

THE EAST GRINSTEAD SOCIETY

Charity No 257870

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Mrs Julie Holden
Town Clerk
East Grinstead Town Council
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26th July 2012

Dear Julie

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN (NP) Town Council 3rd Survey - Housing and Infrastructure

The EG Society welcomes this opportunity to comment on the above issues. In doing so we have found the Town Council's website overview of the third Atkins report most helpful. In our letter of 28th November, 2011, the EG Society gave its broad vision for the future. A town proud of its character and why many people like to live here, visit and set up particular kinds of business. The town's topography and existing road infrastructure do limit expansion, to many people part of its attraction. The idea that the town could die without significant housing growth is not true and should not be given credence.

Background

As we said in our letter in planning for the future it is necessary to understand events and planning history over the past decade. The District Council in 2002, to meet its WSCC Strategic Location target of 2500 homes, confirmed they should be built at Imberhorne, in addition to a further 2000 or so in and around East Grinstead over the plan period, ignoring reasons why this would not be feasible for various reasons including the town's topographical character, its difficult road structure, the resulting lack of employment possibilities, the potential damage to tourism, and an ill-founded relief road planners said would make the 2500 possible. Other potential sites for major development in the north of Mid Sussex, for instance at Crabbet Park, were not investigated. We welcome this third Atkins report on junction improvements providing a technical basis for considering potential housing development on the basis of road capacity.

Housing

Some 950 new homes were built during the past 10 years, many more than MSDC's 2004 Local Plan which, largely on the grounds of traffic congestion,

proposed a limit of less than 200 for the whole planning period. Regrettably the Local Plan's wording contained loopholes enabling developers to build many more houses despite the best efforts of some members to halt the tide. To avoid this happening again we believe the NP needs to limit house building until junction changes are shown to have been successful.

Infrastructure

We start from the position that **present** congestion levels, which include the effects of past years' development (the 950), are not satisfactory for the health of East Grinstead. In our view junction improvements should put those right whilst other improvements to make the town more attractive to visitors are put in place, including more car parking capacity and town centre redevelopment including associated homes. When these have been achieved, and if congestion levels permit, further building could be considered. Caution is necessary since in practice developers may not be able to achieve the theoretical road capacity believed possible by Atkins.

Proposal

In view of the above we propose no further building should be approved for a period **after** 'Do minimum' junction improvements have been implemented and assessed for effectiveness in reducing congestion. The Localism Bill is strong on giving residents new opportunities to register what they feel about local planning. A moratorium period on new building until junction improvements have proved their worth would enable past planning decisions to be revisited. For instance, further building at Dunnings Mill where local people's objections based on fear of flooding and dangerous road access were over-ruled. During this period the validity of many of the planning permissions of the 765 could also be reviewed. Not least because doubts have been raised about those given SSHA planning approval some years ago. In allowing them to be placed on the potential sites register we understand the inspector was not told of the effects Habitats Regulations could have on new building within a certain distance of Ashdown Forest. Indeed the whole question of the effects HRs have on building within the area of Ashdown Forest does of course need to be addressed in preparing the Neighbourhood Plan.

Yours sincerely

John Bridle
Chairman