

# ANDREW GRIFFITH MP

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR ARUNDEL AND SOUTH DOWNS

HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Cllr Martin Boffey – Leader  
Horsham District Council  
Albery House  
Springfield Road  
Horsham  
RH12 2GB

24<sup>th</sup> February 2026

Dear Martin,

## **Horsham District Local Plan 2023–2040: Restart of the Examination**

I welcome the restart of the Examination of the Horsham District Local Plan under the new Inspector, Mr Jonathan Bore. The exchange of letters between the Council and the Inspector on 4 and 11 February 2026 (HDCJB01 and IDJB01) sets out a constructive way forward, and the agreement of a structured timetable is a positive step.

As the Member of Parliament for Arundel and South Downs, I am writing to place on record the concerns of communities in my constituency about the conduct of the Examination and the continuing harm caused by the absence of an adopted local plan. I would be grateful if this letter could be placed on the examination webpages for the public record.

## **The Continuing Harm from the Policy Vacuum**

The Horsham District Planning Framework 2015 is now over ten years old. The five-year housing land supply is just 1.9 years and a shortfall against its own housing need of 408 homes before any contribution towards Crawley Borough's unmet need is taken into account. When half of Crawley's unmet need is included, as the Council itself considers pragmatic, the shortfall rises to 4,161 homes over the plan period. These are the Council's own figures, and they are stark.

In these circumstances, the 'tilted balance' under paragraph 11(d) of the National Planning Policy Framework continues to apply with full force. The Council's Housing Delivery Test result for the period 2020–21 to 2022–23 was only 62%, and the presumption in favour of sustainable development means that the Council's ability to resist speculative applications remains severely compromised.

Since the examination hearings were suspended in December 2024, a number of speculative development applications have been approved by the Council's Planning Committee in acknowledged conflict with adopted development plans, including made and developing neighbourhood plans, on the advice of officers that refusal would not be defensible at appeal.



I have written separately to the Council regarding specific applications, most recently Sandgate Nursery in Henfield (DC/23/0189), which is outside the Henfield Neighbourhood Plan area, outside the built-up area boundary, and lacks sustainable access to the village centre. This is one of several recent cases – including approvals at Small Dole and elsewhere – where sites that were included in the draft local plan without community support have been approved for hundreds of new houses.

These include, but are not limited to;

- Sandgate Nursery, Henfield – DC/23/0189
- Land North of Melton Drive, Storrington – DC/24/2006
- Land West of Smock Alley, West Chiltington – DC/24/1619
- Land North of Glebe Farm, Steyning – DC/21/2233

The result is a patchwork of permitted developments that is not plan-led and risks cumulative harm to our local countryside, destroying the villages, biodiversity, heritage and the sustainability of local infrastructure. This is precisely the kind of outcome that the plan-led system is intended to prevent.

### **The Scale of the Challenge Ahead**

The Council's letter of 4 February acknowledges that the submitted Plan's housing provision falls substantially short of need. Meeting the district's own housing need of 890 dwellings per annum, plus any share of Crawley's unmet need of 7,506 homes to 2040, will require significant additional site allocations through main modifications. The Council's own analysis identifies three growth options, all of which involve one or more additional strategic site allocations beyond those in the submitted Plan.

I recognise the scale of this task and the work programme the Council has set out. However, the very scale of the shortfall underlines why it is essential that the examination proceeds at pace. The Inspector's agreement that the Council's timetable is feasible and realistic is encouraging, and I urge the Council to treat it as a firm commitment rather than an aspiration.

### **Consultation on New Site Allocations**

If the main modifications will include the allocation of new sites – potentially including strategic-scale sites capable of delivering significant numbers of homes – it is essential that the process of identifying and selecting those sites involves proper public consultation and meaningful engagement with affected communities and neighbourhood plan groups.

This is not only a legal requirement but a practical necessity if the resulting plan is to command legitimacy that the current draft has lacked. I raised concerns about the inadequacy of community engagement in my own Regulation 19 representation of 1



March 2024, and those concerns were shared across party lines – by the local Labour Party, Henfield Parish Council, and neighbouring parish councils, as well as by community groups who had prepared detailed hearing statements on this issue for the examination. Those hearing statements were never tested because the hearings were suspended before the relevant sessions took place.

The specific concern, which remains unresolved, is that the Council's allocated sites in the draft plan which had been assessed and rejected during the preparation of made neighbourhood plans, and in some cases previously refused permission by the Council itself, without any meaningful prior discussion with the affected communities. This approach was inconsistent with the Council's own Statement of Community Involvement, which commits it to early involvement, clear communication and feedback.

I note from the Inspector's letter of 11 February that a main modifications consultation is envisaged over the summer, between the two stages of hearings. Given that the modifications are likely to include entirely new site allocations that were not before the public at Regulation 19 stage, the consultation must be genuine and substantive, with sufficient time and information for communities to engage meaningfully. It must not repeat the approach that characterised the earlier stages of plan preparation.

### **Neighbourhood Plans and Public Confidence**

Communities across this district invested significant time and resources in preparing neighbourhood plans, at the express encouragement of successive governments. Those plans are now being undermined by speculative applications that the Council feels unable to resist. If neighbourhood plans can be routinely overridden before they have expired or been reviewed, there is little incentive for communities to engage constructively with the planning process in future. This is of considerable concern.

The restart of the Examination under a new Inspector offers an opportunity to begin rebuilding that confidence, but only if the communities believe they have a genuine voice in shaping the plan that will govern development in their areas. The Examination process itself – the hearings, the consultation on modifications, and the Inspector's report – must be conducted in a way that demonstrates the plan-led system can work fairly and transparently.

### **Conclusion**

I welcome the agreement between the Council and the Inspector on a way forward. The priority now must be to ensure that:

- (a) the timetable is adhered to, so that plan-led development is restored as soon as possible and the continuing harm from speculative applications is brought to an end;
- (b) the consultation on main modifications, particularly on any new site allocations, is substantive and allows meaningful community engagement; and



(c) the concerns raised in representations and hearing statements that were never tested at the suspended hearings are properly considered as the Examination proceeds.

I welcome your comments and ask that this letter is put on record.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Andrew Griffith".

**Andrew Griffith MP**

cc. Mr Jonathan Bore, Examination Inspector, via Programme Officer  
(programmeofficer@horsham.gov.uk)

Jane Eaton – Chief Executive Officer, Horsham District Council