

**Leader of the Council's Speech to Council on 2 February 2004 moving the  
Council's formal policy response to the West Sussex Structure Plan 2001-2016  
Deposit Draft Modifications**

In moving his proposal Councillor Baldwin gave the following introductory address:

“It's no exaggeration to say that the County Structure Plan holds our Town's future in its hands, with its proposed massive housing expansion. So this is a vital consultation for East Grinstead. Our meeting tonight must give a powerful response to the County Council on the draft Plan.

“We must speak for the Town. We've reviewed the draft and it's just not good enough. We must say loud and clear to the County Council – ‘you haven't listened to the Town so far; it's time you began listening and began to act on our concerns’. That belief underlies my resolution tonight.

“Of course, we can see the opportunities inherent in the Draft for affordable housing, traffic relief and investment, but we - and the Town - also see grave threats come from inadequate or insensitive implementation of the proposed development. The Town Council wants to lead the fight to ensure any development happens only if it benefits the existing community and preserves the Town's identity. Our Vision is for a Town with greater job, shopping and housing opportunities, a Town not choked by traffic congestion and a Town that retains its special character. Make no mistake: we will resist any aspect of any development that compromises that Vision. We are not in the business of creating a clone of Crawley nor do we want a repeat of the poor planning and inadequate infrastructure provision that characterised the Town's last spate of imposed development in the 1970's and 1980's.

“The key issue is that whether 2500 dwellings is good or bad for the Town depends on how plans are prepared and implemented, exactly what is implemented, and the extent to which our community is involved – only the community knows what's best for the community, not the planners in Haywards Heath or Chichester. Let's stress yet again this Council never asked for these houses. The County Council's proposals followed the Government's instruction for more housebuilding in the South East.

“It's true East Grinstead has been chosen as a possible location because of its nearness to Gatwick. Yet this provides a “now or never” opportunity to obtain the traffic relief and new investment the Town needs. This Council's existing policy, set last February by the last Administration, reflects a realistic understanding of why the houses are being proposed. It also establishes clear definitions of the necessary conditions to safeguard and benefit the Town. As such, it remains a robust starting point not least as this Administration was elected upon it last May.

“But we now need to move on as a new Council and to reflect what we've heard since our election. We said we'd listen before reviewing our policy and we have. We've listened hard to residents groups, planning and roads experts, developers and even other councils. Based on the conclusions from our listening, now is the time for us to show leadership.

“Leadership means being realistic. That means we cannot stop the houses tonight by saying the Structure Plan is fatally flawed or that the referendum showed a large vote against it. I am afraid such a policy may gain brief glory in the local press letters page but would let down the Town’s long term interests and our mandate to protect them. No – realism says we can’t stop the houses but we can have a significant influence on the detail of the implementation of the development package. We must seize the chance for that influence and not throw away it away in some futile gesture. So we should work to influence the development, to get all those who care for the Town behind us to ensure we get the very best deal for the Town: a deal that brings real benefits to its future.

“Leadership means being responsive. Our new policy must reflect what we’ve learnt from our review process. That means recognising many people fear the loss of the Town’s identity if it’s allowed to sink into a Greater Crawley and they fear the Town’s already frail infrastructure being overwhelmed. It means recognising the strength of feeling as shown in the Referendum. It also means recognising the demands of young people for more affordable housing, the desire of the community for a more vibrant Town Centre and the Town’s endless campaigning for traffic relief. But above all Leadership means being responsible. That means not ducking hard choices and being clear when and where we need to defend the Town. We can and will attack the areas where the Structure Plan draft is weak or leave the Town exposed. And this draft is weak and woolly in too many areas. The resolution before you seeks to highlight them. It seeks to address them by building in safeguards around the relief road, infrastructure, affordable housing, and community consultation. It restates our primary policy, a policy that we have not nor will not waver from and a policy which is far from being weak or woolly: no proper relief road, no houses.

“I believe we should proclaim three messages tonight: To the Developers – watch out for us, we’re looking to ensure you fulfil every detail of your commitments. To the County and District Councils – make sure you consult us on the detail of the Structure Plan implementation, as we are the Town’s elected leaders. And, most importantly, To the Town – tell the County Council what you think but also work with us, trusting your Town Council to lead the fight to safeguard the Town’s identity and secure its future. So let’s move forward tonight on a strong, united and committed basis and do what is right for the future of the Town by passing this resolution.”