

It's time for a new town to be created



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THE GOVERNMENT'S publication of the South East Plan last week will have significant consequences for Horsham district, particularly the northern part, including Horsham itself.

This forms part of the so-called Gatwick Diamond, a sub-regional economic area which depends for its prosperity on its Crawley and Gatwick hub, and in turn, so the argument goes, Horsham should provide support for the

continuing growth of the region by providing the necessary housing and other services.

We have questioned before whether the benefit of having a vibrant economic hub on our doorstep is outweighed by the demands it places on a largely rural district, but the die is cast in the SE Plan.

It is quite clear that of the 36,000 new homes it says are needed by 2026 in the Gatwick sub-region alone, 9,200 must be found from within the north of Horsham district.

The planned developments west of Horsham and west of Crawley will provide 4,500 new homes but that this leaves a huge gap. Where are these new homes going to be built?

And we are not the only areas facing this threat. Crawley and Mid Sussex must

together make room for a further 23,300 homes over the same period.

Coalescence between Horsham and Crawley will be much harder to prevent now the Government has abolished the strategic gap – a decision which the district council refused to fight. And a significant part of the land within the Gatwick sub-region is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, thus restricting the potential for development.

So what seems certain is that unless the planners come up with a radical alternative we face the possibility of an urban sprawl from Billingshurst to East Grinstead.

The Horsham Society has said before that there is a finite size beyond which towns lose

their identity, and with it the essential community spirit which makes a place somewhere pleasant to live. Horsham, with a population approaching 50,000, has reached that limit. There must be no further expansion of the town's boundaries.

We cannot continue with our present policy of adding piecemeal to existing towns and villages. It will destroy their character and it is not a long term solution. It is a policy of cowardice, and a failure of leadership.

The Horsham Society has long argued for the creation of a new town, planned for the 21st century, incorporating the lessons learned from the post war new towns such as Crawley and more recent developments like Poundbury.

Where would it be built? Rail and strategic road links would probably limit the number of possibilities and there is no doubt wherever it is located there will be objections. But the long term benefits of the many must be weighed against the anxieties of the few.

It is time for our local leaders to show the courage and foresight needed to create a district which future generations will cherish.

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 261905.