

Planning for the future or planning for chaos?

THE VERY pompous title 'draft National Policy Framework notes' serves to hide what on the face of it should be a sensible approach to planning.

The proposal is to simplify the planning laws so as to make it easier to provide the homes, businesses and industrial units as and when they are required for economic growth.

So why is this document generating so much concern? The reason is very simple. It's been seen as a developers' charter with little regard for the countryside or the integrity of our existing towns and villages.

The position hasn't been



by
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helped by the Planning Inspectorate issuing advice to its inspectors that they should take the proposals into account during planning appeals, even though the proposals are not yet law and are still open for consultation.

There is no doubt that we need to simplify planning law if for no other reason than to make it more understandable to all of us.

We also need new, affordable homes to be built so that our children and grandchildren can remain in the area, where they were brought up, if they so wish.

Unfortunately, affordability of housing does not always go hand in hand with mass development.

In addition, we need to protect our towns from ill-advised or unwanted developments, which serve only to boost the profitability of the developer, whilst at the same time destroying the character of the places in which we live.

There is another problem. The proposed changes start from the assumption that

local planning authorities have in place a Local Plan for the area, ideally looking forward for some 15 years.

Horsham District Council like so many other local authorities does not have a current plan in place and will not do so until probably some time in 2012.

Within such a plan some consideration needs to be given to the possible development of a new village / town with its own unique character rather than destroying the character of the existing towns and villages by overdevelopment.

This doesn't mean to say that new buildings, be they for domestic, office, retail

or industrial use, cannot be built within existing towns such as Horsham.

Such changes have always happened and, if done properly, can add to rather than detract from a town.

However, this has to be done sympathetically and also take account of what the residents of the town want. We've heard a lot about localism over the last two years but we haven't yet seen it in action.

As the current proposals focus on the presumption that the developer is in the right, the absence of a Local Plan could lead to problems in the immediate future.

The risk is that our area

becomes a developers' dream and our worst nightmare.

We have to ask whether the enthusiasm for change in the planning laws is being pushed through too quickly. Change is required to planning law but it has to be right.

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 or telephone 01403 261640.