



Public must engage with developers

The Horsham Society's 'strapline' is 'Our concern is the past, present and future of the Town'. That means we get involved in all sorts of things, very often with other organisations who specialise in particular topics.

One thing that takes a considerable time and effort is planning, both applications under the building regulations and Town Planning in the wider sense.

The Society is not a statutory consultee so developers do not have to talk to us but, refreshingly, they increasingly choose to do so. This gives us a chance to reflect our local knowledge and what we think might be our members' views. This, latter, is always problematic because we have some 1,200 people who are members and they all have their own ideas!

To do this we have a Planning Sub-Committee which includes people who have had experience in development, architecture and design. And we have experience of talking to HDC officers and councillors. Needless to say, we do not always get our own way. We have a better chance if we can talk to developers and



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architects before they have done 'final' drawings and we can still influence their ideas.

Sometimes this is before any public consultation. We recognise the difficulties that developers have with public

consultation. They have to have ideas before they consult. The consultation usually takes the form of exhibits and drawings which means they put a lot of work into it. Having made all this effort and expense they are naturally reluctant to start afresh after a public consultation.

Nevertheless, it is important that the public engage with developers. The Society and other consultees such as the Neighbourhood Councils do not always have the intimate local knowledge that, for example, nearby residents have. If you land up with a result that you do not like, at least you can say afterwards 'I did all I could' for a small degree of self-satisfaction.

The Society's Planning Sub-Committee meets monthly and there is a lot of email interchange between times. Its hands are somewhat tied by recent relaxation of planning rules and regulations so it may be that nothing at all can be done about some 'permitted development' which adversely affects the neighbours. And if something does go wrong HDC, the planning authority, are reluctant to prosecute the offender because, if they lose, the court costs they must pay can be enormous and it is taxpayers' money (yours and mine). The

frustrating thing is that relaxation of the rules has not resulted in more homes, particularly the sort that Horsham needs.

Quite a lot of land is allocated for housing. Developers already own it or, more likely, have options on it, but it suits them to sit on it while its value increases, claiming that they do not have the money to start the development or that there is a shortage of skilled labour to build the homes. And, of course, they make much more profit on the more expensive homes so any hope of building 'affordable' homes (whatever that might mean) recedes further and further into the distance.

It is hard work keeping up with the system but the Society and organisations like the Neighbourhood Councils do need feedback from you, the great general public who live in Horsham.

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.