

# John Steele: council should explain more - remember, 'we wunt be druv'



It is rare these days to feel any sympathy for our council leaders. So highhanded and insensitive are they to the wishes of those they are supposed to serve that the savage criticism they receive is usually well deserved.

Even when they do something right they are so ham-fisted that they unnecessarily offend

residents and raise fears that they have a hidden agenda.

The current marketing of Park House, in Horsham, for sale or lease is a good example.

Park House is a very important Listed building with a rich history at the heart of the social and political life of the town.

With its setting on the edge of Horsham Park, and as one of the first buildings that visitors see when leaving the station, it is priceless.

Once an important centre for local government it is now surplus to the council's requirements as staff numbers decline and there is a need for modern flexible office space for those that remain.

A use has to be found for Park House that will breathe new life into it and protect it for the future. There is nothing more depressing than an empty Listed building.

Many of our cherished old buildings are still with us simply because they have been adapted over time to meet changing needs.

This isn't something that has been suddenly sprung upon us.

The council has been looking for a solution for some years and there isn't an obvious or easy answer.

Some time ago we asked our members for suggestions but there were few, and none that were entirely new.

There was talk of moving

the Museum but that was rightly dismissed as inappropriate and a less satisfactory site than its current home in Causeway.

Other ideas have included a boutique hotel, a restaurant, a company head office or conversion to apartments but none have generated a firm proposal.

Marketing Park House to a wider audience to see what offers come forward is therefore a sensible idea.

It is also sensible to consider sale or lease.

It isn't important who owns Park House, only that it is put to an appropriate use that respects its character and setting, and that it is properly maintained.

The problem however,

and where an otherwise good plan falls down, is the lack of public explanation.

People are concerned that Park House will simply be sold to the highest bidder, regardless of suitability, or that part of the Park might be sold with it.

There is no sign as yet that either of these are true so why haven't people's minds been put at rest from the outset?

Many of us are relative newcomers to Sussex but we have readily adopted the stubborn streak for which Sussex folk are well known - 'We wunt be druv'.

We expect proper explanation from our local politicians, and a willingness to hear and consider

contrary views.

If the council would take the time to explain and engage it would find life a lot smoother in the long run.

Meanwhile, let's hope someone comes up with a really good use for Park House without losing any of the Park in the process.

*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 [horshamsociety.org](http://horshamsociety.org) or telephone 01403 261640.*