

Spectre of Crawsham can be avoided



by **John Steele**
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LAST week Horsham District Council launched its Core Strategy Review which will eventually decide where the additional homes needed in our district will be provided in the period up to 2026 and beyond.

The document is pretty opaque about the number of homes we need.

In part this is probably because the announcement by the Conservatives that if elected they will drop the current 'top down' housing targets throws the current South East Plan into

doubt.

More significantly, I think, it is a welcome attempt to focus less at this stage on precise numbers and more on the principles involved.

There is no doubt we will need to build many more new homes. Housing demand is driven by a number of factors: growth in the indigenous Horsham population; increasing life expectancy with older people staying in their homes longer; more single households; and people wishing to move into the area.

All but the last of these seem to attract reasonable support and together we are told they account for roughly two-thirds of the demand for new homes.

The other third is inward migration. A very high proportion of Horsham residents were originally

incomers.

Should we put up 'house full' signs and deny similar opportunities to others? A moment's thought will show that it is not only unreasonable, but unworkable too.

A housing shortage does not deter affluent incomers, rather it denies younger, and less well-off local people a home of their own.

It is reasonable to assume that when the political dust settles and the council makes its final assessment we will need to find space for as many as 6,000 new homes over and above land already identified. And this is only for the period up to 2026. It will not stop there.

The council has identified a range of options including a new village of 4,000 homes, large settlements in the strategic gap between Crawley and

Horsham, major extensions to Billingshurst and Southwater, and even building on Chesworth Farm country park!

Also canvassed, but lacking any detail, is a new market town possibly developed jointly with Mid Sussex in the A23 corridor.

The Horsham Society has long argued that it is wrong to continue looking for short term solutions to what is a long term problem.

In other words we should stop thinking the demand for new homes can be met entirely by adding to existing settlements.

Towns and villages lose their identity if allowed to grow too large. We need a radical new approach which recognises the need to plan not only for 2026 but beyond.

New towns or villages need

to be built over a period of years. To be viable a market town needs to grow to a population of around 20,000.

So a decision soon to build a new village and a new town would provide for much of the growth needed until 2026 and beyond. It would take the pressure off our existing towns and villages and allow them to develop where necessary more slowly.

The Horsham Society is concerned about the past, present and future of the town. It seeks to promote good planning and design for the built environment and open spaces. Membership of the Horsham Society is open to anyone who shares these concerns. For more information, visit the website www.horshamsociety.org or phone 01403 261905.