

Difficult decisions ahead over targets for new housing



by **John Steele**
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IMPORTANT decisions will be taken over the coming months which will shape the future of our local economy and determine the numbers and location of new homes over the next 15 years.

There was much rejoicing when the new Government announced it was scrapping the South East Plan, and with it the old top-down targets for new housing for the period to 2026. But those that hoped that it would

see the end of new housing estates will be disappointed.

Councils are now required to set their own targets, but they have to be soundly based on an assessment of need, and sufficient land must be released to provide for at least the next five years' planned growth. Until Horsham District Council amends its Core Strategy with new targets the old ones remain in force.

A fortnight ago HDC published a series of background studies. The one that will be of most immediate interest is the housing study. This examines the district's future needs based on an assessment of likely

population growth and range of alternative economic scenarios.

The overall conclusion is that it would be reasonable to set the annual target between 610 and 660 new homes a year.

That this is broadly the same as the target in South East Plan will come as a huge disappointment to many people who were hoping to see a much lower figure.

This study does not commit the council to any target and there will be much detailed debate over the next few months.

But changes in the way in which we lead our lives, and increasing life expectancy, bring inescapable demand

for housing and there is little doubt that we will have to find room for several hundreds of new homes each year.

That brings us to the immediate risks for Horsham town. Because the revised Core Strategy will probably not now be completed until 2012, and the council has recently lost two housing appeals, it has decided to identify the scope for small scale interim developments possibly in some of the locations which are already being considered for major development as part of the Core Strategy review.

This means, for example, that permission could be given for small developments

north of the A264. If this were to happen it would be difficult to prevent a much larger scheme at a later date.

As the council consults over its interim plans we must ensure that short term decisions do not prejudice important longer term strategic land allocations. Horsham cannot be allowed to expand any further if it is to retain its character and sense of identity.

On a happier note, the Council has also announced the production of a Town Framework which will control and encourage future retail, commercial and leisure development in the town. It will look particularly at the town

centre, the Hurst Road area, including the rail goods yard, and the Broadbridge Heath retail and leisure complex.

The Horsham Society has long argued that we need proper integrated planning of this type and we look forward to working with the council to achieve a successful outcome.

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 is open to anyone who shares these concerns. For more information, visit www.horshamsociety.org or to join telephone 01403 263870.