

# Good news for responsible way ahead on planning

THE RECENT publication of the Government's long awaited National Planning Policy Framework creates a step change in planning and an end to the highly bureaucratic local development frameworks, over-prescriptive central guidance and controversial regional strategies.

The good news is that many of the criticisms we and others had of the original draft have been taken on board and the final version is greatly improved. Whilst it retains a presumption in favour of sustainable development that term has been more clearly defined and the earlier suggestion that the default answer to development proposals should be 'yes' has been dropped.

Encouragement will be given to re-using previously developed (brownfield) sites. Great weight will be attached to conserving National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural beauty and the core principles include recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. This is a big step forward.



by **John Steele**  
of the Horsham Society

Overall, the emphasis is rightly on planned development and this takes us to the challenges facing Horsham District Council as our local planning authority.

Horsham has a good record for being proactive and recognising the importance of timely planning. This means that we are one of areas of the country which can continue to rely on our local development framework for a transitional period of 12 months. For others the NPPF has immediate effect and councils without approved plans are likely to find themselves in difficulty.

HDC is already on track to deliver a new local plan but timescales are very short and the task is daunting. Public consultation is vital.

Local Plans will still have to be approved by inspectors after examination in public.

To pass muster they will have to positively address properly assessed development requirements, including of course provision for new housing.

With the withdrawal of most central planning guidance HDC is going to have to decide what is really important in ensuring appropriate development and spell that out in its plan. Inspectors won't let councils regurgitate all the old guidance in their new plans.

Councils must identify and annually update specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide five years' worth of housing against their targets, plus an additional five per cent.

But where there is a record of persistent under-delivery this buffer will increase to 20 per cent. This has been a problem in Horsham district and the council will have to reconsider its policy of locating new housing in a few strategic sites if it is to avoid this threat.

Much emphasis is given to securing high quality design and a good standard

of amenity for all. This is something that HDC has frequently failed to achieve so far. Developers have been allowed to get away with too many banal housing developments and affordable housing ghettos with little or no amenity space.

This has to stop. The Horsham Society has tried for many years to persuade the council to set up an independent design panel to provide it and developers with advice. Hopefully the need to address design quality in the local plan will move this forward.

So, overall, the new policy is better than we initially feared. The time for debate and grumbling is over and The Horsham Society is keen to work with the council to develop our new Local Plan.

*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.*