

# Residents' associations welcome planning inspectors' report on 'unsound' Havant Local Plan

HAVANT borough residents' associations are welcoming a 'damning' report rebuffing council plans to build hundreds of new houses.

**By Emily Jessica Turner**

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**Ann Buckley, coordinator of the Havant Borough Residents' Alliance**

The planning inspectors' report on the Havant Local Plan to 2037, which was published earlier this month, said that the plan was unsound and not legally compliant.

Proposed housing sites were ruled not viable and inspectors said the council did not comply with the law when carrying out a public consultation.

[Ann Buckley](#) is co-ordinator of the Havant Borough Residents Alliance, which made a legal challenge to the plan regarding its Statement of Community Involvement.

She feels that the plan, which has taken five years to prepare over a period in which four different councillors have served as cabinet lead for planning, is a 'disaster'.

Ann said: 'The most basic thing in plan making is early engagement with residents.

'Havant got off to a bad start by not following its own policy in the document called the Statement of Community Involvement and HBRA pointed this out to the council five years ago.

'The plan has now been found to be not legally compliant and this could have been avoided if the council had listened.'

She was 'very pleased' that the planning inspectors 'carefully' listened to group members when they spoke at the Examination in Public earlier this year, and added: 'Havant Council has a lot to learn about resident engagement.'

HBRA has stressed that the housing allocation in the plan was far too large for the borough.

Ann said: 'The council were far too optimistic about getting large-scale housing development on sites that have serious constraints such as congested road access or risk of damage to ecology.

'These include Rooks Farm on Hayling and the large Southleigh site in Havant as well as Havant and Waterlooville town centres and Campdown where the possible housing numbers were inflated and impossible to achieve in the timescale.'

However, Havant Borough Council has promised to 'robustly challenge' the planning inspectors' findings.

Cllr Alex Rennie, council leader, said: 'This is the right local plan for our area.

'Although we may need to make some tweaks to it we believe it's far and away the best solution for our borough because it will provide homes alongside vital infrastructure - while avoiding speculative piecemeal development.

'As a local authority we have a collective responsibility with central government to make sensible decisions about housing and get much-needed homes built in our area.

‘That’s why we believe this is the right local plan for our borough.’

Andrew Hunnibal of the Save Long Copse Lane campaign, disagrees.

He said: ‘Instead of accepting the findings the council are challenging them, telling them highly qualified and experienced inspectors they got it wrong.’

‘Instead of challenging the inspectors’ findings the council should be challenging the housing numbers and talk to neighbouring authorities to accommodate them as they have more space.’

‘The people of Havant should question why our council are so hell bent on building more and more houses on unsuitable sites only adding to traffic congestion and pollution in our harbours.’

Iain Fairley of the Bedhampton Heritage Alliance said that the inspectors produced a ‘pretty damning interim report’.

Ron Tate, a past president of the Royal Town Planning Institute, said: ‘The council identified land for new housing before first analysing the likely impact upon highway capacity and safety. The finding is focussed upon Hayling Island and four larger sites elsewhere, but these are not the only places included in the draft plan.’

‘Best planning practice has for decades relied upon the maxim, Survey, Analysis, Plan. There should be no short cuts. A ‘sites first’ approach that assumes everything can be sorted out later with prospective developers puts the cart before the horse.’

‘As a direct result of the approach adopted to plan making, the citizens of Havant have already paid a heavy price in the harm inflicted upon the ancient heritage of Bedhampton.’