

PLANNING UPDATE

When the coalition government took office in 2010 one of the first things it promised to do was to abolish the top-down planning system introduced by the previous Labour government.

Those who thought we would be able to stop the flood of housing developments across Sussex were rapidly disillusioned. The so-called Localism Act of 2011 created a presumption in favour of development unless Local Authorities could demonstrate they could meet 'objectively assessed' housing needs. Local authorities who tried to block unwelcome planning applications found themselves overruled on appeal. The inspectors invariably took the housing targets in Labour's plan for the south-east and then added some.

The Localism Act also forced LAs to begin the process of drawing up local plans - or planning frameworks as they are now called - from scratch. This created a planning vacuum which developers were quick to exploit. However things are now moving.

Horsham District Council submitted its draft plan for approval last autumn. This set a target of 13,000 dwellings for the 15 year period up to 2030. Unfortunately the inspector halted the public examination last December and told the Council to revise its plan to include an additional 2,000 homes, partly in order to provide homes for people from outside the district. This is bad news for Horsham, Southwater and Billingshurst where the new housing will go though apparently HDC does not intend to increase there pressure on villages like Pulborough and Storrington.

Meanwhile Pulborough and Storrington are in the process of finalising their Neighbourhood Plans. These are the most significant innovation in the Localism Act though how much protection they will provide remains to be seen. Both villages have suffered from large-scale developments outside the main settlement area and too little affordable housing for local residents. The Parish Councils have decided that if their NPs are to be approved by HDC they will have to make a contribution to the housing needs of the District, in both cases around 300 units over the planning period. The hope is that in return both villages will be able to assert control over where new developments go and the type of housing. Both NPs are due to be submitted to the local population in a referendum in the course of the summer, after which they will become legally binding.

Finally, what about the South Downs National Park? The purpose of the NP is to protect the landscape and the natural beauty of the site but the Park Authority is under an obligation like all LPAs to draw up a planning framework which takes account of local housing needs. According to newspaper reports there are plans for over 4,000 new homes during the planning period but it should be remembered that the SDNP includes part of a dozen LAs across two counties as well as sizeable towns like Lewes and Petersfield whose neighbourhood plans envisage additional housing. The PAs initial proposals will be published this autumn and the Wiggonholt Association will take part in

the consultation process.

One last point. Unemployment in our district is already very low (2-2.5%), meaning that there is very little slack. If a second runway comes to Gatwick bringing 40,000 new jobs, current housing targets will undoubtedly have to be revised. In other words, all bets are off as regards the possibility of avoiding massive new housing developments across the county.

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