

John Steele: encouraging a greater sense of civic pride



These days civic pride depends as much upon active citizenship where residents give up time to care for their communities themselves.

We have some amazing examples such as Horsham in Bloom, the Friends of Chesworth Farm and of Warnham Nature Reserve; and groups which adopt and tidy community areas such as the riverside. Horsham District Council recently launched its own 'adopt a street' scheme.

More still is needed, particularly on a very local scale such as looking after our many small green spaces, but it is hard to mobilise residents if they lack a sense of belonging to their local community.

Horsham has grown enormously and as towns expand beyond a certain size there is a risk that the sense of place, of belonging to a single entity, breaks down, leading to alienation and apathy.

Developers understand



'Amazing community care' displayed by Horsham in Bloom.

this and make a great fuss about creating new communities, often giving their developments fancy names.

Although not many stick once all the homes are sold and the developer moves off to pastures new, they are tapping in to a deep set desire

to belong. When people ask residents where they live many, instead of simply saying Horsham, use a more local name such as Holbrook, the Common or Rookwood.

Should we celebrate and recognise local place names more?

Would it help to build community identity and pride at a level more local than Horsham itself?

On the Queen Street side of the Iron Bridge there has long been a decorative sign saying 'Queen Street' as if it were a location in its own right.

We could extend this idea as they have done in many cities (and dare I say it, Crawley) by adding neighbourhood names to street nameplates.

Would such a move encourage a greater sense of ownership and pride, and even lead to the formation of new Friends groups and working parties?

Surely it is worth considering because civic

pride and engagement can no longer be left to the council and other statutory bodies.

As council funds get tighter it is important that they focus their limited resources on those things which individuals and groups cannot do.

If, for example, everyone were to accept responsibility for cutting the grass verges outside and close to their properties not only would the streets look tidier, but the money saved by the county council could be put to better use, perhaps for example on social care.

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 or phone 01403 272814.

Civic pride is a concept that is difficult to pin down but one we all recognise when we see it. It can manifest itself in myriad ways from neat, clean and tidy streets; well maintained street furniture and signs; impressive parks, civic buildings and amenities; to markets, carnivals and fairs. It might be seen in a community's enthusiasm to show off and share its good fortune through festivals, twinning and tourism.

In the past it was often local councils that provided most of the outward manifestations of civic pride but with fewer and fewer resources this is proving ever more difficult to maintain.