

# Horsham Society

by Nigel Friswell



## Hope for the best but plan for the worst

**D**o you remember years ago that there was a regional planning body on which local councils were represented called SERPLAN?

It and central government produced scores of recommendations, guidance documents and rules which set out how our local planning is regulated. Politicians, in their wisdom, threw all this away. There was nothing. I think it was Aristotle who said 'Nature abhors a vacuum', so the National Planning Policy Framework was invented and, inevitably, spawned planning guidance in various guises.

We are still left with little or no regional guidance (and not much nationally, either). It is a bit of a free-for-all. Politicians have their own agenda, hence the 'Northern Powerhouse'. I don't doubt that is needed but why are we being told to have so many houses (and businesses) in the South East? It seems that instead of having a proper planning body we just get edicts from above. There is no real local planning. There cannot be if all the targets are ready made by central government and the councils' purse strings are also centrally controlled.



The Scouts have recognised that they will need more group buildings as the town grows

So, we have to make a local 'plan' based on targets from above. HDC is doing what it is told – it has to! There are even penalties if it does not. And, this time, it is having what appears to be a genuine consultation with the public. I only hope that it has the resources to analyse the results in-house and not by some far-flung contractor who doesn't understand local issues.

We are told that no decisions have been made yet on most of the schemes in the local plan: 20,000 homes in 20 years,

plus commercial (and even industrial) development. However, if we really are planning for 20 years it would not be a bad guess that all these schemes will come forward eventually. This has led to the realisation that Horsham District will just become a giant suburbia and, naturally, people are objecting. They hope for the best; that good sense will prevail and that there must be a better regional plan.

Nevertheless, we should all plan for the worst. Think about what will happen when

all those plans are approved. What facilities will we need then? There is talk of more 'infrastructure' but who will provide it? Schools, health services, etc. A long time ago electricity, water and gas were provided by nationalised industries, nowadays private companies plead poverty. Who will provide for services like public transport for all those new estates?

We all need to plan ahead for the next 20 years. Even organisations like the Scouts realise that when all the local plan projects are implemented, around Horsham, they will need six new Scout group buildings for the increased youth population, not to mention adult leaders to go with them. We need to think about that now and I urge all local organisations to consider the long-term implications for them and respond to the consultation on HDC's local plan by March 30.

*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](http://www.horshamsociety.org) or phone 01403 25903*