

Social housing options boxed in

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Hundreds of people desperate for social housing will finally have homes to call their own after a seven storey block was approved – despite concerns it would blight historic views from Box Hill.

There are 640 names on Mole Valley District Council’s housing waiting list and the plans, approved on Wednesday, August 7, will add 126 new affordable homes to the borough’s stock.

Developers Clarion Housing Group will demolish the existing office and residential buildings at the vacant Regent House. The homes will be spread across two blocks ranging from three to seven with shops on the ground floor.

Officers told the meeting the council was behind its housing targets and the huge number of affordable housing on offer meant it was hard not to recommend the proposals.

Of the 640 names on the council’s housing waiting list, 218 households are currently waiting for two bed units and this development will accommodate 42 per cent of those with a further 10 per cent of the 316 households waiting for one-bed homes also set to benefit.

Councillor Monica Weller (Liberal Democrat: Bookham West) said: “I am particularly mindful of the horrendous number of people on the housing list.

“That really is quite shocking, 640 on the housing list. A lot of my time is spent with people who are actually living with a partner and children in their parents houses or homes or flats.

“The situation is actually dire and I think there are a lot of people who don’t actually realise that.

“A lot of people who I have contact with do not have cars, they can’t afford cars, and I think that with this site so close to Dorking, it is walkable.

She added: “I am particularly interested in the National Trust’s case about the view from Box Hill but seeing the proposal from the planning officer and the photographs I think there is a limit to how much we can protect these views weighed against the need for homes

Some spoke out against the plans and warned of a “slippery slope” of allowing too many tall buildings.

Andrew Holden speaking on behalf of a number of residents in Lincoln Road and the surrounding area said a development with fewer floors could still provide a large number of homes while minimising the impact on the area.

He told the meeting: “The view of Dorking from Box Hill and to visitors arriving by train will be of a significant cluster of multi-storey buildings thoroughly out of character with our historic market town.

“To avoid this slippery slope leading to irreversible harm, its important that councillors draw a clear line in the sand of what the scale of development is appropriate n this area..”

The plans were approved unanimously by planning committee members.

Image: New homes set for Dorking (credit Clarion Housing)