

### **HDC Preferred Strategy: other options**

First a bit of history. Horsham was one of the first councils to have its local development framework core strategy approved and published in 2007. It covered the period up to 2018 and was heavily constrained by the requirements of the South East Plan and the West Sussex Structure Plan which dictated not only the number of new homes but also that development should be concentrated in two strategic sites west and/or south west of Horsham and west of Crawley (to provide for the town's expansion).

It soon became clear that an approach that depended on large strategic sites was flawed. It put too much power in the hands of a handful of developers and weakened the Council's position in relation to Section 106 payments (which pay for community facilities), social housing and build out rates. Furthermore, large sites seem to eat up far too much of the available Section 106 funding on hard infrastructure, mainly over-engineered and expensive highway solutions.

The recession accentuated these weaknesses, and complex requirements on councils to maintain a five year rolling supply of housing land opened up the prospect of developers winning appeals for development outside the core strategy. This in turn led to the Council making ever more desperate attempts to release more land in a managed way, all of which have failed.

So, has the Council learned from the mistake of putting all its eggs in one basket? No, it has admitted there are risks but is still hell bent on making the same mistake again with 2,500 houses north of the A264. It says there is no alternative but this simply isn't the case.

In 2009 HDC consulted on four strategic options: spreading development throughout the district, focusing it on main settlements, a new market town, or a hybrid of these. It also identified nine options for strategic development sites: West of Ifield, Faygate, North Horsham (two sites), Chesworth Farm, Southwater, Billingshurst, Pulborough and Adversane. We favoured a new market town and smaller development sites.

Nevertheless, in March 2010 the Council, with very little explanation, announced it was continuing its strategic site policy but dropping Adversane, Faygate, Chesworth and Pulborough. Chesworth and Faygate we could understand, but why drop Adversane and Pulborough? We need to spread development more evenly throughout the District and Adversane could have been the basis of the new town site we so badly need.

But even allowing for its love affair with huge sites the Council has been inconsistent.

In 2011 it published proposals for up to 2,750 new homes in Southwater and 1,750 in Billingshurst. The case was sound then, and remains sound today. This would have provided much needed community facilities and was capable of being absorbed over the life of the plan. It was, and still is, the logical incremental step from the current core strategy.

North Horsham is the least appropriate of the remaining strategic sites. It will destroy the only remaining buffer between Horsham, Crawley and an expansionist Gatwick Airport; and the geography means it can never be assimilated into the town. If HDC must remain wedded to huge developments then Southwater, Billingshurst or a new town are much better options. Even west of Ifield would be better than North Horsham.

But what about the smaller sites? The core strategy identified dozens of small and medium size sites. The new preferred strategy does not. Why? Well, we can't be certain because the whole process is opaque and shrouded in secrecy but we suspect that the 500 homes that are expected to be found from neighbourhood plans includes many hundreds within Horsham town. If this is the case Horsham is being asked to take an even greater share of the new homes than has been admitted so far.

There are sites in the town that can be developed and they are far more appropriate than North Horsham. The Council needs to come clean and tell us exactly how it has arrived at its housing numbers for its selected sites and explain in clear and simple terms why the alternative options are not being pursued.

The Horsham Society  
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