



SIR PAUL BERESFORD, M.P.
Member of Parliament for Mole Valley

Cllr M Cooksey
Cabinet Member for Planning
Mole Valley District Council
Pippbrook
Reigate Road
Dorking
RH4 1SJ

HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON, SW1A 0AA

2st December 2020

Dear Cllr Cooksey,

Chris Grayling MP and I are in receipt of your letter dated 11th November 2020, regarding the White Paper "*Planning for the Future*". With Mr Grayling's agreement, I am responding on behalf of us both.

We have noted the Mole Valley District Council response to the Local Plan consultation - and that it did not have universal support from Mole Valley District Council Members. Additionally your letter to us was not even *seen* by all members before being emailed to us.

You must accept that England needs more homes and the methods of deciding where these homes will be are currently based on Local Plans derived from the Town and Country Planning Act 1947. It is taking local authorities an average of 7 years to develop and ratify their Local Plans. By June 2020, 50% of English Councils had still failed to adopt their Local Plans. Unsurprisingly, Liberal Democrat controlled Mole Valley District Council is one of those authorities that have failed - and for that you must **personally** take responsibility as lead Executive Member.

After the last local elections, you, with your Liberal Democrat group, took control of the Local Plan process. You inherited an early draft from the previous administration under which the Local Plan progress was under the leadership of an Independent Councillor. After further development you put the Draft Local Plan out for consultation in your name and that of Liberal Democrat controlled Mole Valley District Council.

I do not need to remind you that the Liberal Democrat Draft Plan was roundly condemned by residents in response after response – meeting after meeting. Many of your own Liberal Councillors, realising that the Draft Local Plan was flawed beyond redemption, began speaking against it as a matter of political expediency. We understand there will now be no further decisions on the Plan until mid-2021. We - and the Conservatives within the Mole Valley District Council area – are looking to



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this Plan to Save our Green Belt and Revive our Towns. Your draft does neither!

Even you, after the Draft Local Plan consultation, must finally accept that, for Mole Valley residents, the Green Belt is at the very heart of what makes our constituency so special, and that this unique asset must be preserved. Equally you must accept that our towns, especially Leatherhead and Dorking need reviving. The towns need shops, the shops need customers, customers need homes. There are brownfield sites crying out for imaginative developments in and around both towns but the Liberal Democrats appear to lack the energy or creativity to seize these chances.

The White Paper you decry proposes a faster, simpler, clearer, process of planning, with more certainty. Consultation will not rely on residents seeing notices on lampposts or the back pages of local papers, but on a well-publicised interactive and accessible online system – placing planning at the fingertips of people.

Both Mr Grayling and I accept that the new proposed housing numbers are too high for Mole Valley, a constituency made up predominantly of precious Green Belt and Greenfield land. Along with other Conservative MPs we applied pressure on the Government in order to ensure a rethink.

Mole Valley District Council should positively accept the ideas in the White Paper - and even suggest enhancements. Rather than waiting for the White Paper to be put into legislation, you should abandon your locally rejected Draft Local Plan and begin a fresh effort which adheres to the principles contained in the White Paper.

The present failed Draft Local Plan is *your personal* Local Plan. In recognition of this Mr Grayling and I suggest you resign your post as lead Member for Planning and hand the vital Local Plan making work over to a team of three forward looking Councillors, one each from the Liberal Democrat, Conservative and Independent groups. Time is of the essence - as the country moves beyond COVID and the economy rallies Mole Valley must be positioned to benefit. We do not believe progress to an acceptable Local Plan is possible as long as you remain in post.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Beresford', written in a cursive style.

Sir Paul Beresford
Member of Parliament for Mole Valley