

Horsham Society

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No property ladder to ascend

We all know of the urgent need for more affordable housing but are we aware how high house prices are changing our town and the mix of available homes?

There has always been change in Horsham and there always will be. The variety of old buildings in West Street alone confirm this.

There is a mixture of buildings from different periods. The use of the shops has changed too, butchers, greengrocers and fishmongers are long gone from the town centre and newer shops often remain for only a year or two.

Look too at how house building has changed. In the early 1900s terraced houses along narrow roads were built close to the town centre. The houses were small but affordable.

In the late 1900s spacious estates were built, land was cheaper, people wanted and could afford larger houses in more pleasant settings.

People who had jobs could afford to get on the housing ladder. As they needed more space or wished to have a better house, they



Typical of its period, New Street in Horsham. This picture from the 1950s.

moved, up the ladder.

Now it seems, circumstances have changed. It is hard and sometimes impossible for many young working families to purchase their first home, and if they do, they may find that for them there is no ladder to ascend.

Whereas their parents may have been able to afford to move to a larger home as their family grew, they are unable to.

We are building a large number of houses around Horsham but do they meet the needs of local people? Developers manage the rate at which they build according to demand keeping house prices high.

Many of the new homes will be bought by people who wish to move from more dense urban areas to this part of the country.

This is having unexpected consequences. Any land where a house can be built within the town is now more valuable.

Open spaces in our town that can accommodate houses attract planning applications. Open spaces in previously well-designed estates are built on.

Houses are built in gardens resulting in further lost green space, less pleasant surroundings and loss of wildlife habitats.

Do you remember when gardens were full of birds during the day and the dawn chorus was amazing to hear?

Another consequence of people not being able to move to larger homes when they wish to, encouraged by the relaxation of planning rules and by the availability of specialists who can ease the process and

make the cost affordable, is the expansion of existing homes through adding extensions, or building into the roof.

Similar opportunities for expansion are provided by outbuildings in the garden for family use, further reducing open space.

I have no problem with any of this as it makes sense in the current situation. Our own house has a huge outbuilding, albeit probably built more than 100 years ago, and one daughter has a house with an extension in the roof and a studio in the garden.

Horsham is changing. We are losing green spaces, density is increasing.

People cannot afford to move and houses, once relatively affordable, are now more expensive following work done to make them larger. The only answer is housing that people can afford, but sadly there seems little chance of that.

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 259038.