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# What future for Victorian street scene?



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QUESTIONS over the future of the Nelson pub in Trafalgar Road, Horsham, have raised once again the difficult issue of finding new uses for old buildings.

Horsham is fortunate in having a wealth of period buildings of all ages. Some are quaint, others are individually pleasing because of their design or setting.

But in many cases it is not so much individual buildings that catch our eye as a number of similar period and design forming a pleasing street scene.

Our built heritage is the most significant factor in creating the character of the town and any proposals for change evoke considerable feelings in residents. Yet change is inevitable, particularly when buildings are no longer needed for their original purpose.

The Horsham Society is keen to ensure that change when it comes is both necessary and appropriate. Where possible we prefer to see old buildings converted to new uses and there are many examples in the town where this has been successfully achieved.

In most cases demolition should be a last resort although it does not need planning consent unless the building is listed or in a conservation area.

But nowadays conversions, particularly for residential use, have to meet rigorous modern standards which are

increasingly difficult to achieve economically, if at all.

Conversion costs have to be proportionate both to the final sale or rental value of the building in its new use and to the intrinsic importance and value of the building.

What it might be reasonable to require of a conversion of an important listed building would not necessarily be appropriate or manageable for a lesser building.

This brings us back to the Nelson. The brewers have decided that it is no longer viable as a public house. It would almost certainly be uneconomic to convert it into flats.

The building, together with its adjacent hall, stands proudly on a prominent corner in Trafalgar Road, part and parcel of the Victorian street scene. The surrounding roads are all

narrow and car parking is a nightmare. The pub has its own car park so did not contribute to the problem.

Indeed we understand that on occasion the landlord allowed locals to make temporary use of the spaces.

Developers originally applied to demolish the buildings and replace them with 14 flats but the council turned them down. They tried again with a scheme for eight two-storey houses.

This too has been turned down much to the relief of the society and local residents.

The plans did not provide sufficient off-street parking and would have turned a site which now provides an important focal point in the street scene into a run of the mill street corner.

In truth this site is unsuitable for housing. The last thing this

densely populated street needs is more residents, more visitors and more cars chasing the limited street parking. What is needed is an imaginative new community use for this corner.

Instead of passively waiting for another compromise housing scheme to be put forward the council should work with local residents to find a new use for the site which is both economically viable and visually appropriate.

Perhaps County Times readers have some suggestions.

*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.*