



Investing in Horsham's future

Not so long ago Horsham was named as one of the top places in which to live based upon a range of indicators including life expectancy, health and employment rates. This year, according to Halifax, we are only just in the top 20.

In reality such surveys, with their year to year variation, have little value other than perhaps to highlight that changes in relative circumstance can occur very quickly, both for good and ill.

So Horsham is fortunate to be on the cusp of substantial inward investment in the form of a multiplex in Swan Walk, and the redevelopment of Piries Place, again probably including an hotel and cinema. This represents a significant vote of confidence in the town's future prosperity which will hopefully attract still further investment.

In the year ahead we should see Horsham District Council's vision for the future of the town, particularly the public land in Hurst Road that is gradually being freed up for development. This will be an important step as it is a sensitive site, sitting above Horsham Park, and one which offers a



Asphalt patching in Horsham's Carfax.

number of possibilities for mixed use.

But new investment is only one side of the coin: we must maintain and where necessary improve the built environment

we already have. There is an increasing number of near derelict and poorly maintained properties in the town centre such as the former Antix shop in Queen Street, and the old groundsman's cottage by the cricket field. The frontages of the former council offices and Norfolk House in North Street are weed-strewn, overgrown and look dreadful. Where the appearance of a property or land is causing significant blight to an area the council has powers to require defects to be put right, including if necessary carrying out the work itself and recovering the cost from the owner. HDC should start flexing its muscles to secure an early improvement.

West Sussex and Horsham councils also need to take a much firmer stance over paving reinstatement in the Carfax, West Street and East Street. Carfax is a particular problem with statutory undertakers leaving broken and mismatched paving and, worse still, black asphalt. Local authorities can register high amenity footways and identify a suitable source for reinstatement materials, which statutory undertakers must use. Have our key pedestrian areas been registered? If not they should be, and the councils should put more effort into

chasing up defaulting contractors.

Then there are the illegible street signs all over the town. It must be many, many years since they were cleaned and it seems WSCC has no money to do it. This is a thoroughly unsatisfactory, and potentially dangerous, situation. Maybe, with the prevalence of sat navs, not all direction signs within the town are still required. If not, they should be removed. A way must be found to maintain those deemed to be essential. With proper training, could this be a job for volunteers?

It is good to see that local county councillors have suggested setting up a joint working group between HDC and WSCC to consider the condition of the shared spaces, roads and street furniture in the town centre and explore options. Let's hope it gets under way quickly and bears fruit this spring.

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.