

Time to re-open the debate on housing



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THE DOWNTURN in the housing market presents critical new challenges to the delivery of current policy for the provision of new homes.

At the same time it provides an opportunity to re-open the debate on how many new homes we really need in the South East, and in Horsham district in particular.

National house building policy is managed through a complex set of legal arrangements which culminate in each housing authority – in our case Horsham District Council – setting out its policies and plans in a Local Development Framework.

The process was designed to ensure the delivery of new homes at a rate essentially dictated by central and regional government.

Horsham district is obliged to deliver over 10,000 new homes between 2001 and 2018, with separate annual targets.

For what remains of this period almost all the growth is planned to come from the

developments west of Horsham and west of Crawley.

With the severe downturn in the housing market it now seems inevitable that in the medium term at least the number of new homes will fall below the planned rate.

The council will then be forced to release more land for housing from a 'reserve list', with no certainty that it will be built on and therefore make good the shortfall.

Meanwhile, next year the council must review its Core Strategy – the document that sets out future housing targets. This time the planning horizon must stretch to 2026.

A new South East Plan,

which is still making its slow progress through the planning bureaucracy, calls for an even higher growth rate up to 2026 than suggested by current plans.

And only this week a government think-tank has called for a further increase of half a million new homes across England as a way of driving down house prices, thereby increasing affordability.

This is all very worrying because even at the present planned rate of growth, unless there is a radical change of heart, the council will be forced to find land for possibly 5,000 additional new homes.

The Horsham Society has

long argued that the district has been forced to plan for more new homes than required for its continued economic prosperity.

The assumptions that an over-supply of housing will reduce prices and that there is no choice but to continue forever to build more homes in the crowded South East must be challenged. It is time to re-open the debate.

The Horsham Society is concerned about the town's past, present and future and seeks to promote good planning and design for the built environment and open spaces. For more information, including how to join, visit www.horshamsociety.org