

THERE HAS been a significant change in the structure of Havant Borough Council. But you may well have missed it as the announcement was very low key.

HBC have abruptly ended their association with East Hampshire District Council.

We know it was abrupt because the required changes – organisation, structure, etc – did not accompany the announcement.

We agree with this decision to terminate this association. You may remember this was implemented 12 years ago to allow us to benefit from synergies and reduced costs. Sadly, this is not what happened.

There are a number of reasons for this failure, and the association also introduced new threats to the wellbeing of our community.

- EHDC has a significant revenue stream from their extensive property and land holdings. They also enjoy the protections and opportunities of the incorporation of the South Downs National Park. And they received a huge land gift from the MoD to be used for housing development at Bordon. None of these advantages are available to HBC, so their respective financial positions are miles apart. Synergy in this situation, where the risks and opportunities have no similarities is, and never was, a realistic expectation.

- You may remember that in 2019 EHDC received a damning governance audit which was unequivocal in its opinion that they had lost their way and were not doing the job they were elected for. They had moved towards an autocratic bureaucracy focused on the priority of their political masters at Central Office rather than the needs of their community.

This undemocratic process, we believe, leached into HBC through the joint structure of the senior managers, and was supported by some long-standing elected members.

This led to a situation where the tail was increasingly wagging the dog.

We need a situation where the Officers advise and the Councillors decide, based on the community's wishes and needs.

- One major consequence of this mismanagement was the production of the problematic Local Plan which was rejected by the Inspectorate who (at the time of writing) retain their view that the Plan should be withdrawn, corrected, and re-presented for consultation.

This did not need to happen: the key issues raised by the Inspectorate had already been tabled by your resident support groups over the past 3½ years.

But we are where we are and must move forward.

We believe the restructure of HBC last year, and this separation from EHDC, are positive changes, and our ongoing communications with HBC point to a growing view that we may be seeing green shoots of representative democracy reappearing under the leadership of Alex Rennie and Clare Satchwell, amongst others.

We will – and will encourage others – to work with the Councillors to resolve the Local Plan, but only if these efforts are based on open and transparent communications in line with the Stakeholder Engagement Framework and are expanded to encompass the new threats posed through global warming.

- Allied to this, we would also make a plea to all members of Political Associations to look very closely at the performance and motives of the candidates they choose to represent them. The current situation was in part caused by the decisions made by the people you selected. Remember in our “one party” Borough, you are in reality responsible for the Councillors elected. Please reflect on the fact that each Association represents less than 1% of a Ward's electorate. This should weigh heavily on your minds when selecting your representatives.