

David Moore: New West End Story - musical or development?



It was good to see that a planning application has finally been submitted to redevelop Bishops Weald House in Bishopric. Development in this area has long been awaited and the next step will be to look in detail at the proposals before making any constructive comments on the application.

The announcement could not have been better timed as it coincided with the unveiling of the new

look West Street. As became clear when East Street was given its new image, any improvements, which are made to the town centre, need to be rolled out. Without taking a pro-active approach, the risk is that improvements to one part of the town, in this case West Street, leave the adjacent parts of the town looking past their sell by date.

The only part of the current proposals for Bishops Weald House, which appear to miss an important opportunity, is the artist's impression, which accompanied the announcement. It still shows this part of the Bishopric with the Shelley Fountain. There's no real doubt that this motionless hulk has to be

removed and replaced so that we have a good focal point at the junction of West Street with this part of Bishopric. The replacement of the Shelley Fountain should form part of the redevelopment.

However, we must dispel the marketing concept of a "New West End" for Horsham once and for all. It serves no useful purpose save other than to disguise the problems that still have to be satisfactorily resolved. Whether we like it or not, the current plans for the "New West End" are in reality the redevelopment of two different sites, which are separated by Albion Way.

If Albion Way was moved so that the sites on either side of the road could be treated as one, then we could look

at these proposals as one development. Unfortunately, we're told that it's not possible to move Albion Way in order to create one site so it means that, with the best will in the world, there's a problem to be overcome.

For that reason, we must deal with the two sites separately as the proposals and the requirements associated with each site are different. Unfortunately, the planning application for the Bishops Weald House development includes demolition and redevelopment of part of the Lifestyle Ford site. This only serves to confuse matters.

Whether we like it or not, the problem with any redevelopment on the other side of Albion Way

means that we have to carefully assess the issue of connectivity with the town centre. Currently, the only way for pedestrians to cross Albion Way is via the crossing on a road, where traffic flow is a priority.

By all means upgrade and improve what's currently part of the town centre, i.e. Bishopric between West Street and Albion Way, but tread with caution about redevelopment outside of what is currently the town centre, i.e. the other side of Albion Way.

There's no doubt that the Lifestyle Ford and Bishops Weald House sites should be redeveloped but we have to ensure that it's done in such a way that it benefits the town by attracting more shoppers

into the existing town centre and doesn't damage what we already have.

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.

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