



Town on the brink of transformation

There have been two very welcome recent developments. The first is the decision by Horsham Council to purchase the Ambulance Station site in Hurst Road and the other is the County Council's announcement it was to buy the redundant Novartis site.

It has been clear for some years that what has been called the public estate on the southern side of Hurst Road – the police, fire and ambulance stations in particular – will become ripe for redevelopment in the near future, along with one or two smaller sites. The fact that a large area of land is already in public ownership provides a huge opportunity to move away from developer-led speculative building to a planned approach which delivers the maximum benefit for the town, economically, socially and architecturally.

Only Horsham Council has the land assembly powers that may be necessary to ensure that such a comprehensive redevelopment is successful.

It is too soon to say how the south side of Hurst Road should be redeveloped. Plenty of ideas have been canvassed including



Horsham Park

apartments, a hotel, and expansion of the Horsham Hospital site, if only the car park. Maybe the final scheme could include all or some of these but there are also important constraints.

Hurst Road borders Horsham Park, the jewel in the town's crown, and it will be important that new buildings are not allowed to loom over the north of the Park. One of its main attractions is that its long vistas are not compromised by surrounding development because it is relatively low rise and screened by the mature trees fringing the Park.

The now almost completely cleared Novartis site offers a different challenge. Both the company and WSCC would like to see part of the site used for a new science park and if this can be achieved it would bring a significant boost to the town. The remainder of the site will be for housing. Again there are significant constraints. WSCC has already promised to retain the locally listed former CIBA headquarters building and the avenue of trees leading to it from Wimblehurst Road. We have asked for the two Gate Lodges to be retained as well as they perfectly frame the entrance to

the site. Fitting housing and a science park around these in ways which enhance and showcase the CIBA building and its setting will take imagination and flair.

Again, hopefully, what WSCC will be able to do, which developers too often do not, is to balance the commercial realities with a strong social responsibility to achieve a high quality, attractive development which will be a lasting legacy of the company's long association with the town.

Horsham is on the brink of transformative change the like of which we haven't seen for 25 years. It is reassuring that our local councils are preparing to take a leading role as their predecessors did. Councils don't necessarily have a monopoly of wisdom - and taking the public with them is vital - but only they have the powers to ensure that such extensive redevelopment is a long term success.

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 261905.