

Is it crunch time over new housing?



by **Nigel Friswell**
vice-president,
the Horsham
Society

HORSHAM District Council has bent over backwards to dance to the Government's tune over housing.

It was one of the first planning authorities to introduce the hugely bureaucratic new Local Development Framework and to have its core strategy approved by the Government's inspectors.

The council accepted without any fuss the centrally planned demand for thousands of new houses to be built on green field sites despite it being clear to

everyone that the necessary supporting infrastructure, including hospitals, would never be provided.

Most recently it refused a plea from The Horsham Society to object to the Government's decision to remove the strategic gaps between Horsham and Crawley, and Southwater without which the risk of coalescence will be considerably greater.

Now, its flagship scheme for 2,000 new houses to the west of Horsham is running into serious problems.

The council, after wide ranging public consultation, adopted a Masterplan to which the developers are expected to adhere.

However, Countryside Properties, the developers of the largest portion, south of Broadbridge Heath, have put in an application based on an

alternative plan already considered and rejected by the council.

One of the primary reasons given is cost. Countryside say that the council's plan would cost £8m more, primarily for the road layout required to take traffic away from the new development.

This they say is unaffordable in the current economic climate and would not enable them to deliver the affordable housing which is an essential element of the council's plan; and they hint that other promised community facilities might also be in jeopardy.

Similar issues have been raised by Berkeley Strategic, developers of the section to the east of the A24.

Although they have not yet submitted a planning application they have told the council that the Masterplan is

no longer affordable and that they could not deliver either the affordable housing or the other required community benefits.

Discussions are reaching a critical stage.

The council is under pressure to deliver new homes, not least because its forward budget projections assumed a rising tax base.

The developers, who are probably in no hurry to start building houses they will not be able to sell, are pressing for substantial concessions.

Unless the council stands firm there is a considerable risk that we will see the 2,000 houses built in small penny packets over a longer time scale but without adequate affordable housing or many of the community facilities such as schools, halls, playgrounds, allotments, playing fields and other open spaces promised in

the Masterplan.

This would be a disaster for Broadbridge Heath and Denne neighbourhood in particular, and Horsham as a whole.

The time has come for the council to be robust and take a stand.

It must tell the developers to go away and not come back until their proposals measure up to the requirements in the Masterplan.

If that means waiting until the recession is over and the economy picks up so be it.

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
telephone 01403 272814.*