

John Steele: Horsham Society is not negative, just watchful



In last week's letters column the Horsham Society was accused by a reader of objecting to every change and having little positive to contribute about anything.

The Society was founded in 1955 as part of the burgeoning civic trust movement and has been working with others tirelessly since then in seeking to retain and enhance the special

character of our town. Whilst we certainly wouldn't claim more credit than is due there is little doubt that Horsham today is still a rather special place and those that read these articles regularly will know we acknowledge and celebrate it.

It is true that we are critical of changes which we believe will damage our town but we welcome progress.

With few exceptions towns which do not move with the times and embrace change ossify and decline.

We have supported initiatives designed to attract visitors and shoppers to the town centre such as Piazza Italia and the creation of a thriving restaurant scene.

Once it was clear there was no viable community use for

the Town Hall we supported its conversion to a restaurant and welcomed the arrival of Bill's.

We have campaigned for the pedestrianisation of East Street and are part of the council's working group for the enhancement of West Street.

Going back 20 years or more, the Society courted unpopularity by supporting the building of Sainsbury's store on what was then school playing fields.

It was the right thing for the town then, and it is still a huge magnet bringing shoppers into the town centre.

But not all ideas are as good and some can be positively harmful.

We have expressed

concern about the plans to move Waitrose to a new superstore because so far the developers have failed to provide the same level of connectivity with the town centre that was achieved by Sainsbury's.

The proposed North Horsham development is simply not good planning.

It will not be part of the town, with only a single narrow access across the A264 down Rusper Road.

The planning case is still underpinned by a new hospital which one of the council's cabinet has publicly acknowledged will never be built and a 'parkway' station that is unlikely ever to be built either.

Children from the town will cross the A264

northwards to get to a promised new secondary school.

And, at least in the short term, it seems young children will have to cross in the other direction.

The economic viability of the development is dependent on a massive new out of town superstore which is contrary to national planning policy and would damage our town centre trade.

The plans are riddled with such anomalies and muddled thinking.

Nobody should be fooled into believing this is the result of considered planning; it is simply a politically motivated stitch-up designed to dump almost all the District's new housing

on Horsham with no concern for the consequences.

Yes, Horsham is a wonderful town and it could be even better.

So the Horsham Society celebrates our success but will continue to be ever watchful for proposals that threaten to set us back.

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.