

# This is no time for heads in the sand over housing

THE RECENT controversy over new housing in Southwater and Billingshurst is only the start of a wider debate as the Government's proposed reforms of the planning system begin to impact.

There is no doubt that the country needs more housing. The population is rising, we are living longer, expectations are growing and everyone deserves to live in a decent home. The South East, including Horsham, must play its part.

That means planning ahead and taking difficult decisions; and doing so quickly because the Government's plans create a new sense of urgency.

The new draft National



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Planning Policy Framework sweeps away almost all current national guidance, reducing it from 1,000 pages to 52.

It creates a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Local councils will be required to plan positively for growth and approve all individual proposals wherever possible. Planning must not operate as an impediment to growth.

The Local Development

Framework, with its complex interconnecting documents, will be replaced by new Local Plans which must be consistent with the National Framework.

In the absence of a Local Plan, or where it is silent on an issue, authorities will be expected to grant permission.

Plans will be have to be approved by a planning inspector and this is the way the Government will prevent local authorities from including unnecessary impediments to development.

Neighbourhoods can develop their own plans but these must be consistent with the Local Plan so will only be able to promote more development, not less.

So what does this mean for Horsham? Well, development will still be plan-led so we are fortunate that Horsham District Council already has a Local Development Framework.

This would have given us some protection against inappropriate development while a new Local Plan is created, but for the decision to drop the Interim Statement.

This was designed to solve the requirement that councils must be able to demonstrate that there is always five years worth of specific developable land available to meet its housing target, a situation which has been compromised by the slow build-out of the west of

Horsham development. The National Framework raises that threshold to 120 per cent of defined need.

Southwater will almost certainly still get its new housing – planning inspectors have been told that the draft National Framework may be cited as a material consideration at appeal – and the whole of the district is now at risk of opportunist developers.

HDC has said that it will press ahead with its new plan as quickly as possible, starting with a review of housing need, and there are some new opportunities to be considered, including a Local Green Space designation.

But but the impact of the Framework as a whole will

not become fully clear until the first Local Plans are considered by inspectors, perhaps in 2013.

Meanwhile we must keep our fingers crossed and stop putting our heads in the sand. There will be more housing. Either we can decide where it should go or the developers will.

*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 our website [www.horshamsociety.org](http://www.horshamsociety.org) or telephone 01403 261640.*