

# CPRE voices concerns at plans for 'new' Horsham

A LEADING countryside campaign group has expressed concerns over the massive development proposed for North Horsham, which was exclusively revealed in last week's West Sussex County Times.

Roger Smith of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) Horsham and Crawley District raised a series of points about the plan to build on 800 acres of "irreplaceable countryside and productive farmland".

And he asked: "Is it desirable and sensible that a substantial part of the 'new' Horsham would be owned by a single company and controlled ultimately by the company's investors?"

Liberty Property Trust and its partners are making much of the possible economic benefits to Horsham of the huge expansion of the town, which would increase its population by 25 per cent.

But Dr Smith argued: "We question Horsham District Council's underlying assumption that the local economy can be controlled and made to grow at or above pre-recession levels simply by building thousands of houses and by providing a huge new business park.

"New business parks do not by themselves create a demand for office space and commercial facilities.

"For example, Liberty Property Trust is currently seeking tenants for over 1 million square feet of business space ([www.kings-hill.com](http://www.kings-hill.com)) at its existing business park at King's Hill, West Malling, Kent.

"The information published by WSCT seems to indicate that this 'proposed mixed-use development' would be, if permitted, speculative and a gamble by Horsham District Council because the identified 'benefits for Horsham' appear to be possibilities, not certainties."

Dr Smith said it could not be assumed that the proposed development would attract wealth generating businesses into the district, create thousands of new 'quality' jobs, enable a new NHS hospital with A&E facilities to be built or be accompanied by a new railway station or schools.

But he added: "It would certainly result in the loss of 800 acres of irreplaceable country-

side, and productive farmland.

"It would certainly create an enormous requirement for new infrastructure and expanded essential services and have a huge impact on the district's road network, all with resultant costs and funding need."

Dr Smith questioned whether the Liberty Property Trust would fund a new hospital and pay for all essential new infrastructure, adding: "If not then who would pay?"

He also queried whether the costs for extra

infrastructure and essential services had been worked out and whether this vital information would be available for public scrutiny as part of the forthcoming public consultation.

He continued: "How many of the 4,500 new houses would be 'affordable' homes?"

"If the proposed development is permitted, would HDC reduce significantly its house-building targets for Billingshurst, Southwater and Pulborough?"

Letters, page 10

## Sign of conservation confusion

A GOVERNMENT department has no conservation walks despite signs saying so on the north Horsham land being earmarked for 4,500 homes.

The County Times rang the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to find out if the land was subject to any kind

of protection after the 'DEFRA Conservation Walk' sign on the site north of the A264 featured on last week's front page.

A media spokesperson said: "We don't have any" and then said if the land was an Area of Outstanding Beauty it could be protected.

## Landowners express support for multi-million po

TWO OF the north Horsham site landowners made representations strongly supporting development of the Chennells Brook part of the site.

Huntley Farms in Three Bridges and the Walton Partnership formed the Chennells Brook Consortium and put forward a statement for the North Horsham Eastern Area option in Horsham's core strategy review as owners of two thirds of that site.

Huntley Farms' partner Steve Harvey, the company which owns 40 per cent of the site covered by the Liberty proposal, said they were approached in September 2009 to see if they were interested in including their land in the strategy.

In their statement they said the

'overall landscape condition in the area is declining due to intensive arable farming and visual and noise intrusion of major traffic routes'.

Mr Harvey said it had been used to try out new fertilisers when his company bought it.

"It is farmed but is really open fields with cereal crops growing there," he said.

"There is a lot of traffic in terms of noise and quite a lot of activity at night with rubbish dumping."

He said it was not simply a question of building lots of houses.

"The council had to find a certain number of houses for the Horsham district and I think we have been in a bit of a campaign with Crickmay to try

and find someone that could offer a lot more than just houses.

"Liberty is unusual in that it is masterplanning rather than house building."

He said the Liberty plan would benefit the community rather than just looking to profit from a large number of houses, with about 50 per cent going to open space and recreation and protection of historic monuments, like ancient woodland, Moated House Farm and an old moat in the other part of the site.

"They seem to go into it all fairly thoroughly but they are in the early stages in the process at the moment," he said.

If the council did not meet its housing supply need, planning

**Is it desirable and sensible that a substantial part of the 'new' Horsham would be owned by a single company and controlled ultimately by the company's investors?**

Roger Smith, CPRE Sussex