

Is Horsham the jam in the regional planning sandwich?

FOR YEARS everyone blamed the regional strategies for foisting unwelcome new housing on to unwilling councils, but it is becoming clear that their recent abolition will not solve the problem for districts such as Horsham, and could even make things worse.

The fact is that surrounding districts have severe constraints on where they can allow new development. Much of Chichester district now lies within the South Downs National Park and is protected. Mid Sussex has the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in the north and the national park to the south.

Gatwick and its associated industries is a major generator of prosperity but continues to fuel the demand for housing. Crawley is already heavily developed with restrictions to further development due to the flightpaths in and out of Gatwick.

This leaves Horsham district as the jam



by **John Steele**
of the Horsham Society

in the sandwich with attractive countryside but very little national protection.

The new national planning policy requires authorities to work together to ensure that taken as a whole their local plans meet regional and sub-regional needs. This will be tested by an inspector. It requires very little imagination to see what the outcome will be for Horsham. Neighbouring districts are going to argue that because of the constraints on their ability to provide new housing, Horsham should build more.

This is happening already. Horsham's recent consultation over housing numbers drew predictable responses from Chichester and Crawley. Chichester said that Horsham

should ensure that it provides sufficient new housing to satisfy the additional demand likely to arise from the creation of the National Park. In other words, help Chichester out. Worse still, they don't seem keen to have any of the new housing too near Chichester!

Crawley has made it clear that it does not expect to be able to find the land required to cater for its own local needs for new housing and is looking to its neighbours – including Horsham – to help them out. With this in mind Crawley only supported the two highest of our council's options for new housing. In its defence Crawley does recognise the threat to the character of local settlements.

The lowest of the four options put forward by HDC – 11,800 new homes - is already higher than any of our neighbouring authorities, except Crawley, are planning to provide. Even Brighton and Hove only seems to be planning for 11,300. And Adur and Wealden between them are planning for less

than 9,000.

The irony is that unless Horsham puts substantial and immediate pressure on its neighbours to share the pain more fairly, we could end up taking a higher proportion of new housing than was the case under the much maligned regional plan.

The case for a new town based around Crawley, Mid Sussex and Horsham is irresistible if we are to avoid swamping existing settlements. Until Horsham District Council starts to flex its muscles we will continue to sleepwalk into a nightmare scenario none of us wants to see.

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 our website www.horshamsociety.org or telephone 01403 261640.