

## **Leader's Statement to Full Council – Wednesday 18 October 2017**

### **Infrastructure bids**

Working with KCC and other partners, a significant amount of work has gone into making bids to support investment into Highways Infrastructure in recent weeks. In the summer, bids were made to both the National Productivity Investment Fund and the Housing Growth Fund for improvements on the A2500 Lower Road between Barton Hill Drive and Cowsted Corner. If successful these will complement the money already secured to improve the Barton Hill Drive Junction.

In response to the Government's initial call for bids against the £2.3bn Housing Infrastructure Fund, two submissions have been made; one seeking £3.5m for site enabling costs on a key phase of the Queenborough and Rushenden development; the second promoting improvements to key junctions on the A249, the completion of the Northern Relief Road and a new Southern Link with the strategic road network. If successful both bids will help deliver against our adopted local Plan, with latter also supporting the review of the Local Plan, which has already commenced.

### **Increase in housing allocations - Planning for the Right Homes in the Right Places: Consultation proposals**

After prolonged debate and discussion, the Swale Local Plan was recently approved. This makes it clear to developers that if they are going to build, it will be where we, acting as the voice of our local communities, say they can build.

As we all know, as we were preparing the plan the goal posts changed, and the housing target was increased beyond anything we have seen delivered before. We argued it was unrealistic, but nonetheless when instructed we made the unpalatable choices that needed to be made, because the risk of having no plan was even worse.

But, as we argued from the start would happen, developers are failing to build out the much-needed new homes quickly enough, so now the rolling targets aren't being met and consequently are increasing.

And the government's suggested response?

Increase the target again.

The current consultation on further changes to the planning system, with a one-size-fits-all housing target imposed on local authorities, would take the numbers of homes expected to be built from what could charitably be described as 'optimistic', into the realms of fantasy.

We really can't sit here quietly without raising the loudest possible objections to this nonsensical approach. Having even higher targets which everyone knows will not be delivered on, would stand only to make the whole planning system irrelevant. We cannot have the future of our borough determined totally by planning inspectors sent

up from Bristol. It is time that the people of the South East, led one would hope by their elected representatives both national and local, stood up together to say 'no'.

We need a planning system that allows the people of Swale and the wider south east a realistic say in determining the future of their communities and their environment.

**Cllr Andrew Bowles**  
**Leader**