



**East Hampshire
Conservatives**

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NEWS RELEASE

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Bordon: Damian Hinds in Referendum call

Local Conservative candidate Damian Hinds this week called for a “genuinely open-minded” referendum of Bordon, Whitehill, and surrounding areas, before pressing ahead with *any* large-scale development.

In a statement, Damian Hinds said:

“Everyone wants to secure the best possible future for Bordon and Whitehill.

“In my three years as parliamentary candidate for East Hampshire, I have listened to the views of a lot of residents of Bordon and Whitehill, and the surrounding areas, about the proposed eco-town plan and thoughts on development in general. I have maintained an open mind and always said whatever plan is proceeded with must reflect the will of local people. The opinions I have heard have been very varied.

“Under the present government’s planning regime, the army’s planned withdrawal from Bordon could have led, other things being equal, to the imposition of house-building on a large scale without an overall plan to maximise the services and facilities secured for the area. In that context it was absolutely right for the District Council, in consultation with the Town Council and other local stakeholders, to seek ways to get local democratic control over this process and ensure it would come with appropriate facilities and services. This gave rise to the original Green Town Vision and subsequently the application to join the government’s Eco-towns project.

“The central question faced was not whether there would be thousands of homes built – which was all but inevitable under the current government’s rules – but how to shape development to the best advantage of local people.

“But there is now a realistic possibility of a change of government. If a Conservative government is elected, the whole ethos of the planning and development system will change.

Top-down housing targets will go, and the South East Plan will be shredded. Localities will be incentivised to accept development, rather than being coerced. Local people, through their elected local representatives, will be able to say yes or no to new housing, and there will be no 'inevitability' about large-scale development.

"Clearly, this would change the terms of the debate about Bordon and Whitehill. A basic economic reality would remain: the provision of the services people want is enabled mainly by residential development and population growth. But *how* that happens would to an extent change. And the decision *whether* to do it would be much more in the hands of people's local democratically elected representatives.

"We also now face a number of uncertainties. The state of the economy means some reduction in house-builders' plans in the immediate term. There is less government money about for projects like eco-towns. And I suppose it is always possible that the army's facility requirements could change.

"There is clearly a broad spectrum of views on the town's future from local residents. That, combined with the changed economic and political realities, I believe, means people in and around Bordon & Whitehill must be allowed a referendum, before embarking on *any* programme of development, whatever its label, which would result in several thousand new homes. Such a scale of development could bring great advantages but would also change the character of the town. It is only right to have a full poll on the matter, to get solid quantified results.

"Such a referendum should of course be genuinely open-minded, with the wording of the question set in consultation with key local stakeholders and reflecting the real trade-offs expected between scale of development and the facilities that can realistically be secured. It should cover the appropriate area – obviously Bordon and Whitehill residents, but also those in surrounding areas. And especially in these difficult economic times, it is of course vital that it be done at the lowest possible cost.

"As I said at the start, everyone wants the best future for Bordon and Whitehill, and I pay tribute to dedicated local councillors in all parties, and other local people, who have worked so hard to secure this. The opinions of local residents on the future for their area are finely balanced. Let's trust to democracy before embarking on decisions that can't be reversed later."

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