

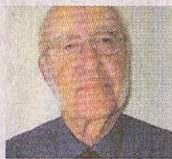
Fundamental flaw in plan to replace leisure centre

WE SEEM to spend a lot of our time these days reading consultation documents, looking at exhibitions or attending stakeholder meetings and it's all linked to the future of Horsham district.

Unfortunately, most people never get to see the consultation documents, so we finish up with a lot of ill-formed opinions on what is proposed, whilst at the same time a lack of understanding as to what the likely outcome will be.

This is very sad, especially as the end result may well be something that nobody wants and is decided simply on the grounds of cost. It's essential, therefore, that we grasp these opportunities and ensure that our views are known if we wish to have any influence whatsoever on the decision-making process.

This has been well demonstrated by the furore over the proposed closure of the Broadbridge Heath Leisure Centre, where the groundswell of public opinion forced Horsham District Council to have another



by **David Moore**
chairman of the
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report prepared on its future. This report is now open for public consultation and the deadline for comments is June 5.

The closure of the existing facility is still recommended for sound financial reasons. It's suggested that it should be replaced at least in part by a new smaller leisure centre with less facilities, which would be built on land in the west of Horsham housing development. So far so good but the problem is, as always, that the report is very long, some 104 pages, and it is full of statistics. It also looks at the needs of Horsham district, a very large area, and ignores the needs of Horsham town and its nearby settlements.

One fundamental problem relates to the

land available for a new leisure centre.

The original masterplan prepared by HDC allowed for two hectares of land but all that was eventually achieved was one hectare. Thus, right from the beginning, any plan to relocate the existing facility was rather like trying to fit a gallon into a pint pot. It was always going to be impossible.

The proffered solution is one of fragmentation, which involves taking something that works with 200,000 user visits per annum and assuming that breaking it up into pieces will not have an adverse effect. It also assumes that other existing facilities would be available at the required times (not usually practical with schools, for example) and they could cope with the increased demand.

Also, there is no account taken of travelling requirements if the activities are separated. It's not unusual for one couple to be interested in making use of two different facilities separately. In addition, there's no consideration about transport issues in

general.

The report only covers a five year period from 2011 to 2016. It totally ignores other factors such as the recent consultation document on Horsham district's housing needs over a 20 year period. Basing decisions on what might be the need in 2016 totally ignores what it might be in 2031. There's no point in building something which might be fit for purpose in 2016 if it's then too small in 2031.

Unfortunately, the proposed change only makes sense from a financial point of view and really ignores what might be most beneficial for the users.

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.