

David Moore: is this really part of the 'Horsham Experience'?



It's interesting how one always associates certain words or phrases with a specific meaning. For example, when people talk about the 'Horsham Experience', what springs to mind are things like our historic town centre, Causeway, shops, cafés and restaurants? One wouldn't normally include the price of housing within this description.

Yet this is what happened when one of the town's estate agents produced information to show that Horsham had bucked the national trend once again. Apparently, the national picture for houses



Let's build the homes we require to suit our local needs

prices in 2012 showed a one per cent drop in value compared to 2011.

On the other hand, it was said that the average property price in the town had increased by some nine per cent in the same period, whilst

the price of a typical terraced house had increased by an astonishing 15 per cent in one year. If it's true, it's obviously good news if you're selling, especially if the plan is to move to a cheaper part of the country.

Mind you, when you think about this carefully, this does seem to be a worrying trend in what we can still describe as a market town. Experience in other places has shown that such large escalations in housing prices can easily lead to a frenzy of property building and, in no time at all, any market town feel has completely disappeared.

Property price escalation does no favours with respect to the need for affordable housing for our children and grandchildren. Once a dramatic escalation in housing price occurs at the lower end of the market, it's likely to mean that the local people, who want to rent or have a desire to become a first time buyer, can't afford it. The only options open to them are to either continue to live with their parents or to move to a cheaper area.

The other risk that goes hand in hand with rapid price

escalation is that it can lead to the wrong type of property being built. It's obviously more financially attractive to a developer to build the larger four or five bedroom detached properties than to build the smaller type of properties that fall within what we would describe as affordable housing.

We can't afford the future of our town and the surrounding countryside to be driven by developers or estate agents. They clearly have an important role to play but sensible constraints have to be applied.

Most people believe that new houses will be built in Horsham District. The important question to be resolved is the number, type and location. The main battle will probably revolve around the strategic sites selected by the council for future house building. Hopefully, a decision to create a new market town will play an important part in

minimising the effects on the existing settlements.

Let's build the homes we require to suit our local needs in the right places without destroying the countryside around the town. What we don't need is any suggestion that escalating house prices are an integral part of the 'Horsham Experience'. If we get it wrong, it could easily be an integral part of a future 'Horsham Destruction'.

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.*