

# Building a new consensus in Horsham



by **John Steele**  
of the  
Horsham  
Society

THE RESULTS of the county elections have once again confirmed the political divide between Horsham and the remainder of the district.

While it would be wrong to overplay the effect of local issues even on local elections there can be little doubt that the dissatisfaction of the majority of Horsham residents with the way in which the town has been treated in recent years must have contributed to the results.

It is not just that residents' views over issues such as Horsham Town Hall and the future of the King's Head are ignored or rejected, but the district council has demonstrated a signal failure to implement its own plans successfully.

The county council in Chichester is viewed by many residents with complete indifference. It is remote in every sense and when its actions do make an impact on the town – such as the pedestrianisation of East Street – it scarcely covers itself in glory.

It was with some optimism therefore that I read the comments by Keith Wilkins, the new chairman of Horsham District Council, and his wish to use his influence to bridge the divide between the political parties so that together they can tackle the many pressing problems facing the district.

There are two other developments which could make this an opportune time to build a new consensus. The first is the appointment of Robert Nye as leader. He will surely wish to be remembered for the success of his period of office.

The second is the potential that will be created if West Sussex relocates significant staff numbers and responsibilities in Horsham.

Horsham could provide the 'County Hall of the north' thus making the council less remote and, hopefully, more responsive to the needs of our town.

Horsham is under threat as never before. The town has expanded to fill its natural boundaries, with limited brownfield sites ripe for redevelopment. The strategic gaps which prevented coalescence with Crawley and Southwater have been downgraded.

Much of our housing stock is well over 100-years-old. Large office blocks lie empty because the labour-intensive service industries they were built to house no longer exist.

The face of our high streets is being changed forever by the internet. Technology is changing our working lives and creating new patterns of recreation.

The new planning process – the Local Development Framework – is too conceptual and relies too much on responding to proposals from developers and the market more

generally.

What is needed is a clearer picture of how we want Horsham to look and feel in 20 years' time. There is no single policy that will deal with all the issues, no quick fixes, and no one organisation can provide the solutions. But local authorities have the responsibility for developing strategies and enabling change.

Mr Wilkins could do no better than to use his non-political role as chairman to bring the parties and wider community together to start a debate about the future of our town.

If together we could agree on where we want to get to, our political parties can get back to squabbling about how best to get there.

*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 [www.horshamsociety.org](http://www.horshamsociety.org) or telephone 01403 261905.*