

## **Opening Speech – Launch Community Workshop – 18<sup>th</sup> September 2023**

I am pleased to welcome you all to this Community Workshop to launch the preparation of the Southborough and High Brooms Neighbourhood Development Plan.

I am Brian Dury. I was born in Southborough and lived here all of my life. I like to say I am 4<sup>th</sup> generation here. I was elected to the Town Council in May and now Chair its Planning and Transportation Committee. However, tonight I am here as the Chair of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, that comprises Councillors and Lay People.

Over the years I've seen huge changes across our community. Some good and many very bad. Few, have we had any real say on, or it's been a battle to be heard.

Neighbourhood Plans were introduced by our MP some 12 years ago, when he was a Minister for Planning. In 2011, I attended a public meeting Greg Clark held and listened to him speak about his new idea. I was immediately taken by the concept and have campaigned for us to have a Neighbourhood Plan ever since.

In Parliament Greg said "For too long local people have been shut out of the planning process with no real voice to affect decisions about the places where they live. Unpopular strategies left people without the ability to influence the future of their community, and this fuelled resentment towards growth.

Neighbourhood planning will hand power back to communities to decide the vision for their area as they see fit, encouraging people to plan positively for their future."

Within the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council area, we are one of the last parishes to be working on a Neighbourhood Plan. Indeed, Cranbrook, Paddock Wood and Pembury all reached the final stage last Thursday, when their plans went to a community referendum and were all approved by their residents.

I know that a Neighbourhood Plan is not a panacea for all the issue in our Town and I know that some are going to be disappointed. However, I am convinced that having a Neighbourhood Plan will put Southborough and High Brooms in a much better place. It will be a plan that covers more than building and development. It will be a plan for the future of Southborough and High Brooms, with community policies generated and owned by you.

It's taken a long time to get here. Some with significant influence have long argued against community engagement here and have claimed we have no major developments on the books, so we don't need a plan. They say the plan will only duplicate the work of Kent County Council and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.

I believe there is still major development happening. We are seeing constant infill right across our town and we are seeing demolition and restructuring, as land owners look to make more efficient use of their assets.

And I believe we should challenge the policies of KCC and TWBC. We need to care for and develop our own character for our Neighbourhood, so that we can decide how we live together and what we want, to make Southborough and High Brooms a thriving community, full of confidence and ambition.

We have just received a Government grant from the Department of Levelling Up Housing and Communities to help us prepare our Neighbourhood Plan. This has enabled us to work with two professional Planning Consultants in delivering our plan and I am so pleased to introduce to you Alison Eardley and James Boot. Alison and Jim are very knowledgeable of our local area, as they have guided many of the other Parishes within TWBC in the preparation of their Plans.

But it's really all about you and capturing your thoughts. To do this we have six theme tables where you can write down your ideas, hopes, dreams and concerns. We will spend about 15 minutes doing that, and then have feedback from the table leaders and then have a question-and-answer session.

I must stress that the preparation of our Plan is not run by the Town Council. It is managed by the Steering Group, which as I said, comprises Councillors and Lay People. I would welcome more Lay People to the Group, especially High Brooms folk – so please think about joining us.

Brian Dury – Chair Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group - 18/09/2023