

Robert Burch Speech for GBC Council Meeting 26/2/2014

- I'm speaking tonight on behalf of the Save Hogs Back Campaign, but the points I will make are relevant for the whole of Guildford
- Over the last few months, we have heard constant messages about the housing crisis that the Borough faces, causing significant concern amongst residents.
- Behind this, there is a **fundamental question**: should we **ensure** we satisfy **need** or attempt to satisfy demand. I believe we must focus on **need**, particularly that for affordable housing.
- In January, I attended a presentation given by the Borough's Housing Advice Service. Afterwards, rather than leaving with a sense of crisis, I felt that the Council had an intelligent approach: it owns more than 5,000 properties and uses these in a compassionate way to help those in genuine need. Importantly, the Housing Register has been stable since an increase in 2008 at the start of the economic downturn. This stability is **despite a drop in new home completions** since then.
- From the meeting, it was also clear that a supply of 100-150 affordable homes per year would be sufficient to manage the housing register and bring down waiting times. This represents about a third to half the average annual number of home completions over the last decade.
- At this point, I put this discrepancy between messaging and reality down to politics and confusion over supply and demand.
- But once the draft SHMA was published, the situation became clear: **we are being poorly advised**. The draft **does not** properly represent the underlying data it contains in terms of its **uncertainty** and so the range of potential housing need.
- The report recommends **800 homes** to be built per year. However, using the **same data**, it can be shown that only **257 homes** per year are needed. Accounting for vacant properties and Manor Park student residences drops this to about **170** – more in line with the view from the Housing Advice Service.
- The Council can adopt a number to meet need that is **3-4 times less** than that proposed in the report. This would allow the Council to meet all of this demand from existing urban and village sites, plus potentially deliver more with intelligent use of Walnut Tree Close, the Station and Slyfield.
- Councillors, we must return to asking **why** high levels housing are being pushed? This is either due to being poorly advised, in which case **you must all challenge** Officers and use the **significant work** done by groups represented here tonight.
- Or if it is due to a desire to generate income for investment, the Executive should **show leadership and be transparent about this**: what is needed, how much will it cost and crucially **what other options** are there for funding apart from through housing. A housing-based solution for infrastructure development, for all the talk of garden neighbourhoods and car-free living, will only bring **more traffic worsening the very problem it is supposed to solve**.