

# What do we want from our planners - balance or quality?

WHEN it comes to planning do you want balance or quality?

A planning officer once told me that few planning applications are free from conflicting reactions and many will arouse controversy.

It was, he said, his job to reconcile these reactions or - as he put it - to strike a balance and (he added) sooner rather than later.

I disagree because I don't think balance is good enough.

I believe that we owe it to our successors to expect our planners to take a longer view and decide applications in terms of quality in the interests of the community

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as a whole.

In fact we read a lot about maintaining high standards and that means high standards of layout, design and materials; but if they are to be taken seriously we have to take the right decisions.

We also hear a lot about using local features and materials, sometimes called the vernacular.

Taken literally it means "domestic" and it refers to

the native or indigenous speech or language of a locality and the bottom end of the market; but we have to remember that most of the buildings we see today are up-market revivalist versions of the vernacular or domestic buildings of the past and, whether or not they are revivals, they bear little relationship to the types of building that we have to contend with today and that the local materials which were virtually all that was available are now conspicuous by their absence.

In a way we are lucky - property prices in the Horsham area are high today

meaning that people have the money and are prepared to spend it so that, although the matter of cost will always be a factor, it need not be decisive.

At the same time the image that Horsham should present is increasingly being discussed and 'quality' certainly looms large - not least in the importance of taking full advantage of the historic environment we are blessed with - so the circumstances argue for those high standard we hear about.

Just how far should we go? Unfortunately what you get used to can quickly become the norm and that leads to a

temptation to just copy what is there.

There is more to maintaining a standard of quality of layout, design and materials than that. Personally I believe, with Jeremy Bentham, that what matters is the greatest good of the greatest number.

I have to accept that what one desires may not always be good and perhaps that is where we are entitled to turn to our planners for advice?

They bear a heavy responsibility and they also face a difficulty.

They say quite rightly that they can only work with the applications they receive but I think that is an argument

for taking a firm line so that word gets round that if you want the best chance that your Horsham applications will be passed then you must employ the best advice that you can get.

*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.*

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