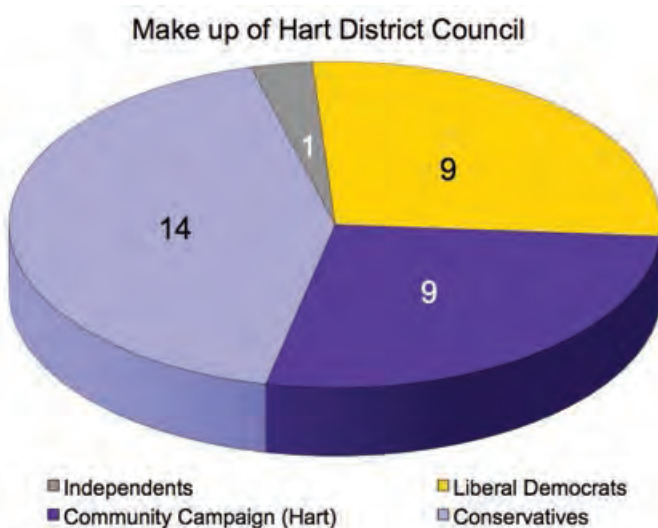


Keeping politics out of it

The Community Campaign (Hart) fought the 2014 Hart district elections on a number of promises. We also emphasised the importance of our having a broad base in the council so that we would be in a position to act on those promises.

With 9 out of our 11 candidates being elected in May, we are in such a position. Being apolitical, we believe that too much energy can be wasted when a council is split into an administration and an opposition.



To this end, we successfully negotiated the formation of a cross party consensus and proportional cabinet with a ratio of members from each of the three main groups. This means that all the political parties have the opportunity to invest their energies in working together rather than wasting time fighting.

The imperative for all groups is to have a Local Plan (LP) adopted, one which would allow Hart to plan for the number of homes which the government statisticians insist are needed, whilst protecting our most precious and eco-sensitive areas from development.

It would be fair to say that politically, some of the members of the Westminster parties find this arrangement uncomfortable at times. However, it is recognised that we owe it to the residents who elected all of us (no matter which party) to work together to get an acceptable LP agreed by the planning inspector. This acts to preserve cohesion.

Keeping promises

Since the election last May, we have worked to keep the promises we made to the electorate. We promised to take a proactive approach to working with the communities we represent to help preserve and enhance the quality of life for all of us. We would hope that anyone who has engaged with us would recognise that we do indeed strive to do this.

We also made two specific promises. The first was that we would stand up against the inappropriate major developments which threaten to consume the more ecologically important sites which surround us. When an application was submitted to build at Watery Lane, threatening the rich biodiversity of the water meadows, we listened to the concerns of local naturalists and were able to successfully articulate these issues to the planning committee.

We recognise Hart needs more housing. However, it is possible to accommodate housing pressure without losing key environmental sites or building in such a way as to overwhelm existing infrastructure. While government policy keeps increasing the housing numbers for Hart, we know some pragmatic compromises, such as a new settlement, are required.

Our second major promise was to look at introducing a car park charging scheme which encouraged both shoppers and retailers to come to Fleet. We'd like to allow a period of free parking for all, 7 days a week; free parking which is not dependent on finding a vacant bay in a side street.

To facilitate this, we need to install pay-on-exit barriers in at least one of the car parks. This avoids having to race back to the car before a Penalty Charge Notice appears on the windscreen. We want to encourage shoppers to relax and spend longer in the town and not worry about getting a parking ticket.

Thanks to our influence on the cabinet, we have been able to secure funding for such barriers to be installed at the Church Road car-park. This is the first crucial step in moving towards a more retail friendly car park charging scheme for Fleet. We have also quashed the plan to build on part of Church Road car park.

Thank you to all who trusted us with your vote, we are now doing what we promised and are working for you and the community as a whole.

Why the go-slow on 20mph limit?

by Alan Oliver

Since the introduction of the 20mph limit on roads between Albert Street and Albany Road, we have had many conversations with local people on whether this has a positive or negative contribution to their quality of life.



Apparently the scheme was introduced, not for safety reasons, but to improve the environment for residents. Hampshire County Council (HCC) promised to consult with residents in Feb 2015, 12 months from adoption. As a group, the Community Campaign are committed to making sure residents get the final say in this and not councillors or council officers.

Following a meeting I had with HCC officers in October 2014, it became apparent that the consultation with residents has been put back to 2016 at the earliest. The reason they gave being "to take account of other 20mph limits being introduced across Hampshire to better formulate future policy". Don't try and find this published on HCC's web site as you won't find it. Another case of Hampshire changing the rules and Fleet's county councillor, Sharyn Wheale, not letting residents know.

Asking the real questions

Notwithstanding this delay, I was able to secure a commitment from the officers to include two additional questions into the eventual consultation; questions which many of you have been asking;

- Should all the roads currently in the scheme remain 20mph?
- Would the 20mph limit be turned into a 20mph zone if residents decide to keep it?

Designating a 20mph zone will almost certainly mean the introduction of speed calming measures (chicanes, junction tables and speed humps). The view of the police is clear on this; they expect 20mph zones to be mainly self-enforcing. They do not see it as a priority to enforce such zones and want the physical design and layout of streets to ensure traffic is restricted to the speed limits.

Personally I am not sure that such calming measures would improve the quality of life for residents, especially as Hampshire favour the introduction of chicanes.

We would urge drivers to respect all 20mph limits. Many of these are introduced outside of schools and the safety of the children using them is paramount.

County council update

by John Bennison

September saw the opening of the new Tweseldown Infants School on the Crookham Park development.

Without extensive lobbying by both the school and local councillors, HCC would have been content to cram the extra children onto the previously combined infant and junior school site. Getting HCC to accept that a new school building was required was a great victory for those who campaigned for splitting the school between two sites.

The proximity of the QEB development site (now Crookham Park) to the existing school, allowed for this fortuitous and creative site split. The result of which is that pupils can now enjoy their education in a spacious environment on both sites.

A strategy for our growing schools

Elsewhere, the county council's policy to bolt extra classrooms onto existing schools continues. Without doubt, this can create a school (primary or secondary) which is too large. HCC's policy inevitably results in play areas being replaced by buildings, thus reducing facilities for the ever-increasing number of children. This has to have a negative impact on the educational qualities of the school environment.

Most developers trying to build a few hundred houses will offer a school site, knowing that HCC cannot afford to build it. Thus existing schools are expanded with 'temporary' classrooms being 'permanently' located on what had once been play areas. Only larger developments, such as Elvetham Heath, enable HCC to justify a completely new primary school.

The secondary school situation is even more dire. Fleet and Church Crookham have two secondary schools. As Court Moor cannot expand due to site constraints, so Calthorpe Park is at risk of becoming a mega-school for over 2,000 pupils.

For the sake of future generations of our children, I believe we need a structured approach to how we combine new housing growth with the provision of suitable education facilities.



John is a serving county councillor and a district councillor for Fleet Central. John takes a keen interest in triathlon and other athletic sports. His family have grown up in the area and he is committed to ensuring that the intrinsic quality of life in Fleet and the surrounding area is not lost.

Elvetham Heath matters

The process of adoption by Hampshire County Council (HCC) of the roads, lights and verges within Elvetham Heath is progressing far too slowly. Without adoption it still remains with the developer to maintain many of these basic items of infrastructure.

Slowing down the adoption process may avoid immediate costs to HCC but is certainly against the spirit of the original agreements when Elvetham Heath was planned. We share the concerns of the parish council and request that HCC step up their efforts to meet their obligations and promises.

Due to the extended time it has taken HCC to start the adoption of roads on Elvetham Heath, essential paperwork has been lost which is needed to provide assurance as to construction techniques. Hence the inconvenience caused to residents with the need to drill bore holes in the roads. More outrageous is that even when a road is adopted by HCC they continue to refuse to maintain the lights and bollards.

In need of illumination

The situation is now so bad that street lights which have been broken for 2 years are being replaced at the expense of the parish council because of their worries over the safety of residents walking into Fleet over the footbridge and children returning from school as the nights draw in.

The unbelievable excuse offered by HCC is that, as the lights don't have a reference number painted on them, they do not exist.



One might ask why the county councillor for Fleet has not stepped in to find a solution for this sorry situation? Certainly she has not stood up for Elvetham Heath residents against HCC bureaucracy nor actively supported the parish council in their quest to resolve these problems.

Localism in action

The parish council is, however, making good progress in acquiring the right to maintain the verges and landscape planting across the residential parts of Elvetham Heath for themselves. Community Campaign cabinet member Alan Oliver has promised Elvetham Heath Parish Council that he will ensure all the money given over for future landscape maintenance by the developer but currently held by Hart District Council is transferred to the parish council as soon as their 'License to Cultivate' is approved.



Elvetham Heath Parish Council do a sterling job of looking after and striving to improve the environment and infrastructure in their area. Indeed all the parish councils in the local area work very hard to ensure that the newer developments get all the facilities that were promised for them when they were planned.

This is just as true of Church Crookham Parish Council and the facilities on the Crookham Park development and Fleet Town Council for Edenbrook. Indeed it has only been in recent years when Crookham Village PC were able to take over the running of the Zebon Copse Community Centre that it has really started to thrive despite Hart District Council wanting to pull it down just a few years ago.

Pushing for infrastructure

As more new developments get foisted on the community, we have to do a better job of ensuring that the bodies who should be looking after infrastructure fulfil their obligations to do so – and that the planning authorities ensure that legal agreements are robustly written so that the parish councils are empowered to make best use of the leisure facilities which are given over to the community.

The various parish councils do an outstanding job of battling the bureaucracy, but in reality the upper tiers of local government should not be making it so unnecessarily difficult and frustrating for them.

If you care about your community, why not join the Community Campaign?

Please contact our Membership Secretary,
Gill Butler: Tel: 01252 786108
Email: GillB@cchart.org.uk

Membership forms can also be obtained from our CCH website: www.cchart.org.uk

So what now for Hart's Local Plan?

Hart desperately needs to get a formally adopted Local Plan (LP) in place so as to have some control over where new development goes. The plan does not stop development but rather provides a framework that indicates where development should go to meet the supply of houses which Hart is deemed to need to provide. Once Hart has an LP in place we can use it to fend off inappropriate planning applications by pointing to the LP as proof that we've got our future housing needs covered.

Government policy requires Hart to plan for the building of 7,534 homes in the period 2011-2032. This number is imposed upon us by the government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and its implied mandate that we address 'objectively assessed housing needs'. If we don't nominate sites for these houses, then developers can effectively dictate where they go.

Of this total at least 3,516 have already been granted planning permission. The majority are in and around Fleet, Church Crookham and Hook. Building on brownfield sites is an option but will only address a small portion of the 4,018 still left to find – this option will be included in the plan. However, within the plan period around 3,250 houses will inevitably need to be built on green fields. This is the result of the housing targets imposed on us by the policies of the national government; it is not Hart's choice.

Unless Hart proposes something radical, these 7,534 new homes will end up expanding existing settlements dramatically. Experience of the incremental expansion of our towns over the past 30 years shows that such 'bolt on' development fails to deliver infrastructure. It would inevitably fail to deliver the much needed new secondary school nor be able to provide adequate highway improvements. Just how do you improve road access through Crookham Village, Fleet and Church Crookham to accommodate more traffic anyway?

For this reason, based on feedback from the recent 'options' consultation and faced with the inevitable impossibility of mitigating large scale expansion of existing communities, a new settlement option looks likely to be an integral part of the new LP. Even with the allocation of a new settlement, some development will be needed across the rest of Hart. This would be particularly true during the time it would take to ramp up a new eco-village project. Development within existing settlements such as blocks of flats on the site of disused offices, would look to account for 750 new homes. Sites adjoining existing settlements would also be looked at to deliver up to 650 homes. While a further 1,400 homes for existing towns and villages may seem a lot, there are sites around Guillemont Park and Minley which could account for half of these. The burden would be shared with places like Yateley and Hook.

The new settlement can be beneficial because it would justify having its own new secondary school. Conversely, incremental development on the edge of existing towns can only ever lead to the corresponding growth of existing secondary schools; so putting at risk the personalised child focus for which our local schools are noted. A new settlement can also be planned with a suitable road network, rather than simply exacerbating existing highway pinch points as has been the case with the developments of the recent past.

A new settlement will have the capacity to help address the future housing needs of Hart up to and beyond the plan period. It will also help us to deliver the required housing stock if the government foist the unmet demands of our neighbouring authorities upon us. While a new settlement in the countryside is never going to be a welcome prospect, it does offer the opportunity to deliver more comprehensive infrastructure than relying on the expansion of existing settlements into the surrounding countryside.

How to contact your local Community Campaign (Hart) Councillor:

Feel free to contact us with your local concerns.

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For further news and information about Community Campaign (Hart) activities or to sign-up for email updates, please visit www.cchart.org.uk

