

Shortage of council funding needn't put the future on hold

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AMID the dire warnings of further financial belt tightening as the country comes to terms with economic reality, the start of a new decade is an appropriate time for our local councillors to ask themselves how they want to be remembered.

Running efficient, cost effective services is important to all of us but that should be a given. And, frankly, with high calibre officers it should not require much input from elected representatives.

What really matters is whether they leave our town in better shape than it would have been without their efforts. Will it be a more prosperous, more attractive place in which to live and



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work? Will it be a vibrant, confident town, proud of its history yet welcoming of new ideas? Will it attract a broad spectrum of society as residents and visitors; and will it provide for the less fortunate?

It is in times like these that plans should be laid for the better financial climate that will surely come. Whilst funds may be too tight to allow services that play an important role in sustaining

the diversity of community life – libraries, museums, arts and sports facilities – to grow, they must be protected from cuts that would endanger future growth.

The successful towns of the future will be those that have a clear vision and use the next year or so to bring together those with the necessary creative ideas and practical skills in order to be ready for the upturn.

We have argued before that there is a great opportunity for Horsham to become a centre for the creative arts. The council should act as a catalyst to bring together a group to explore the idea further and examine possible business models.

Whilst they are considering how to build a better future whilst minimising present day costs there are three more things which our councillors could do now which would make a big difference.

First, they should encourage Horsham District Council's cabinet to back The Horsham Society's proposal to create a District Design Panel which could advise developers and the council and act as a champion for better building design. It would cost very little and its positive impact on our built environment would be seen for decades to come.

The council should throw its support behind the society's proposal for five new conservation areas and a local

list of buildings of particular value. Very little cost would be involved, and future generations would reap the reward.

Finally, last year we invited the council to voluntarily register five of the town's green spaces as Town Greens to ensure their protection from future development.

The council has nothing to lose as they are not sites likely to have development value, it would cost almost nothing to give them this extra protection, and it would send out a strong message that our green spaces are important in an increasingly urban environment.

So, a lack of available funding doesn't mean that

we need to put the future on hold. There are significant initiatives that would cost next to nothing to implement now. And our councillors could be confident that they were playing their part in making Horsham a more attractive place in the years ahead.

The Horsham Society is concerned about the past, present and future of the town. It seeks to promote good planning and design for the built environment and open spaces. Membership of the Horsham Society is open to anyone who shares these concerns. For more information, visit the website www.horshamsociety.org or phone 01403 261905.