

Is the hope of a new hospital worth the mega town price?

THE PUBLICATION of the report on the creation of a Bio City in the Horsham / Crawley area has raised hopes that we might at last get a major new hospital on our doorstep.

We are pleased that Horsham District Council is taking an active role in the forward looking partnership seeking a solution.

But the report raises concerns over the future of the land north of the A264 which The Horsham Society has argued should be protected from future development.

There is no doubt that we need a new hospital. The transport connections to East Surrey Hospital at



by **John Steele**
of the
Horsham
Society

Redhill are so poor that the journey from Horsham and the surrounding area for patients and their families is a nightmare.

Even those fortunate enough to have private transport face severe delays and dreadfully inadequate parking provision.

However before we get carried away we must remember the Bio City report is only a pre-feasibility study, or sales

pitch. That is not a bad thing, many exciting and successful projects start this way.

But even at this early stage it puts down some clear markers. Success would depend on synergies between a medical science park and a new tertiary care private hospital providing services to NHS patients. Neither, it is suggested, would be independently viable.

These would require associated housing for staff and others, and all the amenities of a small town.

Profits from the sale of housing would subsidise the project while the hospital and science park became profitable over a longer period.

Having looked at five options the consultants conclude that North Horsham is the preferred location. HDC has already considered the area for housing as part of the now stalled core strategy review, and the land available would provide the space for 2,500 to 3,000 new homes and the Bio City. The site is referred to as Chennells Brook although in fact it would cover both of the two of the sites still under consideration by HDC – Chennells Brook and Holbrook Park.

This would create a huge new community stretching northwards from the A264, covering almost the whole length of the northern

boundary of the town.

The Horsham Society has argued that the town's identity would be undermined by any further growth beyond its current boundaries. This was also the conclusion of the neighbourhood councils and North Horsham Parish Council when the Town Design Statement was produced and adopted by HDC in December 2008.

So, the question that we may face is a simple one. Is the prospect of a new hospital worth the price Horsham would pay in becoming an anonymous mega town?

What is certain is that we should not allow the possibly

distant dream of a hospital to drive the council's policy on the future allocation of land for housing.

Those behind the Bio City must press on quickly so we can see whether the dream is realisable, and if so at what cost, before the council proceeds with its review of the core strategy.

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 is open to anyone who shares these concerns. For more information, visit www.horshamsociety.org or to join telephone 01403 263870.