Council Report
Report of the Executive Head of Governance

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Petition – Keep West Horsley in the Green Belt

Recommendation to Council:

The Council is asked to debate the subject matter of a petition and to indicate to the petition organiser what action it intends to take.

Reason for Recommendation:
To comply with the requirements of the Council’s adopted Petition Scheme.

1. Purpose of report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform the Council of the receipt of a petition, which was signed by 660 people, of whom 626 live, work or study in the borough, 31 live outside the borough and three gave no address or the address was illegible.

1.2 The petition states:

“PLAN TO CONCRETE WEST HORSELY
We say:
• KEEP WEST HORSELY IN THE GREEN BELT
• NO to 821 homes to be built on Green Belt land in our village
• NO to increasing our village by 75%

We say this plan will impose an unsupportable burden on schools, road network, drainage, infrastructure, medical services, public transport and dramatically change the character of our village for future generations.”

1.3 Under the terms of our adopted petition scheme, the Council is invited to consider and respond to the petition.

1.4 The petition was received on 29 November 2013, which coincided with the closing date of the Council’s Issues and Options consultation. Whilst the petition will be debated by full Council at the extraordinary meeting on 13
January 2014, it has also also been passed to the Planning Policy team to be considered with all other responses to the Issues and Options consultation.

2. Strategic Priorities

2.1 Formal consideration by the full Council of proposals contained in a petition is consistent with the Council’s desire to be open and accountable to its residents and to deliver improvements and enable change across the Borough.

3. Background to subject matter of e-petition

3.1 The Council has recently completed the first stage of consultation in respect of the new Local Plan. This first stage consultation considered the issues that will face the borough up to 2031 and sets out some options to deal with these issues. The consultation was the most comprehensive that we have ever undertaken in respect of the Local Plan.

3.2 In order to inform this recent consultation we have produced a number of evidence based documents. This has included the Green Belt and Countryside Study and Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment. We are currently updating our Strategic Housing Market Assessment and will be publishing this early in 2014, along with an updated Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment. These documents, and other evidence, show that we may not be able to accommodate all future growth in our urban areas depending on the level of growth for which the Local Plan needs to make provision.

3.3 We have received many comments and representations on the issue of potential development in the Green Belt and AONB, including this and other petitions. As stated above, the petitioners urge the Council to keep West Horsley in the Green Belt. We will consider these issues as part of the process of producing a Draft Local Plan.

3.4 At a recent Duty to Cooperate Conference hosted by the Council, we were clearly advised that we need to demonstrate a careful consideration of all options in the development of our strategy and Local Plan. It would therefore be premature for the Council to remove all Green Belt and AONB land at this very early stage. If the Council took the decision to exclude land because of its land use designation, we will not be able to reassure our independent inspector, when the plan is examined, that we have considered fully and soundly all options surrounding our agreed strategy.

3.5 In order to come to a sound strategy we must first consider all the representations that we have received as part of the recent consultation and our evidence. In the coming months the Council will take decisions on growth, our strategic development strategy and any strategic sites.

3.6 The National Planning Policy Framework gives very clear guidance on the treatment of villages in the Green Belt. The proposal within the Issues and Options document, to inset certain villages in the Green Belt is in conformity with this guidance. Other neighbouring councils such as Mole Valley inset villages into the Green Belt in a Local Plan in 1993. If West Horsley is inset into the Green Belt and no longer washed over by this notation it will still remain surrounded by Green Belt.
4. **The Council’s Petition Scheme**

4.1 The Council’s adopted petition scheme provides that where a petition contains more than 400 signatures in relation to an issue that affects a single ward, or 500 signatures in relation to an issue affecting two or more wards, it will be referred to the full Council for debate. The Council will decide how to respond to the petition at the meeting.

4.2 The petition scheme states that our response will depend on what a petition asks for, but may include one or more of the following:

- taking the action requested in the petition
- considering the petition at a meeting of the Council or Executive
- holding an inquiry into the matter
- holding a public meeting
- holding a meeting with petitioners or the petition organiser
- undertaking research into the matter
- writing to the petition organiser setting out the Council’s views about the request in the petition
- referring the petition to one of the Council’s scrutiny committees for consideration

**Procedure for dealing with the petition at the meeting**

4.3 Under the Council’s petition scheme, the petition organiser is given a period of up to five minutes to speak to the subject matter of the petition at the meeting. Councillors will have an opportunity to ask questions of the petition organiser before the formal debate on the petition.

4.4 In accordance with the rules of debate in Council Procedure Rule 11 (a), at the start of the debate, a motion as to how the Council should respond to the petition should be moved formally and seconded in the usual way. Any such motion may be subject to amendment. After the debate and before a final decision or vote is taken on the Council’s response to the petition, the petition organiser will be granted a right of reply for a further period of up to five minutes.

4.5 Councillors’ comments during the debate shall not exceed five minutes in length.

5. **Financial Implications**

5.1 None

6. **Legal Implications**

6.1 None

7. **Human Resource Implications**

7.1 None

8. **Background papers**

Adopted Petition Scheme (June 2010)

9. **Appendices**

None