

Further words on the Consultation

CHAIRMAN'S LETTER in the East Broyle Bulletin for September 2011

Hopefully you will have all read the EBRA letter that was circulated at the beginning of September about the latest LDF consultation by Chichester District Council. The numbers of additional houses that are planned for the future and where these will be located are issues that will impact on all of us. Somewhat belatedly, common sense prevailed at the Council and it provided hard copies of the questionnaire for residents to complete so even people without computers were able to participate in the consultation.

The technical papers that were issued as part of the consultation revealed some interesting facts: most notably that the number of deaths within the District exceeds the number of births i.e. the existing population is reducing (by around 200 a year). Yet our population is growing: this is because people are moving into the District from other areas (e.g. from London and the home counties where property prices are higher); this is called inward migration.

What appears to be happening is that house building is fuelling inward migration and acting for the owners have increasing our population. It is not the case that we need more houses because our population is increasing, but rather our population is increasing because more houses are being built!

So, you may well ask, why are we building more houses then? It is a question that is not properly addressed in the consultation documents. There is a hint that we need more, because it is the only way to meet the need for affordable housing. Yet the Government is reducing the funding for such housing making it less likely that developers will be willing to build this sort of housing in the future. In any event the old funding arrangement that encouraged building ten houses in order to get four affordable ones, did very little to reduce the numbers on the Council's housing waiting list and did a great deal to encourage inward migration. Another argument that is given for more house building is that we need more people to have a thriving economy; yet there is no convincing evidence given to support that theory either. The thrust of the case for the housing number options in the consultation document is that we have been achieving 400 houses a year (some within the National Park area) in recent years and we need at least that many, if not more, in the future. It is a flawed case.

The location of any new houses is the other major issue covered by the consultation. EBRA has consistently argued that the housing should not be in or around the City. One of the technical papers states "further growth needs to be balanced against the need to retain and respect the historic character of the City", and it acknowledges that the City "has undergone major growth in the past 20 years, and further major development is already identified in the period to 2016 with around 1000 additional homes planned" at Graylingwell and the Barracks. While this recognition is pleasing to note, it is not accompanied by options that prevent further development in the area. Although the Council's statistics show that since 2006, 63% of all the housing completions in the south of the District have been in the City, there are still two new major developments within or near the City

that are being given serious consideration (Old Place Farm in north-east Chichester and Portfield/Shopwhyke). The City is already close to its capacity and with Graylingwell and the Barracks housing gradually coming on stream, when will the District Council appreciate that the City is 'full up'?

With 75% of the District forming part of the National Park or the Chichester Harbour Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (within which the scope for development will inevitably be restricted) the capacity to accommodate substantial additional housing is very limited. That is why keeping new housing growth as low as possible is so important. Given that some growth is necessary, the EBRA Committee still considers that development should be focussed on Tangmere where, with the right infrastructure, it can bring benefits to the existing residents. It is also very important that new housing is designed to meet the needs of existing residents (e.g. starter homes) and not to encourage migrants from elsewhere.

A word of warning: please do not think that the threat of developing Whitehouse Farm (west of Centurion Way) has gone away just because it has been excluded from the consultation. The Agents Acting for the owners have been very active trying to persuade the Council to reinstate the site.

The public meeting organised by the City Council; on 21 September debated many of the above issues especially the inability of the City to cope with further large-scale housing development.

The next LDF consultation starts on 13 January 2012; so our respite will be short-lived!