

TO: Southwater Parish Council

19th July 2019

Dear Sirs

Re: Neighbourhood Development Plan

I have looked briefly at this (which is far too lengthy) and it again fails to address the most important local issues which are the poor transport infrastructure and lack of quality employment. Yet it includes such public feedback as “we want more sweet shops” and “we want Fireman Sam”.

“Affordable homes”. This is a deliberately misleading council term for social housing. If you ask the average person if they want “affordable” homes they will agree, thinking it means builders giving discounts, or the general market price of homes going down. Of course, it means nothing of the sort as it means taking council nominated tenants in very large numbers, often on housing benefit.

This will result in Southwater becoming like Broadwater in Crawley or Roffey in Horsham, in other words an area where crime and anti-social behaviour is above local averages. Social or “affordable” housing should be limited to a maximum of 10%, not aimed at the ludicrous 40% target (which is not mandatory). Previously a more sensible (but still very high) figure of 25% was applied by HDC.

The Affordable/Social housing should only be offered to those already resident in Southwater to maintain a social balance and prevent the area becoming a ghetto. The sensible way to provide affordable housing is to have well-paid jobs at good employers, which Horsham and Southwater used to have plenty of. However, nothing is being done to replace jobs lost from RSA, Novartis etc.

“Housing need”. How SPC can claim there is a need for more housing when we have just had 2,500 dwellings imposed on us? This is nonsense, there may be a general “need” for more housing in the country as a whole, but Southwater has taken far more new housing than it needs or deserves.

Housing is not actually that expensive here compared to say Guildford, but we need quality local jobs and faster transport infrastructure to access well paid remote employment, not more residents on housing benefit. However, the council asks for ever more taxpayer subsidised housing. This was not previously needed, when Horsham was considered one of the most prosperous towns in the UK.

Infrastructure – residents such as myself clearly forecast the adverse effects on GP access, Hospitals, Schools, Roads and other forms of infrastructure such as car parking at the stations etc. This was all ignored by the councils with their usual “we know best” mindset, but has proved totally correct. We also need proper broadband (Virgin Media) and high speed 4G coverage – when I spent some months living near Halifax – they had VM and very fast mobile broadband, but here it’s terrible.

How the council staff responsible for schools planning and road planning can draw their salary each month while residents suffer appalling traffic delays and school place issues is beyond me. There is plenty of space to build new roads, schools, stations and so on. Please do not just produce reams of paperwork that achieves nothing (other than jobs for council staff and large tax rises to fund them).

The 98-bus service to Horsham is appallingly slow and drags around back roads. It takes an absurd 30 mins to reach the train station (from my nearest stop). It would be better to halve the number of stops and cut out the back roads, or at least have every other bus operate faster so that it becomes useful for commuters. Shortening the journey time needs to be the goal, not increasing the number of stops. There needs to be a peak time service that provides fast transport to/from the train station.

Every town and village could expand at a sustainable rate of 1% to 2% per year (with some backdating where no development has occurred). It is wrong that areas such as Shipley should remain unchanged for 70 years while we suffer major growth continuously. They might say their roads are not wide enough – so widen them. We seem to have planning Apartheid here.

You may recall previous planning strategy documents such as this:

- The **1991** Southwater planning strategy ‘General principles of development’ section 2.4:

*“**No additional development to the south-east, south or west of Southwater** – the retention of these areas of land as ‘open’ countryside is essential to maintain the countryside setting and the strong visual relationship between the village and surrounding countryside. Any development in these areas would seriously detract from the landscape quality and character of the area. The clear break between the built-up area and the countryside must be maintained for the benefit of the village and future generations.”*

This shows how council documents such as the one you have expensively produced are simply ignored by developers, and in conjunction with the current timid planning departments, have no impact beyond being a sort of “vanity” publishing effort and giving the appearance of work.

When I moved to the district 30 years ago we had effective planning officers in charge at HDC, who prevented many damaging developments. Their legacy has been thrown away with absurd decisions such as building the other side of the northern bypass (which was intended as the final boundary).

We have had enormous rises in the Southwater Parish Council tax for the last three years (each year being an over 20% increase) and spending our money producing lengthy documents of this nature undoubtably contributes to this. At one stage SPC refused to even state a view on the desirability of massive housing development, and one wonders what exactly the point of such a body is.

Until our parish tax is reduced to the county average (from being the most expensive), I will continue to have little confidence in anything that SPC says, or in any document that it produces. I have certainly no interest in attending any meetings where process takes precedence over progress.

Yours sincerely

