

New developments and the street scene



by **Nigel Friswell**
vice-president
& acting
chairman of
the Horsham
Society

FOR DECADES now, it has been assumed that the best results come if we 'let the markets decide'.

The assumption is that money rules and is much better than management by some central authority. That this philosophy does not allow for greed is illustrated by the current credit crunch.

After the Second World War, Britain was desperate for new homes.

One of the ways to meet this need was the formation of the

New Towns movement, of which our neighbour, Crawley, is one.

New Towns did not just happen, they were planned. There was much criticism at the time but now that they have matured, many New Towns' residential areas (Crawley included) are not looking so bad, certainly better than some of their town centres.

Horsham is to have two new major residential developments, West of Horsham (Broadbridge Heath) and West of Crawley, each with 2,500 houses.

Each is pretty substantial by anybody's standards; not the odd cul-de-sac which can safely be left to a developer after submitting his plans.

The Horsham Society is not alone in being concerned that house design has lost its way but how much more serious is the area where the house sits,

the environment, the street scene.

Our district council has, in recent years, largely abrogated any responsibility for design, planning and layout. Leave it to the developers and it will all be OK in the end.

This is not true. Some management, control and co-ordination is needed. Not just beautiful homes but beautiful surroundings.

Easy if it is a top-of-the-range development but in our two instances there will be every need to economise.

Already the developers are saying they cannot pay for affordable homes and 'green' infrastructure.

The council has got to take some initiative. In the absence of anyone with the skills, experience and willingness to do some town planning, I would advocate that the council

adopts the seven simple rules proposed by Prof Matthew Carmona of University College, London. They are:

1. Streets should form a continuous urban network with all streets joining at least two others.
2. Streets should be designed for a maximum vehicle speed of 20mph.
3. Every street and/or building block should host at least two (preferably more) land uses.
4. Buildings should face public open space and create a coherent, continuous, building line.
5. Blank facades at street level should not be allowed.
6. Space for front gardens and/or street trees should be provided.
7. Setbacks and front gardens should never be covered by more than 30 per cent parking.

Within these rules huge

scope would remain for different architectural styles, densities, types of houses, landscape treatments, road layouts, etc.

We might not agree with all these rules but let us at least consider them.

Go on, HDC, take the initiative out of the hands of the developers and let's see if we can land up with developments in which people want to live; developments which, like the old New Towns, mature into something very pleasant.

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 on how to join visit the website www.horshamsociety.org or telephone 01403 261905.