

Seize the moment: invest in the future



by **John Steele**
chairman of
the Horsham
Society

their future is decided many miles from here.

What should we do in the face of economic forces which few seem to fully understand, and fewer still seem able to control?

We can either throw our hands up in despair and ride the storm out not knowing what the end game will look like, or we can act now to put in place the building blocks for a better future.

Now is the time for our local leaders to show courage and faith in our future. Instead of continually paring down council capacity in pursuit of low council taxes, our leaders should be investing aggressively in those things that will pay dividends as the economy improves.

It should become much more interventionist in pump-priming start up schemes for local businesses, converting empty properties for new purposes, and creating new opportunities upon which future economic strength can be based.

The Horsham Society does not have all the answers but here are two ideas that could be implemented almost immediately.

Currently the council employs a single town centres manager for the whole district. It is an impossibly large brief for one person.

Horsham needs at least one individual whose full time job is working with traders, local organisations and others to promote the town.

The council should commit

itself to developing the town as a regional centre for the arts, with the aim of creating a nationally recognised arts festival within five years. It should invest now in employing a top arts director to create and deliver this vision.

A major arts festival based on Horsham could bring huge benefits to the district as a whole, with spin-off events in the smaller communities.

This agenda will cost money. It also needs to be driven through with a great deal more imagination and speed than we usually associate with the council.

Throughout the world, leaders are recognising that the right investment implemented quickly now will reap rewards in the future.

The question is whether our local leaders have the necessary courage, energy, and imagination to put aside traditional thinking and grasp a new vision?

History is a harsh judge. Are we going to sit on our hands and let fate take its course, or seize the moment?

If I were Leader of the Council I know how I would like to be remembered.

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 or telephone 01403 272814.

IT SEEMS that the current economic problems will get worse before they get better and the risks to the future prosperity of Horsham are serious.

Small traders, already facing severe competition from national multiples and growing internet sales, will find times even harder.

Neither is there any guarantee that the multiples will still be here in a few years' time. They have no loyalty to the town and