

EAST GRINSTEAD TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of a Public Meeting held in the Meridian Hall, East Court at 8pm on Thursday 28th February 2008 to discuss the Mid Sussex Core Strategy.

Present: Councillor James Baldwin, Leader of the Town Council (in the Chair)
CJ Rolley, Town Clerk - Minutes
110 other people including Town Councillors, parishioners, residents
from neighbouring parishes and local press.

Councillor Baldwin, the Leader of the Town Council welcomed everybody to the meeting. He reminded the meeting that it had been convened by the Town Council to advise on their own resolution of 4 February 2008, set out below, and to hear the views of the general public on the Core Strategy generally.

1. The Town Council believes the Core Strategy should reflect the principles that won wide East Grinstead community support in the Town Council's Community Review on the Area Action Plan and in the November 1 2005 and May 30 2006 Town Meeting Resolutions.
2. It is clear that the draft Core Strategy fails to do this. It also fails to provide
 - * A compelling strategic vision for the Town.
 - * Credible and robust evidence base to underpin its key thrusts
 - * Identification and comprehensive discussion of all options
3. The Town Council is particularly surprised and disappointed at the draft's focus on a single contingency of 1500 houses plus partial relief road should there be a failure to deliver the Area Action Plan's proposed 2,500 house strategic development with full relief road. The Council considers this flies in the face of work carried out by consultants retained by Mid Sussex District Council and West Sussex County Council, including Peter Brett Associates, to work on this option (DS10). The Council agrees with the Leader of the District that this is the 'worst of all worlds' option.
4. The saved policy LOC1 without appendices makes it clear that a large-scale mixed-use development is required to the west and south west of East Grinstead associated primarily with growth in the Crawley/Gatwick area. Given that the Core Strategy is supposed to represent the most appropriate policies, and consider alternatives founded on a credible and robust evidence base, options that deliver the LOC 1 objective (and which are not contiguous with East Grinstead's current boundaries) should have been presented and more rigorously tested. Thus Crabbet Park should be presented as an option in the Core Strategy and not as a fall back position to the East Grinstead proposed allocation, an option to be judged on its own merits.
5. Accordingly the Town Council opposes the Core Strategy as failing to meet the needs of East Grinstead and its current and future residents and commits itself to working for a better way forward for the final version of the Core Strategy.

6. The Town Council restates the requirements it seeks from the Core Strategy, as an open and interactive process to produce options that are dictated explicitly by East Grinstead's own needs, character and identity. In this regard there is a need to produce an evidence-based schedule of fully funded infrastructure requirements that **must** be provided prior to any future housing growth.
7. The Town Council remains committed to working constructively with Mid Sussex District Council to deliver a better way forward that meets the needs of the Town and Mid Sussex as a whole. The Town Council tables the following proposals as fundamental to providing a better way both in the construction and in the delivery of the Core Strategy.
8. The Forward Process
 - 8.1 The Town Council calls for the Core Strategy's forward process to be based on community involvement and evidence-based development planning. The process must culminate in the production of a Masterplan for East Grinstead to provide the heart of the Core Strategy's framework for East Grinstead. The Town Council remains committed to playing its part in this process working in conjunction with its community partners wherever possible.
 - 8.2 The Town Council believes further urgent work is necessary now to provide the evidence base currently lacking in the draft Core Strategy, particularly on employment data and aspirations, infrastructure provision and traffic congestion, specifically linked to the real needs of East Grinstead.
 - 8.3 The Town Council will seek to create a Three Tiers Working Group to ensure regular debate and joint decision-making on all issues relating to the Town's development and Core Strategy generally, such body being based on the successful model already established in Burgess Hill.
 - 8.4 The Council endorses the concept of a Town Fund to control and manage Section 106 monies, including a significant role for the Town Council in the direction of such monies.

Councillor Baldwin began the meeting with the following introductory speech:

"We're here again to discuss yet another Plan for the Town drawn up by others with no mandate, no support and no insight. This time it's called the Core Strategy. It's the latest act in what I now see as a Four Act drama that may yet turn out to be a Tragedy if we don't, together, change Haywards Heath's script and write a happier ending.

"Act One was the Structure Plan and its false promise of 'no road no houses'. Act Two was the Area Action Plan with its blatantly inadequate evidence base and totally discredited conclusions. We're here tonight to discuss Act Three – the Core Strategy which threatens, in the words of Mid Sussex District Council's own Leader, 'the worst of all worlds' for the Town: mass housing and no relief road. Act Four will be the last act when everything is brought together to determine the Town's future – housing numbers, traffic, jobs, infrastructure and so on.

“Tonight is about demanding that we all, who care so much about the Town, get the final say on what’s in that last Act. Tonight is about demanding the opportunity to say what we want and are finally listened to by those that have so far ignored us.

“What’s different from previous consultations is that the Core Strategy is not just about East Grinstead but the whole of Mid Sussex. This gives us the opportunity to say what we want and show how it can be accommodated in such a way that also delivers Mid Sussex District Council’s needs to meet its centrally imposed housing targets. Thus we can deliver not only a better way for East Grinstead but also for Mid Sussex.

“The Cross-Party Town Council resolution before you is intended to help in that process. The Resolution makes it clear that the Council rejects the Core Strategy. It makes it clear the Council wants to work to create a better way forward, to create a Vision with the Town as a whole for what the Town should look like over the next 20 years. Above all the Resolution makes it clear the Council wants a solution that works for East Grinstead’s needs, and not one imposed from outside in the face of massive local opposition.

“That’s enough from me. Tonight is for you, the people of East Grinstead , to speak out. As my Conservative counterpart, Cllr Liz Bennett, says: ‘It’s important to remember it’s not what we as Councillors want but what the residents of East Grinstead want.’ These are words that Haywards Heath will not like but words I fully endorse.”

Following his introductory speech Councillor Baldwin opened the meeting to others for comment about the Mid Sussex Core Strategy.

John Bridle, Vice Chairman of East Grinstead Society said that the Town’s people and East Grinstead Society had sent a very clear message to Mid Sussex District Council some eighteen months previous with their objections to the Area Action Plan. He felt that we were now experiencing something that could best be described as déjà vu. It was quite clear that people know now what the District Council plans for their town and he said it was important that the town should stand together. In this he wished to give his full support to the resolution of the Town Council that was set out on the agenda for the public meeting.

Nick Beal, a resident of the Garden Wood Estate and a member of the East Grinstead Society said that he considered that the Core Strategy is something of a pig in a poke. He said that the Core Strategy raises uncertainties into the future and that because of those uncertainties it is difficult to come to a conclusion. Whilst Mid Sussex District Council contends that the Area Action Plan proposal for 2500 homes is still a preferred scheme he questioned whether the Core Strategy has diminished some of the Area Action Plan commitments. Whilst Mid Sussex District Council state there is no need for the public to repeat their AAP objections he was concerned to ensure that the District Council do indeed take those into account in their evaluation of the Core Strategy. He referred to the Section 106 funds and said that developers are expected to produce significant financial resources towards infrastructure improvements whether this is for 2500 houses or the contingency of 1500 houses as an alternative strategic development. He wondered whether the size of their contribution was known and how the townspeople would know whether it was adequate to meet the requirements. He also wondered whether there was any information known about the number of jobs that could be produced with 10 or 15 hectares of employment land. He was concerned that East Grinstead would still be a dormitory of Crawley with inevitable implications on the road network due to out-commuting. He also questioned what proportion of the larger 2500 homes strategic development would be social/affordable and whether these contributed towards infrastructure costs. He felt that the partial relief road was a joke inevitably impacting upon traffic coming into the centre of East Grinstead and adversely impacting on some of the major connecting roads including Turners Hill Road and Hurst Farm Road. He commented on the known existing problem of rat running through West Hoathly and Sharpthorne, rat running which would continue with any reduced scheme. He

said that nothing in the Core Strategy gives him confidence and that there had not been sufficiently adequate evaluation of other options.

Speaking from the Chair Councillor Baldwin said that Mr Beal had made good points. He emphasised that infrastructure needs to come first whereas the Core Strategy is proposing housing first and infrastructure second. He reluctantly concluded that there is no evidence base that gives confidence in this matter.

Regarding the housing numbers, Rodabe Rudin, a resident of Ashurst Wood asked whether there was any likelihood of the government saying the town has to have the housing whether or not public consultation considered that this is not the best way to progress. Councillor Baldwin indicated that whilst he couldn't specifically comment on that, he and the Town Council believe that there was every reason for Mid Sussex District Council to look at Crabbet Park as a possible solution to meet some of the future housing numbers. He said that clearly housing targets that were set by central government need to be met and that there are better options than those currently proposed. He regretted that Mid Sussex District Council had not evaluated Crabbet Park in greater detail than they had and that this is clearly an issue for that authority. He said that there should be a level playing field of options.

Sue Bicker of Crawley Down commented on the partial relief road problem with the 1500 houses strategic contingency. She said that she feared this was merely an access road and if so felt that it would be a disastrous option.

John Corbett, a resident of Holtye Road asked how many houses had been built in East Grinstead over different periods of time. The Town Clerk advised that whilst the Town Council isn't specifically in possession of that information recent trends had tended to be in the order of over 100 units a year based upon planning applications approved by Mid Sussex District Council. However he indicated that the population overall had not increased at the level one might have expected because of the demographic changes in society that had seen average house occupancy decrease over time and more single person occupancies. He said that this was in line with the national trend also.

Bill Glenister, a resident of The Meads asked whether the owners of Hill Place Farm and other landowners might now have sold to the developers in readiness for the planned housing development. He was advised that whilst the Town Council had no knowledge of that it was unlikely and that probably pre option agreements would have been entered into. He also commented on Section 106 agreements, as he understood a review was taking place and that the Town Clerk would be assisting Mid Sussex District Council with this. The Town Clerk confirmed that he had been asked to assist in a review of Section 106 arrangements in Mid Sussex and the way that funding is allocated. He considered that this did provide opportunities to improve current arrangements and to ensure greater benefits for local communities.

Michael Ashley of Fulmar Drive said that a number of people were concerned about the content of the Core Strategy but due to the complexity of the issue found it difficult to formulate a sufficiently robust response. He wondered whether any guidance would be issued. He was told that the Town Council's resolution did provide some indication of the way that the Council would like to proceed but that it was possible a resolution would also come from the public meeting, following further deliberations, and that this could also prove useful as guidance.

Christopher Thompson, living on the Imberhorne Estate, asked what the Three Tiers Group is and was advised by Councillor Baldwin that this comprises representatives of the Town, District and County Councils and is attempting to drive forward an alternative plan on a cross party basis. It was felt that arguments against the existing Area Action Plan and the Core

Strategy are now well rehearsed and that there is a consensus of views developing. The purpose of the Three Tiers Group is to fill a vacuum and work is in progress.

Ann Woodard, living on the Herontye Estate, commented about the proposed Relief Road. She said that it's important where it goes but it is equally important what it's made of. She commented on the A27 west of Chichester which had been constructed of cheap ribbed concrete when constructed some 20 years previously, which has led to huge noise problems that were prejudicial to the amenities of local residents. She did not want such a solution in East Grinstead and there was therefore a need for the Highways Authority to be specific about the engineering solutions and noise effects generally.

Marcus Allen of Queens Road said he smelt a conspiracy. He said proposals for a relief road/bypass dated back to about 1929. He asked what was the point of a relief road as he said we had got one. He asked the meeting when they considered traffic is so bad that it makes the need for a further relief road essential. In his view the only times there are problems on the local roads relates to the times of school runs, mornings and afternoons. He felt that at those times there are hundreds and possibly thousands of cars on the road delivering children to their schools. He said that in Marlow, a town with similar problems, they had had success in getting people out of their cars. He felt that increasing prices of petrol would make a difference as this impacts upon people's ability to pay. He asked what any relief road would be relieving. In his view it would merely take traffic from Surrey and dump it in East Sussex with no economic benefit to West Sussex. He said that the Eden project in Cornwall had generated significant additional traffic but when St. Austell, the nearest town, had been offered a relief road they said no as they wanted the cars and it was important for their economy. He said that people often complain about lack of car parking but in his experience there is usually space. The problem is, he said, that people are inherently lazy and aren't prepared to walk further than they have to. He said that to focus upon a relief road is to divert attention from the real issue, which is houses. In his view we definitely need houses and the only question is how many. The largest house builder Persimmon builds 15,000 houses annually whilst self-builders are the largest single grouping of builders constructing some 25,000 houses annually on a national basis. He said that houses will eventually be built on Imberhorne Farm and he wondered whether up to 100 acres could be allocated for self-build. He said that the largest demand for self-build is likely to come from aircrew working at Gatwick, and that they would welcome this sort of opportunity. In his view technical problems could be overcome and that there are no problems unless one wants a problem.

Bridget Pestell of Crawley Down said that she was shocked at Mr Allen's comments. She said that most parents couldn't let their children walk to school because of distance particularly those living on the outskirts of East Grinstead. For herself she tries to support local shops. She noted the comment about houses but said that those proposals would still result in out-commuting, particularly as the majority of people would probably work at Gatwick or Crawley.

Nigel Manger said that the Parish Council in Forest Row, of which he is Chairman, had been looking at this matter in detail. He personally had read every document all the way through. He said that the Core Strategy reminds him very much of Sir Humphrey and Yes Minister. He drew attention to the Core Strategy, Sustainability Plan and the local development framework generally. He also commented upon traffic modelling and traffic jams that form outside peak periods. He asked whether there was any need for more traffic modelling. He also commented that the South East plan is driving the housing numbers. Councillor Baldwin said that East Grinstead wouldn't compromise its views on housing numbers, and the need for infrastructure, because of the threat of government pressure.

Jane Oatey, of Crossways Avenue said she was concerned at the educational elements contained within the Plan and that these should be met to meet local needs. She wondered

whether anything was known about what specific proposals there were. Councillor Baldwin advised that beyond the general statements contained within the Plan regarding infrastructure precise proposals for secondary and primary schools in the town were not known in this juncture.

Rodabe Rudin said that East Grinstead does have traffic problems. She said that there are difficulties everyday of the week.

Barry Starmer, an East Grinstead Town Councillor confirmed that the A22 is solid with traffic for large portions of everyday. He said that the A22 north south is not the primary source of the congestion difficulties but these stem from the A264 west of Felbridge.

Ken Corsie, a member of the Imberhorne Residents Association said that he has concerns that Mid Sussex District Council has not always accepted that objections voiced by the local community are valid in planning terms. He said he thought that the local arguments against the major development had been well rehearsed locally and that it is important for local residents to back their local associations. He said he was pleased that the Town Council is taking the clear position that it is.

David Jonas, a Wealden District Councillor said that he sits on the local development framework for Wealden. He was pleased to report that East Sussex County Council had come out against the Mid Sussex Core Strategy and was not supportive of the Area Action Plan. He said that the contingency housing proposal had come about because Mid Sussex District Council were not adequately conforming with the planning requirements of their cross boundary colleague authorities. He said there is no evidence base regarding employment numbers and that what is proposed would produce out commuting. However he said that housing numbers are unlikely to be reduced in total but that they should be built in the correct place.

Leonard Oatey of Crossways Avenue said that there is a real danger that the community could get worn down by the sheer number of consultations that have taken place on planning based issues locally over recent years. In his view the town's people have made their position quite clear and those views have been ignored. He was concerned that the extensive infrastructure contributions required may impact on the affordability of houses. He asked whether the country is heading for economic collapse. He reminded the meeting that fields produce crops but that houses produce nothing. He was concerned about building on flood plains and other land that is unsuitable.

Richard Barnby of the Post Referendum Campaign referred to transport modelling. He said that this had only been based upon the 2500 homes strategic development and not on the likely total future housing requirement of 4550 for East Grinstead civil parish to year 2026. He said the only road that clearly shows reducing numbers of vehicles consequent upon a relief road is the A264 between Felbridge and the Dukes Head. He said that the Core Strategy proposes some 3000 new jobs but this was clearly, in his view, unrealistic as the whole of the Mid Sussex District had only created 60 or so jobs in the previously five years. In his view most new jobs would be in Crawley. He regretted that no detailed research had yet been undertaken by the District Council into this aspect. He was concerned that Mid Sussex District Council doesn't have sufficient resources in its planning policy section to undertake the necessary research and to create the evidence base around which future decisions need to be taken.

Freda Hannington of Meadow Court referred to proposals to build houses on meadowland adjacent to the Old Convent. She was concerned that this would come without adequate infrastructure and would have a major impact on the immediate area. The Town Clerk advised that the land in question is allocated, as two sites, in the small scale housing allocations document approved by the Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

following the enquiry in 2007. However, subject to ratification by Mid Sussex District Council, this provides for that authority to produce a planning brief for the site that would address issues such as infrastructure. He said that the Town Council had written to Mid Sussex District Council earlier in the week emphasising the importance of this and he said that he would send Mrs Hannington a copy of that letter for information.

Mike Watts, a Mid Sussex District Councillor representing Crawley Down and also a Worth Parish Councillor said that Mid Sussex District Council needs to provide approximately 15000 new homes throughout the district and that some one third of these will need to be provided for in the north of the district. He said that Crabbet Park would put houses close to where the jobs are likely to be. He said that the site would be easily accessible by Fastway with two road bridges over the A23. Development at Crabbet Park would not create massive numbers of additional commuter miles and therefore would be sustainable. He said that East Grinstead and surrounding areas is getting close to gridlock and he was not confident that there are proposals to address this adequately. He said that he welcomed the creation of the Three Tiers Group.

David Shepherd, living on the Imberhorne Estate, said that the A22 was declassified early in the 1970's and was passed to the County Council as their responsibility. He said that the relief road along the Beeching Way had done little to address overall congestion. This had originally been estimated to cost £2 million but had eventually cost £4 million. He said he would support any proposal that would get through traffic out of the town. He said that people in East Grinstead commute not only to Crawley on the A264 but also to Croydon and London up the A22. He said that the Town's MP should be involved in trying to get the A22 reclassified as a trunk road. The Town Clerk said that there had been extensive correspondence with government departments over the years, including with the town's MP. It was quite clear that there is no likelihood of reclassification of the A22 as a trunk road.

Peter Roberts, a resident of The Meads said that responsibility for roads in East Grinstead has rested with West Sussex County since 1974. He regretted the fact that West Sussex County Council had never been able to work productively with its neighbours in East Sussex and Surrey and that until there is effective cross boundary partnership working little or no progress will be made.

East Sussex County Councillor Francis Whetstone said that whilst he didn't altogether agree with the recollections of Mr Jonas he could confirm that East Sussex County Council is pressing for early meetings with West Sussex County Council, Wealden District Council, Lewes District Council and Mid Sussex District Council to create a unified position. He said that East Sussex County Council would not agree to any road around East Grinstead that will increase traffic through Forest Row by more than 5%.

Heidi Brunsdon, an East Grinstead Town and Mid Sussex District Councillor, said she wished to bring a new strand to the discussion. She said that whilst there had been many criticisms made of the Core Strategy and Area Action Plan she had heard little of visions and aspirations. She would find it useful to hear what sort of town the people want in terms of schools, education, leisure and jobs etc.

Mr Corbett said in terms of blue sky thinking we could think of starting to charge for congestion. He thought it might be possible to address this by means of one strategically placed camera in the centre of the town that would record number plates. He did not advocate charging locals. A number of other members of the public present shouted out various things they would like including the need to protect local architecture, the need to fight the closure of Dunnings Mill Squash and Fitness Centre and the introduction of free parking.

At this juncture Tony Lane of the Post Referendum Campaign said he would like to propose a resolution. He said that in approximately 65,000 BC an asteroid hit Mexico and as a consequence all dinosaurs had died out. In 2010 another huge asteroid could hit East Grinstead. This will scatter traffic everywhere and villages will die out. He thanked the Town Council for convening the meeting and the leadership they were showing on this issue. He and representatives of local groups and organisations had been pleased to assist with the stakeholders meeting held at East Court early in February. This public meeting, which follows on from all of that, was enabling the community to unite and to oppose the community strategy imposed by Haywards Heath. He said that the Core Strategy includes stale ideas and was resulting in deadlock. He welcomed the local engagement being facilitated locally and proposed the following resolution, which was duly seconded and then passed **UNANIMOUSLY** by the meeting.

RESOLVED:

We believe the Core Strategy should embrace the principles that won wide East Grinstead community support in the: -

- Town Council's Community Review of the Area Action Plan;
- Town Meeting Resolutions of 1 November 2005 and 30 May 2006.

The District Council's draft ignores the wishes of the Town and fails completely to meet the needs and aspirations of the residents (current and future). This draft Core Strategy is unacceptable and this meeting rejects it.

- The current plans for mass development at East Grinstead are excessive & would have devastating traffic, social, economic & environmental consequences for the Town & the surrounding villages. This is unacceptable & unsustainable.
- It does not offer a coherent strategic vision for the Town designed to meet the needs & aspirations of the local people. The District Council's plans would destroy the District's foremost historic Town.
- It is not founded on a credible & robust evidence base, as required by the law
- It has not properly or fairly evaluated all options for house building within the District on a level playing field - including the sites on the edge of Crawley, the villages and a New Settlement.

This Meeting Demands a Better Way Forward

This meeting supports the Town Council's Resolution adopted on 4 February 2008.

1. We call on our Town Councillors to work with local District and County Councillors to oppose the current proposals. As the District Council seems incapable of making practicable proposals, we ask East Grinstead's own Councillors to step into the vacuum, and to work up a development plan to serve this community's requirements. The development of East Grinstead and the surrounding villages should be initiated by their own elected representatives, and not imposed from outside. A Strategy for the Community, of the Community and by the Community.
2. We call on our own Councillors at all three levels of local Government to work together to co-ordinate the development of a vision for the future of all of East Grinstead and the surrounding villages. The following development principles should apply: -
 - Growth should be organic, in keeping with the historic town, not changing its character to make it a commuter suburb of Crawley
 - Residential expansion must not exceed commensurate, deliverable growth in employment
 - Development must remain conditional on the reduction of traffic congestion below 2004 levels and provision of real traffic relief
 - Avoidance of unacceptable and unnecessary increases in commuting by car, leading to increased greenhouse gas emissions and rat running through the town and surrounding villages

- Robust evidence must be gathered on community infrastructure, employment planning and traffic management before decisions are taken
- An objective evaluation of all options for house building in the District based on best practice.
- Consultation must be genuinely open to comments made.

Following approval of the resolution Councillor Baldwin thanked everybody for their attendance. He said it was clear that there was a real consensus building locally and that apathy must not be allowed to win. He asked people to put their view across to Mid Sussex District Council as a response to the Core Strategy and to encourage their friends and neighbours to do likewise. He said it was important that the District Council are aware of local views. He confirmed that the minutes of the meeting would be available on the Town Council's web site within the following week or so and duly closed the meeting at 9.35pm.