

The Council is preparing a new planning framework which will shape Hart District up until 2028 – it is called the Local development framework (LDF). The LDF is a new type of planning document. Rather than simply being a planning tool to control development, it seeks to establish a vision for the District and what it should look like in 2028 and then work to implement that vision by managing growth and putting in the infrastructure need to deliver the vision.

One of the key drivers for the vision will be how the District can accommodate both its own needs as well as the wider social and economic needs of the South East region. This is where we must meet our obligations as set out in the South East Plan.

There is a need to make provision for new housing. Our plan spans the period 2006-2028 and our housing numbers derived from the South East Plan are:

1. Total requirement (2006 – 2028)	4,840
2. We have already built (2006 – 2009)	677
3. We estimate that we have also identified additional land for housing (sites with planning permission and other sites expected to come forward and receive permission including Queen Elizabeth Barracks)	2056
4. Which means that we still need to identify more sites to make up the shortfall?	2107

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The principle question for the LDF therefore, is where should these houses be built and what infrastructure needs to be put in place to meet the need for the new residents? There are no easy options.

Firstly, we must look at the constraints:

1. The District comprises three very different areas.

- a. To the west is the Backwater Valley and the settlements of Fleet, Blackwater, Hawley, and Yateley. Geographically they form part of the wider Blackwater Valley conurbation which extends from Aldershot to the south, up through Ash, Frimley, Farnborough, Camberley, and Wokingham to the north. Ecological constraints such as the Special Protection of Birds (SPA), traffic congestion, flood zones along the Blackwater River, limited open land, and lack of readily developable land mean that the scope for new development is challenging.
- b. To the north of the District (covering about a third) lies the generally more flat open heath land that comprises Eversley Forest. Much of it is SPA and given the nature of the land, is subject to significant ground water constraints. There is little by way of infrastructure or services to support any major development.
- c. To the south, covering almost a third of the District and running approximately along the line of the A287 Odiham-Farnham Road, lies a part of the District which in the South East Plan is separately identified as having very little potential for development and is only allocated for 110 dwellings between 2006-2028. There is no potential to allocate major development within this area.

This means that the Council is inevitably looking to explore options that could envisage growth in the central part of the District where the constraints can be seen as less of a challenge – although that is not to say that there are no constraints. There are no easy choices. Rural roads are not suited to major development and some of the main feeder roads clearly suffer congestion at peak times. This means that even here, the development opportunities are restricted.

The South East Plan envisages that new development should take place within or adjacent to existing settlements. That means that we inevitably need to explore the options of primarily focussing our growth requirements along the western side of Fleet, Church Crookham, Hartley Wintney, and Hook – none of which we recognised are popular options. Each option brings with it claim and counter claim and will inevitably mean that one community will play itself off against another community understandable with a view to deflecting any growth option away from their patch.

On Wednesday, I am due to attend the Winchfield Parish annual meeting where they shall be pressing me to reject an option that could focus all new development around Winchfield Station – land for possibly 1500 homes. In May I have been pressed to attend a village residents meeting in Rotherwick where they are to press me to reject the option of building any houses north of Hook.

We have made no decisions whatsoever, and indeed we will not make any final decisions for another year. What we are doing at the moment is exploring the options no matter how unpopular they may be because all options need to be aired even if only to discount them.

Factors that we will look at are for example:

1. how sustainable is each possible option
2. would making an allocation contribute significantly towards meeting our identified housing shortfall;
3. what is the current infrastructure capacity;
4. what infrastructure needs and can be improved;

Two issues that are particularly challenging relate to transport (in particular congestion) and access to services such as health facilities and schools. We already know that access to secondary education in Fleet and Odiham is very limited with both Fleet secondary schools and Robert Mays in Odiham oversubscribed but yet calculated across the District as a whole there is spare capacity – but it is all focused in one place at Frogmore in Yateley – in an area that has significant development constraints.

At the end of July we will publish what we think is our preferred option to accommodate the distribution of new growth across the District. This will be for consultation purposes and the consultation will extend right through the summer into the autumn. Everyone is encouraged to have their say and to put forward alternative options if they feel that there are better ways to meet our needs.