

John Steele: Let's see courage from our elected representatives



Two things in particular caught my eye in last week's County Times. First there was the continuing furore over the Council's proposed strategy for providing new homes over a 20 year period, particularly the suggested development north of Horsham.

The second was the article by the leader of the council on parking in the town.

At first sight, they're totally different issues but

in reality they demonstrate the same problem that the people of Horsham face today.

Parking charges are always a contentious issue as nobody wants to pay to park their car. It became even more contentious when the council decided to extend its parking charges into the evening period. We don't know what the long term effect of this will be, especially on the early evening trade in the town. All one can say is that it's one of the few ways open to local authorities to raise additional revenue. Having said that, it doesn't necessarily make the decision right; it's just an easy option.

The proposed

development north of Horsham seems to have been a knee jerk reaction by the council, when it realised the danger of not having a current local plan.

It's always been clear that no plan equates to no meaningful control over speculative planning applications from developers.

Unfortunately, instead of conducting a proper analysis of where to build new homes, it appears to have been easier to go for soft targets in the north of the district.

The obvious new town approach, which has been on the table for many years, was ignored once again.

This decision has to be viewed against a background of encouragement from

central government for local authorities to meet their housing needs, at least in part, by developing new towns with the associated infrastructure that automatically accompanies such developments.

We all realise that it might be necessary to build new homes in our existing settlements over the years.

However, it has to be done in such a way that it does not destroy communities and at the same time irreparably damage the countryside that surrounds us.

The real danger to the people, who currently live in north Horsham is that they're not being given any choice; it's a fait accompli.

There's also the other unanswered question; would

the people of Faygate really want to become part of an enlarged Horsham?

We can be sure that if the proposed development is allowed north of Horsham, Faygate would be absorbed and form part of an unwanted metropolis sooner rather than later. I'm sure that the answer is not in doubt.

So what do we do? Obviously, the first step is to object to the current proposals and you can lodge your objection until the 11th October 2013.

It's important to do this if we want to have any chance of avoiding a disaster. At the same time, we have to ask ourselves how we ever got into such a mess.

Why aren't our elected

representatives listening to what we say? Do party politics override the wishes of the local electorate?

It's easy to blame central government. Let's see some courage being demonstrated by our elected representatives and let's see some of these decisions being challenged before they are presented as policy.

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.