

TOWN COUNCIL URGES HOUSES PLAN DEFERRAL (JULY 2004)

At the Town Council meeting on 5 July 2004 Councillors **UNANIMOUSLY** backed the following **RESOLUTION** calling on the County Council to defer the Structure Plan.

The Town Council, noting the deferral of the Structure Plan by the County Council on June 18,

1. Will continue to fight for a Structure Plan package that provides the Town with an effective and sustainable relief road, affordable housing and improvements in the Town's infrastructure whilst protecting the Town's character

2. Notes the concern throughout West Sussex on the need for adequate infrastructure to meet the Government's large scale housing aspirations and considers that the draft Structure Plan does not adequately address the particular concerns of East Grinstead and its people.

3. Urges the three local County Councillors to join it in opposing the current draft, to press for further deferral of the Structure Plan to address local concerns about the draft and to work with all interested parties to ensure improved safeguards for the Town to be included. These reflect existing Town Council policy and must cover:

(i) The timing of the construction of the relief road

(ii) The provision of at least 30% of affordable housing within any large housing development

(iii) Examination of opportunities to deliver the necessary infrastructure improvements the Town needs on a lower volume of housing than the current 2500 houses defined in the Plan.

(iv) The need for local consensus around the final houses/road/infrastructure package, based on full and extensive consultation with the Town on its concerns around the Structure Plan.

4. Expresses its disgust at the decision of Mid Sussex District Council and West Sussex County Council not to provide a place for it on the new Members Joint Working Group charged with developing the Local Development Framework as potentially a serious impediment to the Town Council's ability to represent the Town's interests in this vital issue.

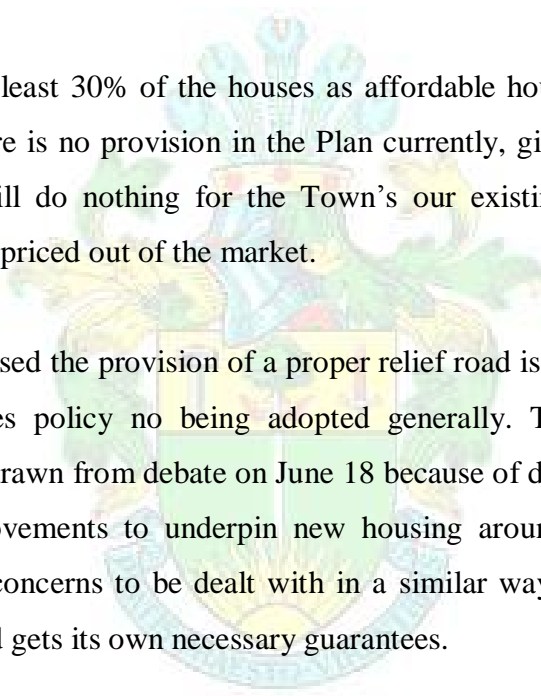
Proposing the resolution, Town Council Leader James Baldwin said:

‘It’s time for some plain talking on the Structure Plan saga. The Plan was deferred to appease local opinion in the south of the county over roads provision. What’s good enough for the south must be good enough for East Grinstead.

At our last debate on the Plan we rightly praised the improvements on the Plan won by County Councillors Andrew Brock and Margaret Collins. We now have the chance to ask all three County Councillors to push hard again and work to address the continuing and widespread local concerns, concerns that have been at the heart of our Policy since the Town was targeted for a large housing development.

In particular we must ask for more assurances on the timing and nature of the proposed relief road. And look for real evidence that the County Council had really listened to the Town’s concerns, as expressed most recently in the petition, over the scale of the proposed development.

Our policy is not about providing Mr Prescott’s houses for him. It’s about delivering solutions to the Towns’ problems. We believe strongly that the Town needs significant improvements in its infrastructure: developer contributions can pay for these. But we also believe the Plan should now ensure ways are explored to meet these needs with a lower number of houses.



We want to see at least 30% of the houses as affordable houses to help the Town's young people. There is no provision in the Plan currently, giving rise to the risk that the new houses will do nothing for the Town's our existing population, with the young increasingly priced out of the market.

We've always stressed the provision of a proper relief road is key - we originated the no road, no houses policy no being adopted generally. The Structure Plan was unexpectedly withdrawn from debate on June 18 because of doubts around guarantees around road improvements to underpin new housing around the A27. The Town Council wants its concerns to be dealt with in a similar way, and the Plan deferred until East Grinstead gets its own necessary guarantees.

Make no mistake, the debate on the relief road isn't over, as far as this Council is concerned it hasn't even started yet.

A word for the 10,000 people who signed the PRC Petition that I will be receiving on 10 July at East Court. We never asked for these houses but have always sought to ensure maximum benefit from them in addressing the Town's problems of traffic congestion, stagnating infrastructure and rising house prices. Our only agenda is the Town's good and we will not allow the Town to be sold short in any of these regards. We are listening now as hard we have always been. We are the Town's local Council, and champion of its interests, or we are nothing. That's why we are looking for a deal that can win local consensus, not one imposed from Central Government, or indeed other tiers of local government. That's why we will continue to fight for consultation with the Town on its future that is real, open and actually influences what happens.

So we've worked hard with all interested parties on this Structure Plan, Officers and Members of other Councils and the Town's residents Groups. We've tried to be constructive and challenging, and certainly not 'cavalier', as has been alleged.

For an example of real cavalier treatment, look to those who control the County and District Councils who think we are not worthy of a place on the new Joint Member

Advisory Group set up by those Councils to consider the detail of the Structure Plan. and the future of our Town.

So much for partnership, so much for wanting to hear the local voice, so much for the Town's concerns.

The fact that the Town's Council is not to be an integral part of the detailed discussions held, behind closed doors, by the County and District Councils, makes it is even more necessary for more guarantees to be written into the Structure Plan. This need further underpins our demand for deferral tonight.

We want everyone to understand three things.

One, This Council will not be taken for granted by anyone.

Two, This Council is not, and never has been, some sort of junior cheer leader for the Structure Plan - the ultimate control over this plan rests with the County and District Councils but the Town Council has its own, independent voice, a voice it will use on the Town's behalf.

Three, This Council is listening and understands the Town's concerns and is committed to fighting for the best result for the Town. We've had some successes in that fight but we still want much more clarity on why we should have so many houses and the start and completion dates of the relief road before we'll back any Structure Plan.

We've always said the relationship between development and infrastructure requirements is crucial and it's still not clear enough. .

I therefore move this resolution which stresses our continuing concerns on the Structure Plan, our clear and continuing expectations for the safeguards the Town needs and our concern at our exclusion by the County and District Councils from their Joint member Advisory Group. “