

# Horsham Society

by Philip Ayerst



## Difficult times but local plan continues

**T**hese are strange times with the Coronavirus and all our lives disrupted. Teleconferencing, online appointments and home working may now become the norm rather than just possibilities.

Museum visits and theatre plays are now available online. Consider the speed of change in the NHS to provide new wards and hospitals. To say we live in interesting times, is an understatement.

Despite these upheavals, at the time of writing this, the consultation on the Horsham Local Plan remains in full flow, due to close on March 30.

To give due credit, The Horsham Local Plan is a long, comprehensive document that controls all aspects of local planning policy.

However, there are key areas where good intentions are not turned into definitive policies; these need strengthening and clarifying, in order to be effective.

The society has submitted a large number of comments, and identified a number of key concerns:

Horsham District Council wants to enable good transport, infrastructure, medical facilities and technology such as district heating, but makes no specific proposals for new buses, new trains or lines, trams, cycle routes or technology. The council in reality has little power but nevertheless should specify what is required.

Housing target numbers from the Government have created the need for many new development sites. We support the objection by Horsham District Council to the imposed figures, because the targets set are not only to meet local needs, but those of others attracted to the area.

The council should have allowed the public a real choice by offering far more strategic sites for public consideration. With the limited number proposed it may be inevitable that all, or all but one, will have to be built upon.

The council wishes to be a champion and leader on protecting and enhancing the natural environment. So how can it even consider the idea of building on Rookwood? Horsham

Society has strongly objected to the development of Rookwood with the loss forever of green space within the town and the inevitable damage to Warnham Nature Reserve.

The Horsham Local Plan puts emphasis on the importance of wildlife, yet the policies proposed in the document allow damage to sensitive environments provided that there is a net biodiversity gain through improvements elsewhere in the district.

We suggest biodiversity gain must be assessed on the site and adjacent sites, there should be a commitment to tree planting and green space within each development.

Horsham Society supports the idea of clear town boundaries such as roads and streams. The council must maintain these boundaries by resisting their piecemeal erosion.

We support the text for preservation of nationally listed buildings, but we want the policies to cover locally listed and conservation areas as well. We ask for a presumption against demolition unless the alternatives

for reuse, repurposing or repair have been fully explored and that innovative replacements have been proposed.

The specialist needs of the older generation should be a policy, not an aspiration. We suggest that a minimum of five per cent of the housing needs to be for retirement and care homes (given 21 per cent population aged over 65) while 10 per cent need to be specifically adaptable for older people to use in later life.

Horsham Society are pleased to have had the opportunity to comment.

Meanwhile, we applaud the efforts of volunteers, Horsham District Council, NHS and medical staff to combat the virus. Keep safe.

*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 259038.*