

Men at work never stopped women shopping



by **David Moore**
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THE SIGN on the protective fencing around the never-ending work in Horsham's Forum says it all - 'Men at work never stopped women shopping'.

We need a viable retail operation in the town centre and we'll try to use it whatever difficulties are put in our way.

At the same time, we have to accept that what retail

outlets we have now are likely to be totally different from those that will exist in a few years' time.

Historically, Horsham has kept the bulk of its retail operations within the town so that it is easily accessible to most people with or without their own mode of transport. Up to now, out of town retail centres have been limited to the area off the A281 just outside Broadbridge Heath and most incoming new businesses have been quite happy to locate themselves within the existing town centre.

Looking ahead into the future, it seems reasonable to assume that this process will

continue. The nature of the shops that we have will change but it can only be hoped that these outlets will continue to operate from a base within the centre of the town.

There is still some unfinished business to be addressed with respect to the Forum. Even when the current repair works are finished, the Forum is likely to remain an unattractive, wind-swept area. Some major design considerations need to be actioned to make it an attractive place into which people wish to venture.

It also needs to become truly part of the town centre, though how this can be achieved with the

problematic Blackhorse Way separating it from the Forum remains to be seen.

We also have to bear in mind the way in which our approach to shopping is changing, with the more frequent use of the internet for shopping from home and the introduction of more self-service scanning stations in shops, both of which aim to reduce staffing levels.

These changes are bound to have an effect on the number of new houses that need to be built as the number of people employed in these retail outlets will be far less than those we are used to historically.

Currently, we are seeing

major changes in the type of shops that are leaving Horsham but it's not yet clear what will replace them. Will the smaller outlets disappear to be replaced by the larger stores?

It will be a shame if this happens too much as it is the smaller outlets that tend to add character to a town centre as well as being the source of purchasing items that you cannot obtain from the larger retail outlets.

It will be interesting to see what conclusions are reached in the soon to be published Urban Practitioners' report commissioned by Horsham District Council.

It is hoped that this will focus on the changes that have to be made to satisfy our future needs as an established market town and not set out to try and make Horsham compete with Crawley or Guildford as a shopping experience.

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 our website www.horshamsociety.org or telephone 01403 263870.