

Burgess Hill Community Governance Review – Consultation response

It is the view of Burgess Hill Town Council that the case for extending the boundary of Burgess Hill to incorporate the Northern Arc is overwhelming. We set out below the reasons why the Community Governance Review should support this conclusion.

1. In August 2011 Burgess Hill Town Council published “Burgess Hill, A Town Wide Strategy for the next 20 years” (**The Town Wide Strategy**). This document drew on work that had commenced in 2004 and was informed by town wide consultation that ran from September 2020 to March 2021.
2. This work was undertaken in partnership with residents, Mid Sussex District Council and West Sussex County Council with the aim of shaping the future development of the town and its economy.
3. The Town Wide Strategy took a holistic approach to investment in and around the town and included a forward-looking assessment of housing development in the area. The Northern Sector (as the Northern Arc was called at this time) was identified as a strategic site for 3500 homes as part of a much larger allocation for housing in and around Burgess Hill.
4. The Burgess Hill Neighbourhood Plan (Made January 2016) noted in respect of the Northern Arc development that:

*“whilst this development is primarily outside of the administrative boundary of Burgess Hill, and outside of its Neighbourhood Plan area, **it is designed to function as an urban extension to Burgess Hill.**” (page 16)*

Having established this principle in the Neighbourhood plan it was then carried forward and expanded in the Mid Sussex District Plan. It is also worth noting in this section the reference to the Northern Arc being an “urban extension.” In terms of identifying a cohesive community with a clear identity the setting of the Northern Arc makes it more inclined towards its adjoining urban environment compared to the rural setting of Ansty and Staplefield.

5. The Mid Sussex District Plan was adopted on 28th March 2018 and much of the work that led to the Town Wide Strategy was incorporated into it. In particular, DP7 to DP9 deal with strategic development at Burgess Hill and it is worth noting that no other area of the district has this level of policy coverage. This is an indication of the importance of Burgess Hill as a major area for development.

6. DP6 of the District Plan sets the context for housing development based upon the categorisation of settlement hierarchies. Significant development in the District Plan is directed towards Category 1 settlements which are Burgess Hill, East Grinstead and Haywards Heath. Burgess Hill's allocation in the District Plan is 5697 units (including the 3500 for the Northern Arc) making up 35% of the total housing allocation (22% of the total is in the Northern Arc).

7. A Category 1 settlement is defined in DP6 as a:

“Settlement with a comprehensive range of employment, retail, health, education, leisure services and facilities. These settlements will also benefit from good public transport provision and will act as a main service centre for smaller settlements.”

It can be clearly seen how Burgess Hill meets the definition of a Category 1 settlement. When considering where the Northern Arc naturally fits in terms of structural identity it is appropriate to view it as part of Burgess Hill given that it is an extension of this settlement.

8. By way of a contrast, and because the Northern Arc is currently situated in the parish of Ansty and Staplefield, it should be noted that these are Category 4 settlements which are defined as:

“Small villages with limited services often only serving the settlement itself.”

Other than because of local government history there is no obvious connection between the Northern Arc and Ansty (let alone Staplefield). There is no structural connection between the Northern Arc and these smaller settlements. The thrust of infrastructure development is directed towards Burgess Hill not Ansty or Staplefield.

9. DP7 of the District Plan sets out the general principles for strategic development at Burgess Hill with DP9 setting the policy framework for the Northern Arc development. Both DP7 and DP9 draw on the Town Wide Strategy which includes an emphasis on comprehensive and infrastructure investment which integrates the Northern Arc with Burgess Hill. It is worth noting how this is reinforced in DP9 (para 5, page 43) in the District Plan. Looking at how the Northern Arc development spills into the existing town it states:

*“The area between Maple Drive and the Northern Arc is included within the allocation because **it is important that the new development is integrated with the existing town** and that there are good public transport and pedestrian links between the development and Wivelsfield Station.”*

It is clear, therefore, that the District Plan envisages that the Northern Arc is strategically part of Burgess Hill.

10. The key partners in the delivery of the Northern Arc are BHTC, MSDC, WSCC and Homes England. The development is covered by a comprehensive Masterplan. Full details of the Northern Arc development can be found on its dedicated website: www.burgesshill.net It states as a major aim:

“the Strategic Growth Programme for Burgess Hill is the most ambitious programme of change anywhere in the sub region. Our ambition is to transform the local economy, creating thousands of new high value jobs in technology led industries,

and making Burgess Hill one of the most attractive places in the region to live and do business.

11. The Strategic Growth Programme takes all of the scheduled developments in and around Burgess Hill (i.e. not only the Northern Arc) as the overall growth strategy for the town. Given that this is how it is structured in the District Plan it would be illogical at this stage to treat the Northern Arc as if it was not part of the overall growth of the town.
12. But, in any event, the Northern Arc is designed in such a way to conform to the District Plan and in particular DP7. This states as a first principle that strategic development will:

“be designed in a way that integrates it into the existing town providing connectivity with all relevant services and facilities.

13. The Masterplan sets out in some detail how the delivery of infrastructure in the development sites, but particularly the Northern Arc, creates an integrated whole with a network of walkways, cycleways and road improvements that connect the Northern Arc to the existing town. In addition, as a key transport hub there are plans to improve both Burgess Hill and Wivelsfield Station as well as invest in regular bus links from the Northern Arc into the existing town. These, along with other investments, makes it clear that the Northern Arc and the existing town are two parts of a whole.
14. The Local Government Boundary Commission guidance on Community Governance Reviews (published March 2010) states that:

“in many cases making changes to the boundaries of existing parishes, rather than creating an entirely new parish, will be sufficient to ensure that community governance arrangements to continue to reflect local identities and facilitate effective and convenient local government. For example, over time communities may expand with new housing developments. This can often lead to existing parish boundaries becoming anomalous as new houses are built across the boundaries resulting in people being in different parishes from their neighbours.” (para 15, p10)

This is precisely the situation with the Northern Arc which has been designed as a structural extension to the existing town, albeit that it sits in the neighbouring parish.

15. The case for change has been reinforced by the recent review of the District Ward boundaries. When the Boundary Commission carried out its review it put the Northern Arc developments up to 2027 into two Burgess Hill wards – Dunstall (900) & Leylands (625). To leave the parish boundary unaltered by this decision would be to create an anomaly which Community Governance Reviews are designed to remove. If the boundary is not changed some voters, living currently in the parish of Ansty would be electing Burgess Hill District Ward Councillors. Amending the boundary solves this anomaly and creates a clear and logical structure for local government and democratic accountability.

It also solves a similar problem of some residents in the Burgess Hill wards of Dunstall and Leylands electing Burgess Hill Town Councillors whilst others elect Ansty parish Councillors.

It is important for accountable local government that votes count the same and that people living in the same area are able to access the same governmental organisation. The Boundary Commission clearly saw that as being Burgess Hill.

However, as part of this review we believe that the warding arrangement for the Town Council be considered carefully as, in our view, the Boundary Commission has created a number of smaller parish wards where the ratio of elected member to elector is not in line with some of the other Town Council wards.

16. Burgess Hill has a population of over 30,000 and a wide range of public, private and voluntary groups capable of supporting the increase in population that will come from the Northern Arc development. Being able to provide this level of community support from the start is crucial as new developments are delivered helping to create a sense of place, cohesion and connection.
17. Residents on the Northern Arc will look towards Burgess Hill for a wide range of private, public, and voluntary services that simply will not be available if it was a stand-alone community or remained part of Ansty and Staplefield. Indeed, you could not expect these two villages to be able to support the needs of the Northern Arc where they have no obvious structural connection and do not have an infrastructure base capable of supporting the area (in population terms the Northern Arc is likely to be 3 times the size of Ansty and Staplefield when fully developed).
18. Burgess Hill Town Council has an active Community Engagement Team (3 full time member of staff) that provide a wide range of community events. It has a Help Point & Tourist Information Centre which is staffed (3 full time equivalents) and open 5 days per week providing extensive community support. Residents on the Northern Arc will be able to access all these services and fully participate in the town's active community life.
19. Under the Localism Act 2011, Burgess Hill Town Council has a General Power of Competence giving it the ability to invest in and operate a wider range of services compared to smaller parish authorities. It means that the Council is better equipped to support the needs of residents on the Northern Arc. For example, the Council is investing in more community facilities, including a modern theatre which will support the whole town including the Northern Arc.
20. Burgess Hill Town Council has a budget of around £1m and 16 full time members of staff. It has a strong service ethos delivery a wide range of community services and a vision to expand these. It can accommodate the inclusion of the Northern Arc into its services providing value for money and effective delivery in a way that a smaller parish cannot.
21. Burgess Hill's town centre is the natural destination for residents in the Northern Arc and, indeed, the Northern Arc Masterplan emphasises this fact. In addition to the public services provided by the Council, provision for the wider catchment area is supported with:
 - a) Health services.
 - b) Education provision (though it is acknowledged that 2 primary and a secondary school form part of the Northern Arc infrastructure).
 - c) Banks and other financial services.
 - d) Professional services.
 - e) Employment opportunities at two industrial parks and in the town centre (noting that the Northern Arc also makes provision for employment).

- f) Retail with both edge of town supermarkets and a DIY centre plus a traditional town centre with a mix of independent and national chains. The Masterplan includes a major regeneration proposal for the town centre.
- g) A post office.
- h) The Triangle Leisure centre plus other privately run leisure businesses.
- i) Churches and Chapels.
- j) Community Centres.
- k) Community organisations.

All of these businesses, organisations and groups will be able to support the Northern Arc Helping to strengthen the obvious links between the development and the existing town.