



Affordable homes should be delivered

Affordable housing is an integral part of all major residential developments and should be implemented in accordance with national policy.

This says that all schemes of more than ten dwellings should provide affordable housing, the recommended number being between 35 per cent and 50 per cent of the total build.

Horsham District Council has reduced these figures in its Planning Obligations Document of May 2016 and advises developers to provide for 35 per cent affordable housing but only on sites exceeding half a hectare in area and 15 houses in number.

The term affordable housing includes rental and shared ownership properties. These are essentially low cost rental homes which many of us would originally have known as council housing.

Not included within the category are properties sold at a discount to market prices and private rented homes.

However many developers include both these categories in their calculations in an attempt to muddy the waters and to

massage their development costs, when undertaking negotiations with the local authority.

In the case of the North of Horsham development, Liberty has proposed offering up to 30 per cent of homes 'to meet local needs'.

Superficially this offer appears just five per cent less than the minimum required by Horsham District Council.

This equates to a mere 825 dwellings on a total build of 2,750 dwellings, an apparent shortfall of 138 affordable houses on the minimum requirement of 35 per cent.

But it doesn't end there. By using the phrase 'to meet local needs' in lieu of the more commonly understood 'affordable housing', Liberty seems to have muddied the waters and massaged its development costs in its negotiations with HDC.

In formulating its offer of 30 per cent, Liberty has inflated its figures by including two non eligible categories, namely private rented sector (PRS) 7.3 per cent and discount market sales (DMS) 4.7 per cent, which cannot be accepted as 'true' affordable housing.

If these are removed from the equation, Liberty is really only offering 18 per cent

of the development as affordable housing, which amounts to 495 houses.

The offer which has been made by Liberty of 30 per cent is further qualified, as it will be subject to prevailing market conditions.

If the take up on the proposed Business Park units, which will form an integral part of the development, is 'not to budget' then the offer will reduce by a further five percentage points.

This would serve to reduce the provision of true affordable housing to a mere 14 per cent, amounting to 385 dwellings.

This is a far cry from the 963 dwellings required by Horsham District Council's policy.

The Government has proposed a new Housing and Planning Bill which is out for consultation and includes starter homes – similar to discount market sales – which would in future count towards the 'true' affordable housing target.

If approved, this would marginally improve Liberty's offer to 22.7 per cent and would provide 624 dwellings.

However if the five per cent reduction due to a downturn in the take up of Business Park units were applied, these

figures would reduce to 17.7 per cent and only 487 houses.

At the public examination into the District Plan, Liberty was categorical that the Business Park was needed and would be fully let.

Therefore any financial risk associated with the Business Park should be carried by Liberty alone, and any failure should not jeopardise the full delivery of affordable homes.

Should Horsham District Council approve any of the packages currently on the table, the proposals would fall drastically short of the minimum number of affordable homes required and be a disservice to the community.

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 the website www.horshamsociety.org or phone 01403 261905.