

Notes for talk to Froyle PC

Monday 24th Nov 2025

Major threat to our local villages - Froyle, Bentley, Binsted - and to Jane Austen country.

What is the problem?

Our local planning authority EHDC is currently preparing proposals for its new draft local housing plan, which runs till 2043. They are considering approving development sites for new housing equivalent to two new Altons between Bentley and Ropley – including no less than **150 new houses on two sites in Froyle**, 900 in Bentley and 2,000 in Binsted.

Why these numbers?

- 2023: sites for 574 new houses pa = 10,332 over 18 yrs were required
- 2024; sites for min 900 (up to 1,100) houses pa = min 16,200 (up to 19,800) houses are now required under their formula
- However, EHDC is in a special situation as South Downs National Park (SDNP) and other environmental protections cover 70% of its area
- Therefore we face min 12,000 houses along A31 - between Bentley/Ropley – this equates to 2 x Altons
- There are currently only 55,000 EHDC households in total

What is EHDC doing?

In October, EHDC published its Land Availability Assessment (LAA) – with 150 new sites (out of 274 in total) – to meet the minimum Govt targets for the new Local Plan. For the Plan to be adopted, >90% of these sites will need to be approved for development – inc Chawton Park Farm (1,100), Neatham (1,700), and 150+ in Froyle (138 in Upper Froyle, 15 in Lower Froyle).

These sites will be “allocated” based solely on their availability, not suitability, or long term sustainability, with no reference to local infrastructure (schools, surgeries, transport, sewage, jobs etc). It does not take much imagination to see the scale of the potential damage to greenfields, environment, River Wey, bio-diversity, community.....

EHDC is not proposing to consult on the higher target housing numbers (x 2) or the new sites (150). It is operating in secret and is planning to announce a fait accompli with proposals under Regulation 19 (where it does not have to listen to comments) to approve a new Local Plan with sites for 12,000 houses between Bentley and Ropley in Summer 2026.

Currently EHDC has lost control of development planning as it only has 2.7 years approved housing land supply – it therefore cannot challenge speculative development under the “tilted balance rules in favour of development” eg Four Marks/Medstead is facing speculative applications for >1000 new homes, which they are nodding through. There is no way it will be in any better position before its demise in 2028.

Local Government Reform

The death warrant for EHDC has been announced (and dated – 2028). In 2027 we will vote in a replacement Unitary Authority, probably for North Hants (>500,000 residents, inc

Winchester, Basingstoke) which will have >6 year Housing Land Supply and therefore be in a much better position to consider where to put much needed housing across a much larger area over the next 20 years, with better infrastructure. The UA will also be able to challenge speculative development from Day 1.

The A31 Alliance believes EHDC residents and their parish/town councils should urgently lobby EHDC district councillors:

- To consult again at Regulation 18 on target housing numbers (x 2) and major new sites (doubled) as other local planning authorities are doing (Test Valley, New Forest) – to do otherwise is frankly undemocratic and against the principle of local plan making
- To delay its Local Plan approval process so that it does not give formal site approval for 12,000 new homes down the A31 (a truly dreadful legacy) before it is disbanded
- To allow the new Unitary Authority with its much wider remit/greater flexibility/greater capacity to decide where the houses should go

Meanwhile, please go to our website www.savejaneaustencountry.org and sign our petition www.change.org/p/save-jane-austen-countrywith 22k others. There is a local village meeting in Bentley on 11th December.

Thank you

Bruce Powell, on behalf of A31Alliance (A31A)