



Managing change takes care

Horsham's worked hard over the years to keep its market town feel – but driven by the new housing developments the town centre is now facing a wave of significant changes, which need to be well managed. Or that precious character could soon disappear.

Take the redevelopment of post-Waitrose Pirie's Place. A new cinema and hotel are, of course, great news.

But will the structures that house them loom over the familiar old buildings of the Carfax, and change the whole feel of the space at the heart of Horsham?

They don't have to and they should not be allowed to – so our local planning officials and especially our elected councillors need to be prepared to put their collective foot down, and insist on a design that respects the surrounding townscape.

A few minutes walk away, the redevelopment of Swan Walk to include a multiplex cinema on the site of the current Wilko's raises similar issues; there's been some shift from the original proposals, but the design still features too much metallic cladding that may look fine in an



An artist's impression of plans for Pirie's Place.

out of town leisure park, but which is out of keeping with Horsham town centre.

There is also concern that the main

ground level entrance, via Lynd Cross, is awkwardly-sited.

Getting these developments right matters, because the expansion of Horsham means that there is bound to be constant pressure to increase and intensify development of the town centre. This may, increasingly, mean leisure and restaurant uses, rather than shopping space.

Of course it is good news that the local economy is booming, but the consequences need to be well managed – or the result could be a more ugly, clumsy, crowded town.

One small test may well be the fate of the Carfax Post Office, when the Post Office relocates to the Swan Walk branch of Smith's. It may be one medium-sized retail unit, but it sits in a crucial site.

The biggest challenge of all is the new housing development to the north of Horsham.

The – still elusive – design details of this new community are critical. If it is not to be a dormitory, barely connected to the town itself, then proper attention has to be paid to the need for pedestrian and cycling links into Horsham, and connectivity to Warnham Station would be welcome, too.

All these requirements are laid down pretty clearly in the guidelines set out in the current Horsham Plan – but they now have to be put into effect, along with the guidelines calling for 35 per cent of the new homes to be (properly defined) affordable housing. At the moment there does not seem to be any sense of these concerns being taken on board by the developer.

We may be about to discover how much clout local planning guidelines actually carry.

In short, 2017 could be a year that delivers substantial and well-planned improvements to the facilities enjoyed by Horsham residents – or it could be the year they discover that the planning system gives them no real control over what happens to their community.

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.