

John Steele: ghettoisation and affordable housing



think he is being over-sensitive and that those who have been critical are firmly on the side of the many people for whom affordable housing is essential if they are to live in our district and raise the next generation.

When we talk about ghettos we do not mean the horrors that afflicted many European cities in the past. A better term is ghettoisation – meaning simply segregation or isolation of a group.

There is a lot of snobbery around affordable housing. Everybody agrees we need more, but not where it should be built, or how it should be funded.

Since the 1980s all three major parties have let Britain down by failing to invest sufficiently in social housing.

For years Governments have relied upon developers to provide a proportion of affordable housing on all large housing developments, but developers are adept at getting round these policies.

The headline proportion – until recently 40 per cent in Horsham District – is scarcely, if ever, delivered. Developers argue that the need to make a profit and pay for infrastructure such as roads means they can't afford to deliver the target for affordable homes. And they get away with it.

Councils, including HDC, have a policy called pepper-potting. This means that affordable housing should be spread across new developments so that it is

indistinguishable from the open market housing. This is the opposite of ghettoisation and a laudable aim. The problem is that neither developers or social housing providers like the idea.

Developers frequently don't want affordable housing on their new estates at all and would rather pay for it to be built somewhere else. Failing that, they often try to put all the affordable homes together hidden away from the market housing. And the social housing providers prefer this too as it makes them easier and cheaper to manage. So we create groups exclusively of social housing.

In the case of Windrum Close the 35 homes, part of the West of Horsham

development, were located on the very edge, with their back to the market housing and no links to it whatsoever. The houses, now built, are very fine and will make great family homes, but there is no doubt that as a matter of policy they have been segregated from the rest of the development.

Turning to Winterton Court, the problem is not redevelopment itself but the unattractive design and the overall impact of the plans. Saxon Weald can do better. The Horsham Society gave a design award to their Standings Court development next door. A desire to cram as many homes on to the site as possible has, I believe, blinded them to the fact that their future

tenants have a right to live in as attractive surroundings, in harmony with the wider neighbourhood, as anybody else. Ghetto may have been an unkind description but surely we all want attractive, high quality social housing firmly rooted in our communities?

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.

Last week David Standfast, chief executive of the social housing provider Saxon Weald, attacked the use of the term 'ghetto' to describe its proposed development of the Winterton Court site in Horsham.

Three years ago he similarly took me to task when the Horsham Society used the term to describe its plans for 35 new homes off Windrum Close. As I said to him then, I