

John Steele: Why we must say no to 4,500 new homes



We are being softened up by the council and developers in the hope that we will accept 3,500 new homes north of the A264, rising eventually to 4,500. Early proposals from developers offered the carrot of a new regional hospital but recent press coverage suggests this has disappeared and was only ever a red herring.

The Horsham Town Design Statement says that future development should respect the current built-up boundary and protect the setting of the town in its surrounding countryside. A huge



Land north of Horsham is proposed for development

development stuck on the top of the town would fly in the face of this and destroy the identity of the town. Separated by the A264 it would be an orphan community. Residents would inevitably look to Crawley as their home town and the likely

provision of a new station nearby would encourage their dislocation.

Earlier this year Horsham District Council consulted over the number of new homes it should plan for in each year up to 2031. While the council

has yet to announce publicly its decision a likely guess is 635 homes a year which means that over the next few months it must identify land sufficient for another 6,400 homes. So, you can see the attraction of North Horsham to the planners.

But such a decision would be wrong and would unbalance the district. We need to encourage economic growth but Gatwick is not the only economic hub. The south of the district already looks primarily to the south coast towns and Chichester for employment, shopping and recreation. Development needs to be more evenly spread.

Furthermore, a preliminary analysis of options prepared by officers is heavily and unfairly skewed in favour of North Horsham. What were two separate sites in earlier consultations have been put together as one, and heavy weighting is given to a

new hospital which almost certainly can't be delivered. If this was rectified the two North Horsham site options would currently score no higher, and probably lower, than Southwater and Billingshurst.

Large strategic sites have attractions for planners, not least making the task of overseeing the developments more manageable, pleasing the large developers and upsetting fewer communities.

But the downside is that it gives the developers the whip hand to demand planning concessions as the price for delivering the new homes, and delay on one site has a disproportionate impact on overall delivery. More needs to be done to spread planned development throughout the district, working with communities to identify need and locations.

But in the medium term there will still be a need for

one or two large sites. Our suggestion for a new market town is one option on the table but it is currently being given too little weight and planners are playing up the difficulties.

The only way to avoid the remorseless growth and destruction of our existing towns is to build a new one. We are told that this requires the agreement of Mid Sussex. Well so be it: all councils have a legal duty to co-operate as Horsham has done with the new development west of Crawley.

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.