

Fight to save town from 'blight'

Sir, – Hopefully most *Herald* readers are now aware that Waverley has announced that special 'Brightwells' meetings are to be held with indecent haste next Tuesday (May 24), where the leadership intend that councillors agree to finalise and proceed with Crest Nicholson's impractical and disingenuous scheme using public (Surrey County Council) funding.

But with SCC having actively assisted Crest in the creation and long-term cover-up of their falsified 2008 Transport Assessment, it is difficult for WBC to present their intentions as being lawful and ethical. The proposed land give-away and funding arrangements constitute State Aid for unlawful purposes, and hence the committee papers are largely secret and the public papers available are consistently deceptive.

The manner in which the £100 million decision is being forced through without scrutiny reflects the integrity of the proposals. In essence the papers confirm that the proposed changes are unlawful, and that despite further significant sacrifices the scheme remains commercially unviable, so councillors will be under pressure from their leaders and officers to 'bite the bullet', turn a blind eye, do their worst and force a legal challenge.

In practice Crest's scheme can't be delivered, so it's evident that more changes and more sacrifices would be made after groundworks are commenced. However WBC's new council leader recently told the Chamber that the traffic modelling for the scheme will be conducted after the works are under way, so it's vital that Farnham takes action now to prevent Crest's proposed pedestrianisation and new road system rendering Farnham inaccessible. The likely consequences of the 'Royal Deer charade' for the local economy and environment have not been assessed as the law requires. Indeed the new Brightwells plans are still incomplete in a number of respects, so no one knows what is actually proposed.

There are plentiful robust grounds for challenge. Over 13 years Crest have proven incapable of resolving the fundamental flaws in their design, and their failed attempts to fit a quart into a pint pot continue to blight Farnham. Hence Crest have evaded assessing the likely consequences, and have never been able to publish the obligatory Non-Technical Summary describing the East Street and Riverside EIA project, and so the latest planning applications due to be determined in June cannot be lawfully consented.

Nor can the Memorial Hall works commence lawfully, as the public consultation process necessary to extinguish the covenants by appropriation of the land have not been conducted. Judicial review on those and other substantial grounds is being prepared, and as WBC are now proposing to waiver the minimum land value and remove both the Gostrey Centre and the social rented affordable housing from the scheme, the use of procurement legislation to seek termination and re-tendering of the contract is an obvious option upon which legal advice is being sought.

Extending an EIA challenge to include habitats grounds could also prevent the current unlimited influx of greenfield developments from being granted by committee at both outline and reserved matters stages, or at appeal. WBC's imaginary 'SANG' mitigation cannot and does not provide the necessary 'convincing' objective scientific evidence that the mitigation is effective.

Of course legal action can only be pursued if funding is available, and it is vital that residents are organised and have control of the process. *Herald* readers who realise that all of Farnham's concerned residents need to join together if we are to save Farnham from Waverley and Crest's blight, are invited to help steer and crowd-fund the necessary legal actions by joining the non-partisan Residents Network via the website at www.ResNetFarnham.uk

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