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# The law of unintended consequences



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THIS week we will look at a couple of examples where Horsham District Council appears to have failed to think policies through properly, thus leading to unfortunate unintended consequences. The Horsham Society and many County Times correspondents have argued the case for protecting our Victorian heritage, particularly the few remaining large buildings in

prominent locations. Where buildings are no longer suited to modern needs we must find ways to extend their useful lives such as conversions or retaining the façade and rebuilding behind it. This approach seems to be gaining support but it is endangered by the way in which the council interprets its own policies.

A current example is the Northbrook College building in Hurst Road. This site was identified by the council as a potential brownfield redevelopment site in the Local Development Framework.

In common with all such sites the number of new homes which it was said could be fitted in was arrived at simply by

assuming a density of around 75 homes per hectare. On this basis it was said that the Northbrook College site could accommodate 13 homes.

The problem is that what should have been treated as an indicative maximum seems to have been assumed by developers and the council itself as a target.

In the case of Northbrook College it is simply not possible to rework the site to accommodate 13 homes without demolishing the existing building. So, the council's own policy is in danger of creating a presumption that such buildings will be demolished.

Now Horsham Town Hall. The council has decided to market the building for

conversion into a restaurant. Forget for the moment whether this is in itself a good idea. What is more worrying is that the decision seems to have been taken without fully working through the consequences.

Even were the Registrar to move out of the town hall – and there seems to have been little progress in finding an alternative location – and assuming the kitchens and other service areas would be on the first floor, the usable area of the ground floor is unlikely to provide a large enough space for a restaurant to justify the level of investment required.

Could this be why there is talk of a glass extension to the front of the building? Last week's denial of the rumour by

councillor Lindsay was far from emphatic.

The concerns raised by Causeway residents and others about where the restaurant will store rubbish and kitchen waste have not been addressed at all. This should have been one of the first things the council considered. Maybe it is hoping for a planning application that will magically solve the problems.

*The Horsham Society is concerned about the town's past, present and future and seeks to promote good planning and design for the built environment and open spaces. For more information and details on how to join visit our website [www.horshamsociety.org](http://www.horshamsociety.org)*