

What price our conservation areas?



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IT IS always fun to have visitors and show them around Horsham. This time it was not friends and family but visiting groups, one from Kingston and one from Chichester.

The Kingston Amenity Society came by coach and we separated them into four more manageable groups. We showed them all the sights, old and new.

Although Kingston is not far away, most of them only knew Horsham by its bypass! They seemed impressed with our bustling town; 'How clean it is

and so few boarded-up shops'.

We who live here are, perhaps, too often critical and it is important that we value our assets and appreciate that our often-criticised council does get it right sometimes.

I encouraged the Kingston visitors to come back, as individuals and spend time here (as tourists) now that they had some idea of what our town has to offer.

The second group were the Chichester Conservation Area Advisory Committee. It included the mayor of Chichester, a Chichester district councillor, a member of the Victorian Society, a surveyor, an architect; altogether a much more high-powered and specialist group who were especially interested in our conservation area in the centre of town.

We were able to show them Horsham's rich heritage and

compare notes.

This was particularly relevant in view of the recent English Heritage announcement that one in seven of the 9,300 conservation areas around the country is at risk from neglect, decay or damaging changes.

English Heritage identified the most serious threats to be: plastic windows and doors, poorly maintained roads and pavements, street clutter, unsightly satellite dishes, alterations to fronts of buildings, roofs and chimneys, unsympathetic extensions, advertisements and neglected green spaces.

So far, our central conservation area is not suffering too badly from these threats and maybe with a new conservation officer appointed by Horsham District Council-it can look forward to a bright future.

But we must not forget that we have two other conservation areas; in London Road and Wimbleshurst Road. These do not receive the attention (such as road-sweeping) that the central conservation area does. I wonder what our visitors would have thought about them?

The district council realises the importance of Horsham being an attractive area. It wants to increase economic activity, including tourism.

As residents in the town, we should help it do that but we are relatively powerless.

We rely on the council to do as English Heritage suggests. It is HDC which must prepare briefs for sites which are identified as detracting from the conservation areas, ensuring new buildings harmonise with the existing.

It must control the position

and design of advertisements and shop signs.

It may need to consider grants for the repair of buildings or even invoke compulsory purchase powers to deal with neglected eyesores like the King's Head in Horsham's Carfax.

English Heritage is asking every local authority to complete a questionnaire as part of a nationwide census.

I hope our council completed its and will continue to care for this important element of our heritage.

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 on how to join visit the website www.horshamsociety.org or telephone 01403 261905.