

A swift resolution by the council is now needed



by **John Steele**
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IN A HEALTHY democracy there is always lively debate with individuals and groups pressing their opinions and the Horsham Society plays its part in representing its members and the town as a whole.

We are often at odds with the council. Sometimes it listens and others it ploughs on with schemes that we would rather it did not. There is always a temptation to continue the battle long after it has been lost but in most

cases it is in the long term interests of the town to accept the situation and move on.

Two current examples come to mind: the fate of Horsham Town Hall and the pedestrianisation of the town's East Street.

We would much have preferred Horsham District Council to invest in upgrading the town hall and retain it as a public facility but it has decided to lease it as a restaurant. Were the present plans to fall through there is no chance of public investment in the town hall given the present economic situation and it would remain unused and unloved.

What is needed now is a swift resolution to the outstanding issues so that a restaurant can be up and

running as soon as possible. The longer the building lies unused the greater the waste of a valuable economic asset.

A successful restaurant should help to revitalise this part of the town centre and contribute to the growth of the area as the town's eating district.

Attention now needs to turn to ensuring that the council maintains the Drill Hall in Denne Road as an attractive venue for meetings and events.

Our objections to the East Street scheme were that it was not proper pedestrianisation, it was too narrow for a shared space scheme and that the regulations would prove impossible to enforce. Our views did not prevail and we must now look to the future.

The council recently arranged for its reference group to meet Ben Hamilton-Baillie, who is an expert on reconciling traffic movement with other public use, and it is clear from the examples he described from around the world that it was possible with careful design to make schemes such as East Street work well.

But the secret seems to lie in very careful and precise design. So we are now looking to the council to make sure there is as much investment in the design of its scheme for resurfacing as in the landscaping itself.

Meanwhile, it is essential that the scheme is enforced vigorously so that motorists do not become accustomed to using East Street as if it

were a normal road again. Horsham council gave an undertaking to the county council that there would be proper enforcement but so far there is no sign of it.

Finally, the Shelley Fountain. The council promised an early decision on its future yet it will soon mark its anniversary in its sad broken state. It's time the council made up its mind and got on with the job.

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 261905.