



PRESS STATEMENT 9 FEBRUARY 2010

The over zealous publicity hype with which East Hampshire District Council announced that Whitehill Bordon has been "given" over £10m for "exciting" eco-town projects is reason enough to treat it with more than a little caution. Understanding just how many strings are tied to any of these funds is crucial to putting it in proper perspective.

First, the announcement states that EHDC bid for funds at the end of last year. Did they even tell the townsfolk, let alone consult them about exactly how much was bid and for what? Of course not. As we know, these and other crucial decisions have been taken furtively by Cabinet members from distant wards. After that comes the now familiar promise of improved "facilities." What facilities? The Council has never come clean on what is planned, what proven need there is or whether they are simply geared to squeezing in an extra 15,000 people.

Then it confirms that any monies will be drip fed, next year, the year after that, etc. All of which stands to reason since their £400,000 unfinished masterplan is little more than a shabby set of diagrams, on which they plan to spend another £400,000. The draft Core Strategy policies are a mass of contradictions, inconsistencies and outright fantasies. The Council spent £500,000 last year on some ugly paving at the Forest Centre with a roadway through the middle of it which they badged as a "town square."

Next, it says that "free broadband" will be "rolled out" to everyone in the town, starting, naturally, with Council buildings, then going on to just 150 homes. Which homes? The first new ones perhaps? Not until the last phase, whenever that is, might existing residents see any benefit. The final sting comes with the message "...It is hoped that work will start later this year." Hoped! By whom? We'll have to wait and see. Any monies for retrofitting homes to eco-standards are a drop in the ocean compared to Building Research Establishment figures which suggest between £50 and £100 million will be needed.

BAAG chairman Steve Parsons warned: "The Council's determination to give itself permission for new "eco-houses," amounts to short circuiting the planning system even before designs can see the light of day. As for allotments and cutting down on food miles, "...suitable plots are being sought..." is all the Council can muster, while at the same time it is set to wipe out 90 hectares of working farmland at Stanford in order to compensate for the destruction of green land in Bordon."

Reading on, we can only hope that "modern and innovative transport systems" and "transport improvements" mean something other than buses and road widenings, this despite the withdrawal of the commercial bus service from Bordon, relying on a skeleton mini bus run on public subsidy. Finally, in pushing for house building at Viking Park, currently designated for employment in the Local Plan, the Council aims to jump the gun with an unapproved and damaging masterplan. "Most of the Council's press statement is just more premature, promotional hot air," said Parsons. "Whilst we welcome any real benefits for Bordon, preparing for another 15,000 people and bowing to Government pressure for early housebuilding is behind these millions. People should read between the lines, then demand to see how this money will actually be spent and when."

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