvements to local transport provision, including any relief road. He supported the idea of East Grinstead Town Council progressing such a plan.

Dr. Michael Vickers of Turners Hill Road said that it had been a good meeting. He thought things were turning full circle and he would support the draft resolution proposal. He felt it essential that future planning must be driven by the town and not by developers and that what is proposed is the right direction.

Councillor Barry Starmer, a member of Mid Sussex District Council and East Grinstead Town Council, said he too had been impressed by all that he had heard at the meeting. He said that he would very much support some representatives from the various residents associations working with the Town Council to coordinate the provision of alternative plan proposals.

At the end of the discussions Councillor Baldwin summed up. He said he had been immensely impressed with all that he had heard. He said that it showed East Grinstead could have a good debate without shouting and ranting. He felt that the meeting had moved towards something that the town could work around and have ownership and pride in. It was clear that everyone present cared deeply for the Town. He recognised that any plan for the Town must work in terms of traffic relief, local jobs, local housing and local people. There must be guarantees on infrastructure. He confessed to not knowing what number of new houses would be required but this could be properly evaluated. It was clear though that there must be some more houses in order to meet local needs and that this must have the appropriate level of infrastructure. Any proposals should, he emphasised, keep the best of the town as it is but take it forward and ensure that East Grinstead sees off the threats of Crawley and Tunbridge Wells and does not become a satellite, particularly of the former. The Area Action Plan he said had started from the requirements of Mr Prescott, and from the West Sussex Structure Plan but it was clear that people in East Grinstead want to start from what East Grinstead needs and for any plan to succeed it must be a plan of which the Town itself is apart.

Councillor Baldwin then moved on to the draft resolution which had been tabled at the start of the meeting and which all those attending the meeting had had a copy of on arrival. This was formally RESOLVED with no one present voting against.

RESOLVED:

1. The Meeting notes the consultation on the Area Action Plan (AAP) is based on documentation rejected by all the Town's District Councillors.

It also notes that that the draft Plan has failed to meet the stated wishes of local Councillors, and the Resolution adopted at the Town Meeting on November 1 2005, for a Plan based on a fundamentally more open and interactive process, which offers options that: —

- (a) are dictated explicitly by East Grinstead's own needs, character and separate identity as a historic town;
 - (b) provide for a much lower scale of house building in East Grinstead;
 - (c) provide significant house building closer to the relevant employment opportunities;
 - (d) deliver wider benefits to the town, including affordable homes, regeneration, employment and infrastructure;
 - (e) reduce traffic in the town as a whole significantly below 2004 levels, including tested improvements of existing roads in and around the town, avoids strategic gaps and unavoidable intrusion in the AONB, fully tests all potential to aggravate "rat runs", and also includes tested A22 relief road options north of Felbridge and south of Forest Row.
2. The Meeting considers the Area Action Plan's proposed growth of 4,545 houses excessive. It threatens the character and the separate identity of the district's foremost historic town, while offering no safeguards on infrastructure provision. The Meeting calls for a plan with a lower level of house building in East Grinstead. For any balance of house building required, small-scale sites and previously-developed land should be considered; and also locations closer to the relevant employment opportunities."
3. The Meeting considers that none of the relief road routes published in the District Council's consultative documents are acceptable and calls for traffic relief projections to be urgently provided for consultation on the following transport options: —
 - a relief road route South of Forest Row, utilising the existing road network wherever possible;
 - junction and other improvements to the Town's existing road system as an alternative to a relief road funded by excessive development.
4. The Meeting calls upon the Town Council to develop an approach to housing growth and traffic relief for East Grinstead, observing all the stipulations of the 1 November Town Meeting Resolution — an approach that can win the consensus of the Town's people. The Town's District Councillors are urged to press the District Council to adopt this approach as soon as possible.

At the end of the meeting Councillor Baldwin thanked everyone for their attendance and wished them a safe journey home.

The meeting concluded at 9.19pm.