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EHDC to consult again on Local Plan following 'brutal' housing targets

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EHDC to consult again on Local Plan following 'brutal' housing targets

East Hampshire District Council will consult with residents on its Local Plan again in response to the Government's 'deeply flawed' planning rules and 'brutal housing targets'.

The council previously consulted throughout 2019 but will seek residents' views again following changes to national policies, rising housing figures and the desire for higher environmental standards.

The Local Plan is EHDC's key planning policy document for areas of the district outside the South Downs National Park. It sets planning rules for development which cover housing, business, infrastructure, health, community facilities and the environment.

The new consultation, to be carried out towards the end of 2022, will give the council's Planning Team the evidence it needs to update policies and, where necessary, challenge the Government's proposals.

Cllr Richard Millard, Leader of East Hampshire District Council, said: "Our Local Plan has been many years in the making, with many bumps along the road. The journey has not just been difficult and challenging, it has gone way beyond that. It has been divisive, bruising and at times unpleasant. It has fractured communities and turned councillors against each other. The reason for the acrimony is easy to discern: the government's brutal housing target which eclipses everything else in the Plan-making process. Forget the semantics that it is a 'housing need' figure; it is for all practical purposes a rigid target. We are not alone.

"Other authorities, in trying to find acceptable solutions, have made no progress over years of seemingly futile attempts to advance their Plans that do not meet the imposed housing need. This approach runs the very real risk of leaving planning decisions to be made in a local policy vacuum with Government inspectors making decisions that have huge implications for our district with no accountability to our residents.

"We need to go back and think again about how homes are delivered in East Hampshire. The Government methodology is deeply flawed and is focused on a misleading algorithm for what is needed without any real consideration of what is possible. It is based on district-wide data and does not make any concessions for the South Downs National Park, which is a separate local planning authority, heavily constrained by its landscape designation.

"In March they increased our housing target by at least 650 homes over the emerging plan period.

"Where we feel something is wrong and unfair we won't hesitate to challenge it. And the results of this consultation will help us in those discussions with the government and the South Downs National Park.

"Our Local Plan must also respond to the climate change emergency, and we can now write in the environmental standards we need to make the next Plan the greenest ever."

Recognising increasing development pressure on the countryside around our villages, the council is preparing a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to help consideration of planning applications.

Angela Glass, EHDC's Portfolio Holder for Planning, said: "Climate considerations and the moving of Government goal-posts means re-consultation has to take place if we are to deliver a sound and successful Local Plan."

The consultation will be held towards the end of the year.

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