

As a representative of Billingshurst Parish Council, here are some responses to Matter 1 issue 2 question 2 by the inspector:

. Mr Milne, the newly appointed Local Plan portfolio holder for Horsham district Council came to discuss the development plan options for Billingshurst: West or East. The Parish Council formerly voted to support the western development when Horsham district Council consulted the Parish in 2022. The western proposal had many more benefits to the residents (namely creation of a very large public park, allotments, significant new sport facilities a new community building etc), even though it proposed to build more houses than the Eastern development. Mr Milne said on 7th February 2024 (extract no.1 of the public meeting at Billingshurst Parish Council):

"when we started to get the ground-swell about the West, well, I said, "why don't we just do it? Let them have it? Even though we don't think it's the right thing, but that's what local people want? So be it." But the thing is, the risk of getting East as well is so high and we're not going to be thanked for it. No one's going to ... in five years' time if that's what happened, then ... so, so it's too much of a risk."

Billingshurst Parish is fully aware of the risks of getting both developments at some point, if all technical issues get resolved, but hold a more pragmatic approach: Billingshurst will expand under growing pressure for housing and that is accepted. What the Parish wants is to decide how it expands in the best way.

We were told that it would be too costly to examine the western development project and so the East development proposal was going to be quicker and cheaper:

Mr Milne said on 7th February 2024 (extract no.2 of the public meeting at Billingshurst Parish Council):

"What's the difference then between this local plan and the one that was pulled or cancelled in January?' I'm sure most people know the new administration took over in May, that's when I myself took over this job. So, the local plan, there were many/three versions of the local plan in the last administration, all of which were cancelled at the last minute for one reason or another. In practice, when we came into office, we were able to revise that local plan, the last version of, but not reinvent. The reason for that is, to start again is a very, very slow process. It will take about two years, and it would cost about a million, well, north of a million pounds in terms of officer costs etc - so it's an incredibly expensive process. So, it's a very poor use of money and would take a very long time. So, the practical impact of that is we have had to choose from exactly the same shortlist of sites as the previous administration and we have to use exactly the same rules. So, it's perhaps not surprising that there is a great deal of overlap in terms of site choice with the previous versions of the plan."

Councillor Milne dismissed our decision and imagined that the railway running along the Eastern development and the need for a bridge and a footpath diversion was not going to be an issue, when common knowledge is that it represents a much greater risk for the residents. To safeguard the new population arriving, creating a new safety crossing would cost a few million pounds and involve some quite complex engineering issues managed by a third party being network rail.

To all Parish Councillors, it was quite clear that our choice of the western development was much safer and secure than the Eastern one. The comparative exercise they did of east v west was clearly predetermined and not fair or consistent.

The due process of consultation on practical and economical grounds was therefore flawed and it renders this development plan unsustainably unrealistic. It also flies in the face of Government policy to listen to local communities.

We remain concerned that despite all these reasons, HDC still has a will to force this project through knowing that it will have to magic some infrastructure money, which could render this development unfeasible.

It is unclear, therefore, how this site could be delivered fast, which again undermines the soundness of the plan.

We need to modify this development plan and include the western development proposal that the Parish voted for in 2022. Not to do this because modifying the plan would cost too much is a totally unacceptable reason. "

Matter 1 issue 2 question 5:

A significant negative effect is expected for the site in relation to this SA objective due to it being located within the Bat Sustenance Zone, and within close proximity of the areas of Ancient Woodland and local biodiversity designations. Para 186c of the National Planning Policy Framework, (a material consideration in planning) clearly states 'development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists.'