

We need to plan to meet the demands of tomorrow

THERE has been considerable consternation over the proposed closure of the Broadbridge Heath Leisure Centre, which is classed as surplus to requirements and, in addition, requires repairs costing £1.5m. It is difficult to judge whether or not this is a sensible proposal at this stage in the absence of a detailed income and expenditure analysis.

However, the biggest danger that we face is to consider a far-reaching proposal such as this in isolation from the other things that are happening at the same time.

We know that central



by
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government wants to give the house building programme a shot in the arm and one part of this strategy is the proposed simplification of the planning regulations.

Though the intention is good, the risk of destroying our green spaces is immense, which is why there has been so many objections raised and so much media coverage of the subject.

At a local level, we have

the draft Horsham Town Plan, which is part of Horsham District Council's Future Prosperity of Horsham Project. This document sets out to identify how Horsham might be able to better realise its potential, when competing against larger centres such as Guildford, Crawley and Brighton. This type of long-term vision is obviously important for any town if it is not to stagnate and die.

At the same time, we have the yet to be revealed outcome of the core strategy review, following the scrapping of the South East plan. This will determine how many new houses

will be built and where they will be built over a specified period of time within Horsham district and, in particular, within or adjacent to Horsham town.

Currently, we have a large number of houses still to be built on the west of Horsham development and the east of Bewbush development. In addition, there are already proposals to build houses at both Southwater and Billingshurst. So it's clear that even in a relatively short period of time, we can expect to see a significant increase in the number of new houses and hence in the population in and around Horsham.

This means that we have

to look carefully at the proposed closure of any leisure facility within the area and ask what happens next if we make the wrong decision. The biggest risk would be to close a leisure facility, use the land for something else and then realise in a few years' time that we need to provide additional leisure facilities.

From Horsham town's point of view, this could well put our park under threat as it could be viewed as an ideal location for any new leisure facility. It's important to flag this risk now so that we can at least ask our council to take it into account when it makes its final decision

on the Broadbridge Heath Leisure Centre.

All we ask is that the long range plans identify where any new leisure facility might be built in the future and, more importantly, where it wouldn't, ie Horsham Park.

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.