

Residents deserve better from their elected members

Last July at a full meeting of Horsham District Council members approved by a majority the publication of the council's draft preferred strategy which includes proposals for 2,500 new homes and a business park in North Horsham.

The Horsham Society was concerned to hear what appeared to be reliable rumours that members of the Conservative Group had been forbidden to vote against the motion because this was essentially a planning issue and political party whipping is forbidden in planning cases.

The Society therefore made a formal complaint to the council and after a long delay received a letter last December from the chief executive in which he said he had received an assurance from Cllr Ray Dawe, leader of the council and leader of the Conservative Group, that his members were not subject to a whip.

Naturally we were surprised when on 11 March this year the County Times revealed the minutes of a Conservative Group meeting before the July 2013 vote which showed that their members had been told that if they voted against the motion to approve the strategy they would be subject to immediate disciplinary action.

We wrote immediately to the chief executive to seek the truth of the matter. His re-



John Steele of the Horsham Society

sponse by email said that the policy and procedure adopted at group meetings of any political party were matters which were confidential to the group and not something in respect of which he had any authority, and included this response from Cllr Dawe:

"As you know, our group meetings are completely confidential and thus I am not able to comment any further on the query. I add only that unlike many political groups we do not have an appointed group whip and that each councillor knows that when in council meetings he has to weigh up all aspects of the matter when there is a vote and these clearly would include his membership of a particular political group among them."

What are the people of Horsham to make of this? Surely they deserve better from their elected councillors?