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To:

uknewsplan@bbc.co.uk

Subject:

WEST OF IFIELD: DID HORSHAM COUNCILLORS RUSH TO JUDGEMENT?

Attachments:

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Categories:

Comments Received

[WEST OF IFIELD: DID HORSHAM COUNCILLORS RUSH TO JUDGEMENT?](#)

Letter to the editor: West of Ifield - did Horsham councillors rush to j...

Richard W Symonds

In December 2023, Horsham District Council councillors voted to include the West of Ifield 3,000+ housing option...

Dear BBC Team

In December 2023, Horsham District Council councillors voted to include the West of Ifield 3,000+ housing option in the Local Plan. That decision is now often presented as if it cannot be changed. A powerful case can be made that it can be - one reason being the basis of that decision was taken under intense, unacceptable political pressure.

At the time, the late Colgate and Rusper councillor Liz Kitchen warned the West of Ifield option was “unacceptable” and that supporting it would merely “endorse the next stage” of a deeply flawed, pre-determined process. Her concern was prescient. Once endorsed, political momentum replaced democratic scrutiny - and the process quickly - and inevitably - became a mess.

Councillors were told they had little choice. Housing numbers, the Duty to Cooperate, Water Neutrality constraints, and the threat of speculative development, were deployed to force compliance. Yet it has become increasingly clear councillors were not provided with sufficient information to make a fully informed judgement - particularly on the ecological, environmental, heritage and archaeological consequences for the ancient Parish of Ifield.

If that powerful case is proved [that councillors capitulated to political pressure and were denied the information necessary for informed decision-making], then the Council risks leaving itself vulnerable and exposed - especially to a Judicial Review in any future Local Plan process.

The context has now fundamentally changed. The Duty to Cooperate has been abolished.; Water Neutrality requirements have been removed, and a new Planning Inspector has been appointed. The pressures used to rush West of Ifield into the Local Plan no longer apply - nor should they. This creates an obligation to now do things properly and democratically.

Horsham District Council must be given the opportunity to reconsider its December 2023 vote, free from political pressure and armed with the full evidence required to make an informed and democratic judgement. Anything less will risk repeating the same procedural failure.

The forthcoming 'exploratory' procedural meeting on February 26th - livestreamed - is therefore pivotal. The new Inspector must examine not just whether West of Ifield can proceed, but how and why it was inserted within the Local Plan in first place, and whether the process that led to its inclusion was sound and legally compliant.

Public confidence in planning depends not on speed, but on integrity.

Yours sincerely


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DID HORSHAM COUNCILLORS **RUSH TO JUDGEMENT?**

DID POLITICAL PRESSURE REPLACE INFORMED
DECISION-MAKING?



CAN THE **LOCAL PLAN**
BE DEFENDED IN LAW?

IF COUNCILLORS **FAILED** TO MAKE AN EVIDENCE-
BASED DECISION, THE COUNCIL **COULD FACE A**

JUDICIAL REVIEW.

THEY MUST BE ALLOWED TO
RECONSIDER THE WEST OF IFIELD,
BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE.

