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16 October 2009

Tom Crowley  
Chief Executive  
Horsham District Council  
North Street  
Horsham

Dear Mr Crowley

### **Core Strategy Review**

The Horsham Society has responded online to the twenty-one issues raised in your consultation document and I am enclosing a copy of our comments in case there is any problem with the electronic version. This letter summarises our main points.

The Society welcomes this review because we believe it is essential that the Council takes a long term view and does not restrict its horizons to what are inevitably somewhat arbitrary parameters set by the national and regional planning processes. So we support the Council's emphasis on planning ahead to 2026 and beyond.

We have been critical in the past about both the methods used to assess housing need and the mechanisms for allocating targets to local planning authorities. We remain concerned that it does not appear that HDC has made an independent assessment of the number of new homes required in our District or an analysis of demographic characteristics. The former would help lay to rest the question in everybody's mind about whether the housing demands of the SE Plan are in the Council's view a reasonable planning assumption or not, the second would enable a much better informed debate about the type and location of the new homes that we will need.

Nevertheless, the Society accepts that for the foreseeable future there will be a need to continue to provide new homes to cater for local demand and the legitimate aspirations of others to live in what is a very pleasant, safe and prosperous part of the United Kingdom. We need to ensure through the planning process that this can be achieved in ways which enhance those advantages rather than undermine them.

On the basis of the information currently available we have assumed that there will be a need to find space on greenfield sites for around 6,000 new homes in the period up to 2026, over and above the sites already identified in the adopted core strategy; the majority within or close to the Gatwick Sub Region.

We do not think this can be achieved without serious harm to existing communities unless there is a fundamental change to the rationale in the core strategy. Currently the presumption is that new homes will almost all be provided through planned extensions to Horsham town

and other Category 1 settlements. We believe very strongly that Horsham town has reached a size beyond which the community identity and cohesion so essential to our quality of life will be put in jeopardy. This is recognised in the Horsham Town Design Statement SPD adopted by HDC less than a year ago which says that

*“[future] development should reflect the wish to maintain the current built-up boundary in order to protect the setting of the town and its relationship to the countryside: and a strong desire to avoid coalescence with neighbouring communities, large and small.”*

The same in our view probably applies to the other Category 1 settlements and to the villages.

This sense that we cannot go on the way we have, which we believe is shared in different ways by communities across the District, and the hugely damaging impact that most if not all the identified strategic site options would have on their host communities inevitably leads us to the conclusion that there is now an overwhelming case for the creation of new settlements.

We suggest that the Council should adopt the policy that almost all developments requiring greenfield sites should be accommodated in new settlements, and we therefore support the suggestion that there should be a new market town, probably in or close to the A23 corridor, possibly in conjunction with neighbouring local authorities. .

We are concerned that this option has not been more fully worked up before the consultation document was prepared and we think the timescales suggested could be significantly shortened. We also think that the illustrative figure of a population of 10,000 is much too low. There is no reason why a new town could be planned from the outset to be larger; and if it is to provide for almost all the growth needed as our contribution to the Gatwick Sub Region, as we believe it should, and potentially for a share of Mid Sussex's growth it would need to be larger. We must also recognise that demand for growth will not stop in 2026.

The more quickly we move ahead with new settlements the less the damage there will be to existing communities. From the point of view of Horsham town the strategic site options show starkly not only how essential a new town is, but the devastating impact were it not to go ahead, and quickly. None of the first five strategic site options are remotely acceptable as they would all result in the town growing too large, over spilling the A264, creating orphan enclaves, destroying the strategic gap or, in the case of Chesworth Farm reneging on an earlier Council commitment to protect the land from future development and maintain it for public recreation.

These options should be dropped and replaced at the preferred options stage by a fully developed plan to create a new market town starting within the next few years, and certainly before 2018.

This letter forms part of the Society's response to the consultation and I should be grateful if you would include it alongside our more detailed electronic response to each issue.

Yours sincerely

John Steele