

## **Bordon, Ecotowns and Planning**

*A Letter to the Herald, April 2008*

Sir -

Last week brought the great news that Bordon is short-listed for possible eco-town status. The vision, ambition and public participation that is going into the Bordon opportunity demonstrates what can be achieved by strong local government in partnership with local people. In some other parts of the country, the 'eco-town' label is being used just to re-package inappropriate schemes for heavy development. Not so in Bordon, where the Green Vision put forward by the District Council has always been an integral part of the plan.

East Hants also has a strong record on the provision of affordable housing, having been awarded 'Beacon' status for its work in this area.

But alas the government does not want to trust local government when it comes to planning, as with so many other things.

The latest changes to the targets for passing planning applications are another blow to local control, accountability and democracy. 80% of major applications will need to be determined within 13 weeks, and 80% of minor and other applications within eight weeks. The government argues that this will make everything more efficient, but the danger is it just curtails flexibility for discussion and negotiating improvements to design.

Everyone recognises that homes do need to be built, and especially at the affordable end of the scale, to keep our communities and our local economy vibrant. But this must not be done by someone in Whitehall imposing their wishes against the best interests of those same communities.

Local government has seen more and more of its powers reduced or removed. In truth, the process started in the 1980s, but it has deepened and accelerated since 1997. If we are to see greater participation in local elections and other decision-making processes, we need a wholesale return of powers to the lowest possible level.

Yours

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