

Nigel Friswell: vote for change and govern Horsham better



One of the advantages of being on the Committee of The Horsham Society is that I get to see newsletters that are sent to us from other amenity societies.

There are of course differences. Different places have different problems. But so often one sees that we are facing the same problems as others.

We like to think that we get on relatively well with the local district council, both officers and councillors, but, from time to time, we find ourselves poles apart.

And so it is in other places, too. A recent issue of the newsletter of the Canterbury Society expresses

concern about the system of governance in Canterbury District.

There have been high-profile disputes over development and the way in which their council has ignored almost all of the comments it received on the Local Plan. Does this sound familiar?

At the moment decision-making in the Canterbury District is concentrated in an executive cabinet, controlled by a strong leader. Does that sound familiar?

All the members of the executive are from the majority political party. Does that sound familiar?

This co-exists with a highly efficient whipping system. Does that sound familiar?

The problem is even more acute for the residents of Canterbury city because almost all the council members represent seats outside the city itself. That sounds familiar, too.

They make the point that



while the the winning party has a right to play a dominant role in local government it should not be at the price of the monopolisation of power resulting in bad policy.

The Canterbury Society is pressing its local council to move back to a committee system as existed before the cabinet system was

introduced.

It wants a democratic system whereby councillors should not assume that an election victory is an unrestricted mandate to act just as they want.

There is a need to engage with residents in an ongoing dialogue about the future of the district.

Here in Horsham we have the same problems and there is no opportunity for the town's councillors and local groups to discuss openly the issues affecting the town.

We no longer even have a cabinet member with responsibility for the town.

The problems with the cabinet system run much deeper. It emasculates the role of individual back bench councillors of all parties.

Instead of actively and publicly promoting the interests and views of those they represent they are left simply to react to the decisions of an executive Cabinet.

What is the point of having 44 councillors if all decisions are taken by eight Cabinet members?

A combination of local party politics, first-past-the-post elections and the cabinet system is a toxic mix which is killing local democracy.

Unfortunately the system is geared to party politics and proportional representation

has its own problems but the one thing that our councillors could tackle is the Cabinet system.

The good news is that we do have a chance to make this change in Horsham and return to a committee system in which every councillor is able to play a full role.

Cllr Ray Dawe, Leader of HDC, has promised a review of Horsham's governance system by the end of the year.

All we need is for all Horsham's councillors to recognise the problems and vote for change.

Goto it!

The Horsham Society is concerned about the town's past, present and future and 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 telephone 01403 272814.