

## **Henley Society Response to the Draft Henley/Harpsden Neighbourhood Plan**

Members of the Henley Society Executive Committee and its Planning Committee recently assessed the Draft Plan and, as a result, the Society would like to submit the following comments.

### **Housing**

The Society agrees with the 'brownfield first' policy and, in general, endorses the sites put forward for new housing, though it has some reservations about three of the sites. In addition, in order to provide the greatest opportunity to local residents, the phasing of the release of new housing over the whole of the plan period should be given greater emphasis and clarity.

The area within the Gillotts School playing field should be developed for housing only as a last resort. Its inclusion in the current Plan is seen as a short-term expedient that would preclude the future options (i) of using the area for sports activities should a greater need arise and (ii) of using it for building should an expansion of the school be needed. Other sources of funding for the school, including potential funds from the legal owners of the site, should be fully explored first.

Regarding the Empstead Works/ Stuart Turner site, some members felt that greater emphasis should be placed on redeveloping the whole area in conjunction with the Greys Road car-park, thus providing increased town-centre parking, together with retail/business premises, as well as housing.

Development of the Highlands Farm site, though accepted in principle, should be subject, in terms of the number of dwellings, to the views of OCC on traffic flows and to the views of the County Archaeologist with regard to the conservation of the SSSI and the scheduled ancient monument. Building should be confined to the designated brownfield area, as the surrounding fields are wholly within the Chilterns AONB. The Society supports the inclusion of retirement and/or care home accommodation at this location.

We welcome the news that the Youth Centre site has just become available (though we recognise the need to provide facilities for young people's activities elsewhere) as this may provide a means of overcoming any shortfall in housing allocations due to the considerations above.

### **Traffic and transport**

It was felt that the current shortage of parking space and the extent of traffic congestion had not been fully acknowledged and that proposals for the future were seriously inadequate. The aims of the 'vision' on p. 20 of the Plan were considered to be a 'wish list' with little prospect of achievement and with no strategy for implementing them.

### **Social infrastructure**

Several of the objectives set out on p. 21 were seen as platitudinous and, again, lacking in strategy.

### **Retail, town centre and economy**

It was agreed that (with a few exceptions such as local food/newspaper stores) retail premises should be concentrated in the town centre. The evidence-base for the Plan's proposals is largely out-of-date and needs updating. The inadequacies of the current situation were seen as being due mainly to the small size of many of the existing shops, and consequently it was felt that encouragement should be given to the merging of neighbouring shop premises.

## **Environment, sustainability and design quality**

We fully support the objectives outlined on p. 23 but, for most of them, see little prospect of implementation.

### **General**

The Society notes the change in government policy that has resulted in the Neighbourhood Plan no longer 'allowing local residents to determine where development should go', as originally promised. The remit of the Plan now appears to be that it should 'influence' to an indeterminate extent where development should go.

It is clear from the population projection cited on p.12 that the bulk of the new housing will be occupied by incomers to Henley, primarily from the London area, and therefore there is little point in ensuring that the overall balance of types of housing meets specific local needs.

The Society will vigorously oppose any proposal to increase the number of housing units above the 400-450 accepted by the Neighbourhood Plan.

The major role taken by Nexus Planning in assessing the weight of the numerous conflicting claims and proposals put forward during the process, in achieving a majority consensus view and in preparing the current document should be acknowledged in the Plan.