

# John Steele: what use is the Town Plan if it is ignored?



Less than three years ago, after much consultation, Horsham Council approved the Horsham Town Plan. This is the nearest thing that we have to a vision for the future of Horsham.

It is an excellent Plan which blends strategic vision with specific planning policies for each of seven areas of the town. If followed it would ensure that as development opportunities arise they are be steered in a direction which supports the town's economy and future prosperity as well as creating a better built environment.

The Town Plan is a supplementary planning document which means that it has legal standing

and should guide both the Council's strategic and individual planning decisions.

Unfortunately, no sooner was the ink dry when HDC ignored its own plan for the redevelopment of what is now the new Waitrose and John Lewis site. The plan stipulated that there should be a new road constructed from the Staples roundabout to the Bishopric running behind the new development. This would have diverted traffic away from the busy Bishopric / Albion Way junction and made it easier for pedestrians to move from Waitrose to the town centre. This is crucial if the whole town is to benefit from the new shoppers we hope will be attracted to the town.

It has never been clear to us why HDC allowed the developers to ignore the plan but, so desperate was it to get John Lewis on board, the new road was dropped. If the stores are as successful as we hope it may become clear pretty quickly that the Council's original plan was the right



An artist's impression of the Waitrose and John Lewis site

one. Even if the traffic doesn't become gridlocked, crossing an even busier Albion Way is going to look an attractive proposition.

The Council had a direct financial interest in the John Lewis site and its redevelopment which it refused to make public. We still don't know how much

the Council was paid for the ransom strip it owned across the site entrance.

Now we hear that the Council has sold its old offices in North Street knowing that the buyer intends to convert them to flats. This is in direct contravention of the Town Plan which says that North Street should be

rules over changes of use from commercial to residential use.

As part of its case for a new business park within the controversial North Horsham site, the Council claimed that there was a shortage of high quality office space in the town centre. Instead of selling its old offices for conversion to flats it would surely have been better for the town if they had been upgraded and relet.

If the Council is not prepared to follow its own plan, but instead every time chases the highest financial reward, why should we be surprised when developers seek to do the same?

*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 the website [www.horshamsociety.org](http://www.horshamsociety.org) or phone 01403 272814.*