

Long running sagas that simply need to be resolved

AFTER considerable delay, the district council has finally got around to putting Horsham's old town hall on the market for sale or lease.

When the subject of finding a new use for the town hall in Market Square first came up some years ago, The Horsham Society said that we would like to see something which allowed continued public access. We were initially hopeful that a viable proposal might have been developed for joint commercial and community use.

In the event it seems that was not possible so a high quality restaurant seemed a sensible idea. Unfortunately, that too was stillborn.

It is unclear whether the protracted legal wrangles over the right of the council to dispose of the building in this way was the cause, but it certainly can't have helped matters.

The town hall occupies an important site within the commercial centre and its



by **John Steele**
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continued closure acts as a blight. We need to find a use that will transform the building into a vibrant centrepiece, operating all day, every day, and every evening.

It is therefore imperative that Horsham District Council presses on and finds a suitable buyer or lessee. Those that have been arguing loudly for community use have had long enough to put together a viable scheme, including making grant applications if appropriate. Don't let's start talking about legal process again. All that will achieve is further delay and waste of taxpayers' money.

In simple terms, one might say, 'put your money where your mouth is'. If there is a viable scheme for community use, the people

concerned should put in a bid. If not, to quote Clement Attlee, a period of silence would be welcome.

From one long running saga to another: Horsham's Muggerridge Field.

The field is adjacent to Chesworth Farm and has for many years been treated by locals and others as part of this publicly accessible area for walking and informal recreation.

However, it is clear that the county council still hasn't got the message that this is not the right place for new housing. Despite defying local wishes and Horsham planners, and losing two planning appeals, Louise Goldsmith, county council leader, has made it pretty plain that she intends to try again.

One wonders whether such disregard for public opinion and planning policy would be pursued so vigorously if we weren't so far from Chichester. It is simply a crude attempt to asset strip Horsham.

But what amazes us most is the complete absence of public support for local people

from our county councillors. If they can't get behind the town on an issue like this what on earth are they there for?

Cabinet-style local government may relegate backbench councillors to a pretty miserable existence, but their role is to hold the cabinet to account and to be a public voice for our town in the Chichester council chamber and elsewhere.

So, please, it's not too late to make it clear to Chichester that we will stand for nothing short of a commitment to retain Muggerridge Field as open space.

And don't whisper in the corridors of County Hall – shout from the roof tops.

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 261640.