

John Steele: is leisure just a smokescreen for other vital issues?



There are so many different things going on at the moment concerning housing numbers, etc. and the most important next step will be the publication of the Proposed Submission Framework document for public consultation.

We don't yet know when the draft of this document will be prepared. The Society's asked Horsham District Council to ensure that there is a clear three week gap between

the publication of the new draft and all the supporting documents and the council meeting at which it will be considered, to allow the public time to digest the proposed changes and consult with their local councillor prior to any vote being taken.

It's difficult to understand why the council appears to have had a sudden change of heart on the proposals for the Broadbridge Heath leisure centre and the facilities, which it may offer.

However, as leisure opportunities are an essential requirement for all of us, the apparent change of direction cannot be ignored.

When the Horsham District Planning Framework Preferred Strategy was published for consultation,

there was a huge amount of criticism of the proposal for a development north of Horsham.

However, there did not appear to be any significant comments on the approach that would be taken to community facilities, leisure and recreation, which were set out in Draft Policy 41.

In other words, what the public had been assured would happen in the middle of 2012 seemed to be set in stone.

Public pressure had forced the council to reconsider its plans from November 2011 and some seven months later, it was announced that a new leisure centre would be built south of Broadbridge Heath and the current leisure facilities would remain open until such time as

the replacement facilities existed. A business case study prepared for the council by FMG Consulting showed that provision of a six rink indoor bowls club was needed. It seemed as if commonsense had prevailed.

So why is it that less than two years later, things have changed? Keeping the new leisure facilities on the current Broadbridge Heath site seems sensible but the possibility or even the likelihood that there would not be indoor bowls rinks doesn't make any sense.

What's changed in such a short period of time?

Were some adverse comments made during the Preferred Strategy consultation to change the earlier decision?

We keep hearing about the

problems that exist as a result of living longer. There's one thing we know for sure. As we age, we are likely to need more medical care. This need can be reduced if we provide sensible and adequate leisure facilities.

There are many ways in which this can be achieved, such as swimming for example. However, we cannot ignore the fact that bowls is also an integral part of the healthy living package for the elderly.

It doesn't make any sense to suggest that there might not be an indoor bowls club within the new leisure facilities.

However, at the same time it's such an important issue that it shouldn't be allowed to act as a smokescreen for a far wider issue, namely the proposed destruction of the

countryside north of Horsham.

Let's consider leisure, employment and housing needs together in a constructive way. Don't let's allow one part of the package to be used to draw attention away from what's really important, namely the future of Horsham town.

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.