

Civic leaders need a long-term vision



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THIS week the Horsham Society publishes an eyewitness account of the changes in the town over the last 25 years.

Long time residents still mourn some of the losses, such as the Capitol Theatre, but overall we are fortunate in having tamed the motor vehicle, and created an attractive pedestrian zone linking Piries Place, Carfax,

Swan Walk, and West Street with the huge Sainsbury's development.

Such a successful transformation was not achieved as a result of serendipity, but through an extraordinary shared clarity of vision between key elected councillors and talented officers.

They were individuals who loved and understood their town. They knew it had to change if it was to prosper and they were prepared to be bold.

Some of their decisions were unpopular at the time but almost without exception they were proved to be right.

The location of Sainsbury's new store in the heart of the town centre was probably the most important because it

reversed what seemed to be an inexorable flow of shoppers to out of town superstores.

Perhaps the least successful element is The Forum. An uninviting wind-swept plateau, it has yet to win the hearts of Horsham residents and visitors. This is unfinished business and hopefully someone will come up with a solution.

With one vision completed, Horsham now stands at a crossroads. We can rest on our laurels, pride ourselves on living in one of the best places in the country, and relax. Or we can push forward with a new vision for the 21st century.

The economic and social changes the country faces in the years ahead makes the

choice an easy one.

Technology is revolutionising our work environment and entertainment, and the way in which we shop and this will have a profound impact on communities. Either we attempt to control events and move with the times or we risk a slow decline.

We need to learn from our past success. Even if we thought we knew exactly what will be needed in 25 years' time it would be pointless to try to draw a blueprint for change.

What is needed is a shared vision of the sort of town we want Horsham to be, against which individual decisions can be tested and new

opportunities created.

And we need civic leaders with passion and pride in our town, clarity of vision, and the foresight to put today's issues and decisions in a longer term context.

The Horsham Society, one of the largest amenity societies in the country, is principally concerned with watching over the heritage of the town.

It seeks to promote good planning and design for the built environment and open spaces of Horsham and speaks up for residents when it considers decision making to be detrimental to the well-being of the towns character.

For more information, please visit the website www.horshamsociety.org