

SAVE OUR ISLAND ARTICLE FOR SEPTEMBER HAYLING HERALD

THE need for openness and transparency in Local Government can be seen as a pretty glib ‘catch all’ statement.

To put some meat on the bone, we have related it to the Havant Borough Council Local Plan, which is the all-consuming topic for us all right now.

It starts back at the PUSH Council Grouping (Partnership for Urban South Hampshire) when the decision was made that rather than develop a new city or town, PUSH just divvied up the total housing needs to each Council to engage in a massive ‘strip mall’ linear expansion.

This gave huge areas of precious greenfield land to the large builders, whose objective is to ‘build cheap and sell high’ to please the profit model required by their shareholders. Their developments are same old same old in concept, with no heat pumps, solar cooling, disabled access and mature tree canopies – single access, pink brick, ‘cookie cutter’ ghettos with no identity.

HBC, through its own deficiencies, had not achieved the 5-year housing stock target and now, in its overriding drive to catch up, seems willing to ride roughshod over any and all attempts by the residents to influence the decisions made on housing and infrastructure. It’s as if HBC sees residents as opponents rather than responsibilities.

Our key areas of concern include:

- The Hayling Island Transport Assessment (HITA) was rejected by Councillors twice, then red-carded to Scrutiny, and was still pushed through with serious issues outstanding. The Councillors who fought for your rights, led by Clare Satchwell, were overridden. In the business world, this behaviour would not pass peer review nor governance inspection.
- The Hayling Island Infrastructure Advisory Group (HIIAG), set up specifically to address infrastructure and the Transport Assessment Addendum (TAA), was deliberately excluded from all aspects of the development of the HITA and TAA after promises for full involvement. This was the only opportunity for residents to be involved in the process, and as a consequence, they were not. It started out well, until the TAA issue, created by HBC, became divisive.
- The opportunities for residents’ representatives to engage in debate is limited to short written or verbal statements at various Committee meetings. These meetings have, over time, become completely formulaic, where every iteration is controlled and limited by rules and conventions. The Officers are the only group allowed unlimited time for presentations etc. There are Councillors who complain that the residents chose not to attend these meetings, but let me tell you we have attended and spoken at some of these. For all the world it feels like watching some kind of strange religious ritual where the process is far more important than the content. The observer is sworn to silence. The purpose of the Planning Committee meetings is for the Councillors to listen to Officers’ advice, ask questions, and generally vote in favour. Residents who participate are never engaged by the committee in any discussions during this process. It is in this controlled forum where senior Councillors can say to the Planning Committee for example: “The only advice you need to listen to is from the Officers – they are the experts.” Or from another senior Councillor, indicating that his personal experience driving to Hayling Island on occasions during the Pandemic is more relevant than the facts reported by the permanent counter at the Bridge.
- The use of political spin: recent examples are the Press Releases on the disastrous removal of the West Beach revetments that was claimed as being a success, and the Eastoke shingle track claimed as a one-in-200-year-event protection. The site was overtopped and damaged two weeks after completion.

■ And lastly, the frequent use of consultants. This is often used to establish an air of credibility and independence. This is rarely the case. Consultants are just like employees – paid to do what HBC as a customer wants. In the case of the HITA ... to find ways to present the Housing Plan as sustainable. Or moving the leisure activities to the most unsuitable location on the Seafront to build hundreds of houses at Beachlands.

■ I sincerely hope that the new brooms in charge at HBC sweep it clean ... Save Our Island will be the first to support the changes required, and help wherever we can. Hopefully, this Hayling Herald article will help the new leadership recognise the issues the residents wish to see addressed.

Dave Parham
Save Our Island

