

John Steele: It's all about dumping housing, not a hospital



Last week's County Times was again in full cry promoting the idea of a new A&E hospital north of the A264.

Make no mistake this is not primarily about a new hospital – which we are not likely to get and probably can't be justified - but how Horsham can be persuaded to accept 4,000 new homes – 10,000 people – in a new orphan settlement.

Why is this being pushed again now? Well, as

everybody knows Horsham District Council has made a complete hash of preparing its new housing plan and as a result left the whole district at the mercy of opportunist developers.

At long last it has recognised that the key to public support is getting local communities to create neighbourhood plans for organic growth, but this is going to take some time and will still leave a big housing shortfall.

It is clear that the council's preferred option is to dump the rest of the housing north of Horsham.

This is before a proper

assessment and debate of the alternatives.

Council leader Ray Dawe is clearly hoping that by the time it is forced to publish these everybody will look upon North Horsham as a fait accompli.

And what better way to achieve this

than dangle the carrot of a new A&E hospital on our doorstep.

Obviously were we starting from scratch we would all want a state of the art hospital close by.

But let us look at the reality behind this smoke screen. If built, it would not be an NHS hospital as we know it but a private one

possibly providing some NHS services.

The trend nowadays is to eschew large multifunction hospitals in favour of returning services to the community. This is something we should encourage. We already have an excellent but underused hospital in the town and there is no reason why many more screening, diagnostic and other services couldn't be delivered there or in doctors' surgeries.

With modern technology records can be available at the touch of a button and consultants can come to the patients rather than them having to trek to Redhill.

Surgery and specialist treatment on the other hand need the resources of scarce

and expensive facilities and staff at regional centres.

A new hospital for Horsham could not be provided without downgrading facilities elsewhere and the patients of those hospital would no doubt fight tooth and nail to protect them.

Rather than dangle headline grabbing baubles in front of our eyes Francis Maude and Ray Dawe would be better employed putting their support behind our local NHS leaders in their aim of developing new models of service delivery within the budget likely to be available, and encourage a proper long term national plan for the economic delivery of major hospitals.

If they want to promote

the plan of a single developer to build 4,000 homes in the wrong place they should argue their case on its housing merits alone.

Finally, don't forget the development is predicated on another 70,000 square foot out of town superstore. Now who is in favour of that?

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

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