Striving Through Change

A brief summary of Hampshire County Council, Hart District Council and related issues



Cllr Chris Dorn, Hampshire County Cllr

Another Busy Month

October has been another very busy month across Hampshire and Hart. The most significant county-wide issue is the scale of Hampshire County Council's financial challenge, which we explain in more detail below. We have also had a further update on local government reorganisation, and the Hart Local Plan consultation.

Locally, I have continued to publish regular information about roadworks, planning applications and community matters. I was proud to attend the Remembrance parade at the Cenotaph in London this year, alongside a local event at Winchester on 11th November.

I know the Villages Oppose Warehouses (VOW) have been very busy highlighting their concerns about the warehouse proposal at junction 5. As I sit on the Development Management Committee, I can't comment at this stage.

Hart Local Plan

As you will have seen Hart is consulting on some initial elements of a future Local Plan. I've advertised the various drop-in sessions and sharing my throughs with the 9 parish councils that I cover.

Overall, I think it's shocking.

The doubling of the development targets by Angela Raynor in Dec 2024 was unjustified and unnecessary. The previous Hart Local Plan was ticking along quite well, although over delivering. I'm still working my way through the plethora of documents (52+) to submit my own comments before the **7th Dec deadline**. Please do have a look at the on-line materials.

https://www.hart.gov.uk/new-hart-local-plan/new-local-plan-consultation-proposed-content-and-evidence

It's worth being clear that this is not a "Local Plan", but is a collection of initial drafts, evidence and studies for consultation ***from*** which next Hart Local Plan will be developed (Gateway 2). The actual draft will appear around Sept 2027, but it's vital that we shape the ideas and challenge erroneous evidence.

https://www.hart.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/local-plan-timetable

As I see it, the ideas presented are significantly deficient:-

- Far too many sites in the rural western parishes
- Not enough focus around the transport hubs and stations including Fleet and Yateley.
- No consideration of the re-development of the Harlington area (as was examined in detail by Hart's own civic quarter regeneration working group)

- Dumping of large sites around our rural villages where basic things like sewage systems are not able to cope.
- A suggested huge "garden village" at Rye Common - a point that I suspect is a huge concern to many of you. And the return of Shapley Heath – already discredited as undeliverable without practical access routes.
- Lacking realistic infrastructure considerations
- Several sites (notably around Odiham) that don't have owner's permission for development.
- Not including several recent and large applications (eg. Owen's Farm and Murrell Green)
- Gypsy Traveller assessment that misses several recent permissions.
- Concerns over the approach to managing the Local Plan project, when the Liberal Democrat Cabinet member refused to share the details, so I've submitted a Freedom Of Information (FOI) request.

Local Government Reorganisation

A revised timetable—but continued uncertainty

A ministerial update on 29 October confirmed that Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Hampshire is still intended to proceed, but the final structure remains unresolved. Hampshire now faces a further three to four months before a decision is likely, with no firm date yet confirmed.

The latest timetable set out in that update is:

- Borough and district council elections in May 2027, with councillors serving a two-year term (I'll be standing for Odiham ward in Hart)
- Elections to shadow councils and for the regional Mayor in May 2028
- New councils taking responsibility on 1 April 2029

Ministers previously chose a structure and required councils to begin preparations, but then withdrew the decision following updated legal advice in the face of Hampshire County Council's Judicial Review (alongside 3 other councils). That has created more uncertainty and has already absorbed thousands of hours of officer time across Hampshire.

Our position remains that further expenditure must be supported by objective evidence and a robust, sustainable business case. Any new councils must be financially resilient, capable of delivering high-quality services and able to demonstrate genuine savings after the full transition costs are taken into account. The priority must remain local care, support for children with special educational needs and disabilities, and the other services on which residents depend.

Hampshire County Council's Finances

The £199 million challenge

Currently, Hampshire County Council is forecasting a budget shortfall of almost £199 million in 2027/28. Residents rightly expect the County Council to spend public money carefully, and Hampshire has a strong record of doing so: by March 2028 the authority expects to have delivered £770 million of recurring savings over 20 years, while maintaining one of the lowest county council tax rates in the country.

That record has been achieved while Children's Services remain rated Outstanding by Ofsted and Adult Social Care is rated Good by the Care Quality Commission. The difficulty is that demand for statutory services is rising faster than the resources available. Each month around 45 more older residents need support after their own savings have run out, and many people now require more complex care. Almost 90% of the County Council's budget is spent on high-demand services such as social care and waste disposal. These are statutory needs.

At the same time, Government support is falling. With an annual grant reduction of £42.9 million by 2028/29, and the proposed Fair Funding arrangements would remove around a further £28 million in 2027/28. This is why the gap cannot be closed through efficiency savings alone. Reserves can only be used once and do not provide a sustainable answer to recurring costs.

A public consultation opens on 2 November. It is important that we explain the choices honestly and listen carefully to residents, staff, service users and partner organisations before decisions are taken. We will continue to press for a fair settlement for Hampshire and for essential services to be protected as far as possible.

Hampshire and the Solent Combined County Authority

Mayoral election to remain in May 2028

The Government has declined the Combined County Authority's request to bring the inaugural mayoral election forward to May 2027. That is disappointing. As Chairman, I have argued that residents should have an earlier opportunity to choose who leads a new authority which is taking on substantial responsibilities and funding for our region.

The mayoral election will therefore remain scheduled for May 2028. That does not mean we can afford to sit still. We will continue preparing the region's Local Growth Plan, developing its strategic approach to skills and working with businesses, colleges, universities and councils to identify investment and job opportunities.

Our ambition remains to make devolution work for the whole region — from our cities and coastal communities to Hampshire's towns and rural villages and the Isle of Wight. The true measure of success will not be new committees or structures; it will be tangible improvements in skills, transport, investment and economic opportunity.

Contact

I'm always happy to talk to people, but the best way to contact me is to email: chris.dorn@nehc.org.uk and follow my Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/Cllr.Dorn

Cllr Chris Dorn

Hampshire County Council for Odiham & Hook Division and District Cllr for Odiham Ward and Western Parishes on behalf of the Conservative Party

Just to caveat: Cllrs can't provide definitive planning or legal advice, but I'm usually able to share my personal thoughts on matters while asserting my open mindedness to any related future planning applications or formal council decisions.

Appendix A: General Updates from HCC

Hampshire adult social care services rated 'Good' by Care Quality Commission

Hampshire County Council's adult social care services have been rated 'Good' by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), with inspectors recognising a range of strengths including helping people remain independent, a commitment to listening to residents and carers, and early support so people get the help they need at the right time

Hampshire adult social care services rated 'Good' by Care Quality Commission | Hampshire County Council

Government gives go ahead for major plan to transform SEND support in Hampshire

A new landmark plan to transform support for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in Hampshire has been officially approved by Government, paving the way for a more inclusive education system from early years right through to adulthood

Government gives go ahead for major plan to transform SEND support in Hampshire | Hampshire County Council

New outdoor learning space opens at Runway's End to inspire next generation of environmental champions

Hampshire schoolchildren are set to benefit from a brand-new digital classroom at Runway's End Outdoor Centre near Aldershot, which has been officially opened following an event attended by students from Frogmore Community College, alongside representatives from Rushmoor Borough Council and Blackwater Valley Scouts

New outdoor learning space opens at Runway's End to inspire next generation of environmental champions | Hampshire County Council

Making prevention everyone's business – Hampshire partners unite to help people stay independent for longer

Agencies from across Hampshire's health, care, housing and community sectors have come together behind a shared ambition to help more residents stay independent for longer, as growing demand places increasing pressure on the health and care system

Making prevention everyone's business – Hampshire partners unite to help people stay independent for longer | Hampshire County Council

Hampshire residents face a further wait for Government decision on council reorganisation plans

Residents, businesses and public services across Hampshire and the Solent area face a further wait to learn what local government will look like in the future, following an announcement today by the Government

Hampshire residents face a further wait for Government decision on council reorganisation plans | Hampshire County Council

Hampshire County Council sets out scale of future financial challenge

Hampshire County Council has outlined the significant financial challenges it faces over the coming years as it plans ahead for budget setting in February 2027 and beyond

Hampshire County Council sets out scale of future financial challenge | Hampshire County Council

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