

Dear Councillors,

I attended the planning meeting on Thursday 26th September and was appalled by the lack of understanding of the majority of councillors regarding the planning process and what in fact they were being asked to vote for. There was no introduction to the meeting, no setting of the scene or indeed the process. An outline plan is just that, a rough draft, it showed a plot of land, the boundaries, a roundabout and some pretty pictures of potential houses and trees.

Councillors did not seem to grasp the notion that they were simply being asked to vote on whether this plot of land was a good idea for a new housing estate. It was apparent that a number of councillors had no idea of the meaning of outline planning and that material considerations are not relevant at this stage, which meant a huge amount of time was spent explaining this time after time. On the other hand very little time was taken to understand the impact a development of this size and scale will have on our small town. Most of the comments were incoherent or irrelevant, and repetitive. There was no debate, opinions were offered with little evidence and questions were in the main queries that should have been asked of the Officers a long time before the meeting. Concerns were brushed aside with rather dubious half-truths or vague facts and in some cases passing the buck. A disproportionate amount of time was allocated to various councillors, some allowed a lot of time and others, told to finish what they were saying in far less time.

It is surely incumbent upon Councillors to do some work before the meeting and as a minimum to understand the process. How two councillors could abstain from the vote, is beyond me, they attended, had opinions and then could or would not make a decision. One councillor left before the vote, why is this allowed? This was neither a fair or efficient process. I feel this was an exercise in ensuring HDC met their targets, and very little to do with what is best for Steyning and the people who live here.