

# John Steele: can Horsham still claim to be a market town?



While ago we considered the importance of civic pride and its role in helping to create and sustain communities. When asked to describe the character of our town many of us fall back on the somewhat vague expression 'historic market town'. At least that is how Horsham District Council chooses to describe it.

So, one might think, our council would support all our markets and market traders to help them thrive and attract shoppers to the town. But no.

You will recall that not so long ago there was a thriving, council-managed general market at Lynd Cross. Unfortunately the number

of stalls began to decline but there were still some regular favorites including the splendid fruit and vegetable stall and the butcher's van. So it was decided to relocate the remaining Saturday market stalls to Piries Place to join the small privately run market already there.

We have never fully understood why this change was made. We were told it was because trading had become difficult and it was impossible to sustain the market, but there was always a suspicion that the council did not think it fitted its image for the town's new West End. Yes, the image currently portrayed by a broken mobile sculpture, cracked and badly filled paving and generally sad appearance.

The move to Piries Place has been problematic and never ideal, but since the relocation of Waitrose the footfall has dropped as has the trade. We now understand stallholders have



The Central Market off the Carfax in Horsham in the 1950s

been given notice to quit.

The Horsham Society is keen to see the stalls relocated elsewhere—either back to Lynd Cross or perhaps in the Carfax, alongside but separate from the local market.

However our approach to the council has been met by a refusal to reconsider the problem as the Piries market is privately run.

That is not good enough. Horsham council leaders should be doing everything they can to ensure all our markets continue to operate and thrive; otherwise the description 'market town' will become meaningless.

HDC's unhelpful stance is made worse by the fact the town does not have its own town council. If a similar situation arose in

Burgess Hill, East Grinstead, Billingshurst or Henfield the local town or parish council could step in and find a solution. In Horsham council such is the disinterest in our town we no longer even have a cabinet member responsible for the town. So much for civic pride.

On a brighter note the Horsham Society is working with others to try to offer

regular guided walks for visitors to our town.

This would build on an existing society scheme which provides guided walks for small groups by appointment. The idea would be for a regular weekly walk, probably starting from the museum, with no pre-booking required. It could grow into a popular tourist attraction, as well as being of interest to residents keen to know more about the town.

If you would be interested in helping with the walks please get in touch on the number below.

*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.*