

W35 19/9/08

# Quality concern over affordable homes



by **Oliver Palmer**  
vice-president  
of Horsham  
Society

FIFTY years ago the population of Horsham had passed the 15,000 mark and the Horsham Society had just been founded. Today the population is fast approaching 50,000 and this autumn we shall be invited to discuss our vision for Horsham and next year the Core Strategy which dictates planning policy will be reviewed. Housing will inevitably attract a lot of attention but the

Horsham Society is keen to see a well-balanced and a well-mixed community and it may be worth taking a little time to consider a special group – social housing or affordable rented homes.

What is an affordable home? Some people say it is any home let at a rent less of than 30 per cent of the household income typical in an area.

Most say it is a home let for a target rent from a not-for-profit social landlord, usually one of the registered housing association such as Saxon Weald to which local authorities transferred their housing stocks.

How many do we need? It is hard to say. In 2006 the HDC Housing Need Survey put the district waiting list at 822.

Of course people leave the

list but others are being taken onto to it all the time and HDC has estimated that it should build an average of 80 homes in the district each year, a number it will be increasing to 120 from next year.

These will form part of the programme for all home building at present planned to average 535 a year.

Who supplies them? A housing association will buy land and build on it or buy a completed development and then let it out. Here we come to the small print where, as they say, the going gets difficult and the difficult get going.

HDC policies say that, in Horsham, at least 40 per cent of every development of 15 or more homes, or on a site of 0.5 or more hectares (about 2.5

acres in old money) must be affordable.

This means that the developer has not only to complete a contract with the landowner but also with a housing association to take 40 per cent of the units either as fully serviced sites or completed dwellings.

Our concern – the Horsham Society believes it to be wrong to treat affordable homes as second-class accommodation.

However, there is a possibility that HDC, driven by quotas, and developers, constrained by costs, may yield to the temptation to accept double standards of siting, space and design.

This would compromise the need for a properly balanced and well-mixed community which the society believes to

be in the best interests not only of the tenants but of all the people of Horsham.

The questions we shall be asking are whether the affordable homes are tucked into awkward corners of the site and whether, compared with the other homes in the development, floor areas are being cut, dwellings are being packed more tightly and some lesser standard of design is being adopted.

*The Horsham Society is concerned about the town's past, present and future and seeks to promote good planning and design for the built environment and open spaces.*

*For more information and details on how to join visit our website  
[www.horshamsociety.org](http://www.horshamsociety.org) or  
phone 01403 272814.*