

Horsham Society

with Ron Bates

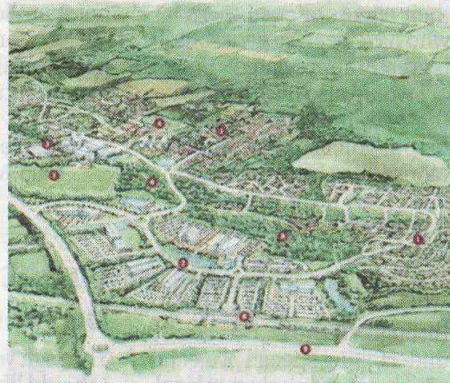


We must retain control of development

The North of Horsham development is too important to delegate, it will be the largest ever single development in the District. At a special meeting held on the 28 April, Horsham District Council's Planning Committee North considered the outline planning application for Liberty's development. After much debate it was decided to refer it to the full council on the grounds of viability, roads and infrastructure including sewerage. This meeting will take place on 22 May.

It will take many years to build out the development so it is essential that every aspect is looked at now so that it achieves high standards of planning and design which respect and enhance the existing natural features. There should also be effective connectivity to the existing town and the wider area.

One concern discussed at length was the percentage of 'affordable' housing that this development will provide. The figure of 18 per cent 'affordable' housing was identified and with some blurring of the definitions of



An artist's impression of plans for North Horsham.

other categories of housing such as private rented, it was suggested it would be 30 per cent. Horsham council's planning policy for new developments like this requires that 35 per cent of the housing should be 'affordable', these properties being managed by registered social landlords. It would be good if the council policy was

followed to provide homes for people currently on the local housing list.

Discussion also took place on the lack of clear and complete financial costings for the whole development as some financial figures are not being published. By interpolation of the figures available the estimate of the net profit that will be made from this billion pound development is in the region of £174 million.

The council officers recommended that outline approval be given with full delegated powers being given to officers to settle the Legal Agreement and planning conditions which may also be added to, removed or varied as the building work proceeds.

This development will be built over the next 15 or more years with many different people involved over that time. It is therefore important that the legal agreement is unambiguous and the local councillors retain all control over the future direction of this development. It is vital for democracy to be seen in action and that all reserved matters and proposed alterations are referred back to the planning committee for consideration.

There are many important matters that remain unresolved such as ancient woodland and hedgerow protection; ecological issues; pedestrian access and rights of way and cycle routes and parking; the Parkway railway station; housing designs and the amount of affordable housing; commercial and retail and leisure provision; schools and healthcare; routing of vehicles servicing the development and Langhurst Wood Road businesses; and the need for connectivity to be improved to the existing town.

What is needed is for the councillors and officers and Liberty to have urgent and meaningful discussions and that all involve themselves as willing participants with generosity of spirit to achieve something wonderful for the greater good of everyone in the town.

There is always something that can be done to improve what this development agreement should include for the benefit of generations to come. There is still the opportunity to do a fairer deal and to feel proud of what was achieved at this time in the years to come.