



Chairman, Trustees and Officers of the  
Friends of the Green Circle Network

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Our Ref:FOGCN

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Dear Chairman, Trustees and Officers

It is with a great deal of anguish that we to write to you on this occasion but there is a compelling reason that directly affects whether the Green Circle Network will ever be completed, or indeed survive as an entity.

The Committee of The Friends of the Green Circle Network has chosen to advise the membership to vote No, on the questionnaire which is being used to gather opinions in the public engagement part of the 20 Year Strategy for Burgess Hill, which is currently under way. This action effectively advocates the non-completion of the Green Circle Network.

The Strategy may not be perfect, but it is not so wrong that it requires members of the group to be instructed to reject it out of hand with the dire consequences outlined in the remainder of this letter. Such arbitrary action is unfair, undemocratic and denies the bulk of the residents of Burgess Hill the opportunity to benefit from the revitalisation of their town and the protection of their countryside.

This action undermines a once in a lifetime opportunity for the residents of Burgess Hill and coming generations, to benefit from a carefully balanced strategy which will give them fully sustainable communities, more locally-based job opportunities, a re-vitalised town centre fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, together with considerably expanded sports facilities for all age groups and communities both new and existing, bound together with an integrated transport system which will be environmentally friendly and efficient.

Essential to the life and happiness of our community, will be the preservation of the surrounding countryside and for it to be accessible via a network of all-weather paths suitable for walkers, cyclists and the disabled; all this within landscapes which are inter-connected, to allow wildlife to prosper and move around.

There will be no public money available for at least the next three years; probably much longer. The funding which is then available to maintain and complete the Green Circle Network, will only come from housing developers. This is a stark fact and has been known for some time. The Town Council, therefore, has worked to reach agreement with the appropriate developers for them to pay for the completion of the Green Circle. The provision of ranger support and a visitor centre will be the subject of negotiation at the planning stage; the raising of the subject now, is a misunderstanding of the process of strategic development.

Should the Friends of the Green Circle Network's intervention be successful in stopping the 20 Year Strategy being adopted, the consequences for wildlife, walking and countryside access will be severe and permanent. A significant number of houses will still be required in Mid Sussex over the next twenty years to meet locally determined housing need (particularly affordable housing). Without a plan, which will allocate land for specific future use (including retention as greenfield) development will happen in a piecemeal and random fashion without any benefits to the town or countryside. If you find the recent vandalism of the trees and vegetation in Folders Lane, appalling, then this is what will happen across Burgess Hill and surrounding green areas, without the restraint of the Strategy.

Burgess Hill Town Council is notably finding every bit of money it possibly can to enhance the Green Circle; it has already been successful in getting S106 contributions from other developers. The Friends Group cannot expect to continue to obtain money, assistance and construction for the Green Circle, whilst attacking the long-term strategy of the three levels of councils who have adopted and are implementing Green Circle Network plans. It is in effect, biting the hand that feeds. Such a relationship will be considered perverse, when its action is revealed, and cannot be expected to continue.

What is also perverse is the action taken when compared to the view of the group's Chairman, as expressed in a letter to the very developers who are now being penalised for their adoption of the Green Circle Network:

*"We have looked at your outline plans on the MSDC website and regard them as visionary and exciting. The whole project will provide an opportunity for us all to improve the facilities in and around the town whilst at the same time protecting and improving the best parts of our countryside that we all wish to enjoy."*

*August, 2010 - as a result of an introduction from Burgess Hill town Council, to consultants Broadway Malyan.*

This letter was written when Burgess Hill was facing the imposition of over 8,000 houses by the then government, without guarantees of benefits to the town or protection of wildlife habitat. We are at a loss to follow the present logic of objecting to only 4,000 homes, which will bring needed benefits to Burgess Hill but importantly, enables us to guarantee conservation and wildlife protection for generations to come.

Clearly, both parties have the same objective in this matter. We would welcome the Friends' ideas on how the natural environment could be preserved and enhanced in the evolution of this strategic plan, so that we can ensure that these important matters are included with the other major issues, which we need to consider in the development of this plan. The objective is to achieve a balance between all the main aspects of creating a sustainable community, so there is no unfair competition between priorities.

There is so much at stake that it must be for all the Group's members to be involved, not left to the committee to shoulder the burden of deciding the fate of our wildlife. The Strategic Planning Group has had to obtain the endorsement of the full Council of Burgess Hill Town Council and then further obtain the support of the residents of the Town for the 20 Year Strategy and fulfil the mandate they have as elected representatives.

It is only fair, therefore, that the Green Circle Network also uses the same transparent, democratic methods as well, in helping its members to fully understand the complexities and implications of strategic planning and the objective of protecting our wildlife. The supply of full information by the Town Council to your members, with your endorsement, will regain the balance the debate desperately needs.

A resolution to the crisis for our town can come from a correcting balance of information to your members, from Burgess Hill Town Council, delivered via your email list of members, to which we ask to be given access.

The granting of this request will enable both parties to be of the utmost service to those who care about our environment and its maintenance to high standards, well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to which the town council, collectively and individually is committed.

It is important to the future of Burgess Hill that we hear from you soon.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Andrew Barrett-Miles  
Conservative Group Leader



Councillor Heather Ross  
Liberal Democrats Group Leader