

David Moore: It just gets worse – the consequences of a flawed plan



The route to the Horsham District Planning Framework (HDPF) was undoubtedly one of, if not the most, damaging things that Horsham has experienced in many years. It pitted the electorate against its elected representatives in the most divisive of ways.

It also led to fragmentation within Horsham District Council. Whatever the outcome, it

was hoped that the Planning Inspector's decision on the Horsham District Preferred Strategy (HDPF) would provide an opportunity for the community as a whole to move on.

It was, therefore, very sad to see the Leader of the council's article in last week's County Times, which suggested that the Planning Inspector's initial report on the HDPF was a success story for the council. It was a great pity that it should have been seen as a victory when only one possible option was ever on the table for consideration. All the cry of victory is likely to achieve is to prolong the acrimony.

For example, just think of the thousands of pounds of our money that were spent

on consultants' reports to support the council's chosen option for future housing in Horsham District. What would have happened if similar amounts of money had been made available to the objectors? This is just one of the questions that are likely to be asked if this negative approach continues.

Let's for the moment try and put the past behind us and focus on what happens next. One consequence of the so-called victory is that the Inspector expects Horsham District to build an additional 2,000 new homes over the next 20 years. Where will these will be built? Unfortunately, the options are very limited. During the examination, the council made its case as:

no new town, no spreading the housing around the district and concentrating future housing needs on Horsham, Southwater and Billingshurst.

So where will the extra 2,000 new homes go? We appear to have only the three choices unless the current plan is reconsidered. No one would imagine that putting yet another 2,000 new homes in North Horsham would be acceptable, would they? So that only appears to leave Southwater and Billingshurst as likely targets, which is bound to be just as contentious as was the selection of North Horsham as a strategic site. Both have their attractions depending on what factors are deemed to be important.

For example, if Billingshurst had the misfortune to be targeted, at least it wouldn't need to include the creation of a fictitious railway station within the plan as one already exists.

There are no winners when one comes to consider the need for more housing. New homes need to be built and the only questions are where and what type of dwellings should be built. Unless the correct locations, ideally brownfield sites, are selected and the right type of homes, high density reasonably priced affordable dwellings and not low density highly priced detached houses, are built unnecessary damage will be caused.

Any claims of success will be seen as a pyrrhic

victory if a house building programme results in the unnecessary destruction of the countryside and / or of a town. Unfortunately, the ordinary people always bear the consequences of the wrong decisions. All we can demand is an honest, fair and transparent approach to determining where the 2,000 extra homes will be built.

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.