



## Hart to Home

By Cllr. John Kennett

The Hart Local Plan was submitted in May. Apart from all the erudite wording favoured by 'the Planning Community' the key feature was the number of new houses the Council should allow between now and 2026. That number is about 4,400, and initial informal indications from the Planning Inspectorate were that it was likely to be accepted.

To put it in context, if there was a 'Berlin Wall' around Hart with no inward or outward movement we would need about 3,300 houses just to provide for new household formation by our children and grand children. On that basis 4,400 does not seem too bad, although a problem in Hart is that much of the Eastern part of the District, around Yateley is either flood plain, special protection area for Dartford Warblers and other wild life or already built on. This means that whatever the final number for new houses they will have to be mainly in either the Fleet / Church Crookham area or in the Western parishes.

There has recently been a preliminary hearing which was attended by all the big house building companies and their lobbyists. They are keen to build in Hart since they know that there is always a ready demand for houses here and they sell quickly. Unfortunately the Planning Inspector listened to them more than we would like and is now reconsidering whether to require Hart to allow more houses. All is not yet finalised and the next stage is likely to be a further hearing in September.

I am a great fan of 'Localism' and think, in principle, it is a Good Thing. My problem is that I do not know quite what it means when a Minister who grew up in Yorkshire, but now lives in London, appoints a man from who knows where but who now works in a Government department in Bristol, to hear arguments from developers and lobbyists from all over this country and foreign tax havens, to tell a small local council how many houses it must allow in its own district, whatever local residents may think. If you can explain this seeming paradox, please let me know.

The only thing which is truly localised is the blame since, if residents do object, they are told that the Local Plan was drawn up, and the numbers chosen, by their local council. Councils have to go along with this process because Inspectors have been told that "the default answer on any planning application is yes" until a Local Plan has been accepted. They do not do anything as clear as giving a number of new houses, in case they were later asked to justify it but just keep rejecting plans as "insufficiently robust", or similar bureaucratic jargon, until the number is increased to the one they want. .

*If you would like advice on any matter relating to Hart District Council, please do not hesitate to contact me. Whenever I can, I go to the Coffee Pot in Long Sutton and the Tea Pot in South Warnborough, and can always meet elsewhere by arrangement.*

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