

David Moore: as Private Fraser would say, 'We're doomed...'



Just over a week ago, Horsham District Council discussed the proposed modifications to the Horsham District Planning Framework (HDPF). It was unfortunate that the councillors at the meeting were not allowed to consider the ramifications of the modifications on the totality of the HDPF.

It was also a pity that the officers were not allowed the time to provide the

information missing from the document under discussion.

Everything seemed to be starting from the wrong position. We were reminded yet again that none of this was the council's fault; it was all down to the nasty government and its dastardly National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

The fact that the Planning Inspector had made the point in the first part of last year's inquiry that even though the NPPF drove the numbers, the council decided where the new homes were built didn't seem to have any relevance nor that the real reason for the situation facing the district today was the Cabinet's not the officers' incompetence in presenting the councillors

and the Inspector with a fundamentally flawed strategy.

Councillors were told in no uncertain terms why the missing information couldn't be given to them before they made a decision on the proposals. Apparently this was the Planning Inspector's fault and we were 'doomed' if we allowed a delay of even three weeks to occur before the document was sent out for public consultation.

We were even more 'doomed' if the public consultation wasn't finished by the due date so that the Inspector could consider the modifications and the comments received from the public. By now, I felt that I was taking part in an episode of Dad's Army and listening

to Private Fraser making his pronouncements and rolling his eyes. There was no suggestion that perhaps the Inspector could be told the reasons for the delay and asked for a further three weeks to be added to the timetable.

We were also treated to bits of information concerning what a barrister, employed by the council, had told councillors at a recent meeting about the need to avoid delays. The difficulty was that the public couldn't see the legal advice provided to the council as it was classed as privileged, even though we've paid for it. If this is true, one wonders how bits of it can be referred to at an open meeting in the presence of members of the public.

Then things got really frightening when the vote was taken on the recommendations.

Councillors were warned about the fate that awaited if the incomplete document was not approved. The buzz phrase seemed to be that 'chaos would result' if councillors didn't do what they'd been told. Developers would build wherever they wanted. The consequences would be unbelievable and it would all be their fault for asking for the facts before reaching a decision.

With all this pressure, and no admission that the problems were really the fault of the Cabinet for producing an unsound plan, it is little surprise that councillors

caved in. It's a real shame that our poor council has been so badly treated. One has to wonder what else the council could have done in the circumstances.

Might it have been worth listening to the public and answering its questions in the first place?

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