

Dangers of too much development in Wokingham

I am publishing this press release from Wokingham Borough Conservative Councillors as I am also concerned about possible extra developments on appeal.

Wokingham Conservative Councillors have warned that the Liberal/Labour led Council have lost control of development across the Borough as appeals against planning decisions are increasing.

By halting work on the Local Plan, in progress under the previous Conservative administration, the Liberal Democrats, supported by Labour and the Independents, have opened Wokingham Borough up to a free for all for developers. The Conservative Opposition is now demanding that the coalition administration stops "dithering" and produces a Local Plan that residents can be consulted on.

Under the previous Conservative administration, the Council was on track to deliver its new Local Plan by December 2023. Officers of the Council have confirmed that the Local Plan will now not meet that deadline.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires local authorities to outline a five-year supply of specific sites to meet housing needs. Wokingham Borough now no longer has a five-year land supply, making the Borough increasingly vulnerable to developers.

Without the five-year land supply, the Council is more likely to lose appeals brought by developers. As a result, the wishes of residents will not be taken into consideration. Instead, planning decisions will be made by the National Planning Inspector, based in Bristol. On top of this, the Council loses the ability to ensure that necessary roads and local facilities are provided with new housing. Under the Conservatives, successful control of development meant that the Council only lost two planning appeals in the last four years.

At a meeting of the Council's Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee it was confirmed that as a result of not having a five-year land supply the Council is experiencing an increase in appeals for speculative housing development.

In September, the administration lost a planning appeal for new houses in Hurst. An increasing number of appeals against decisions to reject planning applications are in motion, such as a proposal for 54 new homes near St Anne's Drive in Wokingham.

Liberal Democrat councillors have promised residents that they will lobby the Government to reduce housing numbers. Yet since they took office, there has been no progress to back up these words. By contrast, the previous Conservative administration worked with the Government to cut housing targets

in half for Wokingham Borough.

Cllr Wayne Smith, Shadow Executive Member for Planning, said, "On the Lib Dems' watch, the Council has completely lost control over development. Backed up by Labour and the Independents, they've undone the work on the Local Plan without presenting any credible alternative. When they were in Opposition, they promised every single community that they would stop new housing, in an attempt to win votes. Now they're in power, they're risking a free for all for developers – or else breaking promises to thousands of residents.

"The Conservatives believe in protecting our local communities from unsustainable development, which is why we made the tough choices and put together a Local Plan. The Lib Dem-led coalition needs to show some courage, stand up for the Borough, and get on with producing a new Local Plan."

Cllr Pauline Jorgensen, Leader of the Conservative Group, said, "This is a ticking time bomb. The previous administration was set to deliver the Local Plan by December 2023. Without a plan and without a five-year land supply the Council is losing control of development"

"While Conservatives were in power we met with the Secretary of State and managed to reduce the number of homes being imposed on us by a half. Lib Dems say they are against unsustainable development, but their actions don't match their words. This is the very opposite of what residents thought they were voting for."