

Local panel can build design heritage



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EVENTUALLY we will be getting 2,000 houses west of Horsham, between Hills Farm and south of Broadbridge Heath.

The present doldrums in the economic climate means they might come later rather than sooner, but come they will.

Sharp-eyed readers might have noted that I say 'houses' rather than 'homes'. We need more houses. We do not need more flats and apartments. Horsham does not have a tradition of flat-dwelling.

Families live in houses with some outdoor garden space. The problem is that houses, particularly 'affordable' houses, are more expensive to build than flats or big non-affordable properties that demand high prices.

Building on the cheap means that costs have to be cut. The Government sets out strict environmental criteria for affordable homes so costs must be kept down by other means.

One way is to cram them in, another is to economise on architects' fees. Both can have an adverse affect on the design of the houses.

Two thousand houses presents a wonderful opportunity as well as a serious challenge. Unlike the small infill schemes that we have seen in Horsham, these

greenfield areas west of Horsham do not have the constraints of having to fit in with the character of surrounding existing properties. We have a chance for some really exciting architecture which will be a heritage to our descendants.

Unfortunately there are few examples of good modern designs. There are plenty of examples of blocks of flats, warehouses and commercial buildings, but not houses.

Parts of Horsham have rows of terraced houses with adequate gardens but built to the sort of densities that are deemed desirable for west of Horsham. Should we reinvent the terraced house?

Its near-relative, the 'town house', is not generally much liked because it is all stairs.

Perhaps some other designs from the 1960s should be revived?

The design of these new homes is important. The developers will work here for ten years, then up sticks and away.

We, in Horsham, will have to live with the results of their work for the next 50 years, or more. They must get it right! We must make sure that they do.

One possibility is a design panel. It would be available to assist case officers and councillors and to provide a think-tank to discuss policy matters.

We all want to see the high standard of design referred to in council policy statements but it means more than adding local features and materials to

standard designs. Planning is more than a box-ticking exercise against a design guide.

We shall not be able to live in the past indefinitely and reasoned judgements of designs of our own time will require something more.

This is where a design panel can play a part and the society is having discussions with Horsham District Council.

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 or
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