

Horsham Society

with Philip Ayerst



Horsham deserves high quality design

Three major developments have passed through the Horsham planning system in the past month. Each will affect the shops, the entertainment and the appearance of our town.

Piries Place, Prewetts Mill and Swan Walk have now been approved by officers and councillors. The massing of the hotel in Piries Place, the remodelling of Prewetts Mill and the materials of the upper levels of the cinema at Swan Walk are examples where the designs are uninspired. The opportunity for good quality architecture seems to have been replaced by haste to approve planning applications with little scrutiny of the appearance.

The planning process empowers authorities to press for improvements to designs. Planners and architects can combine good design with good facilities, the two are not mutually exclusive; it just takes imagination and encouragement from clients and authorities. This is where councillors and officers should come in, to add value to design by pushing for good architecture and originality so that new buildings provide the facilities the town



The planned new cinema for Swan Walk.

needs and have the quality of design that Horsham deserves.

There needs to be an overall Design Guide for Horsham; one that independently identifies important views and sites, considers how public space should be enhanced and the effect developments have on conservation areas, notes which buildings need repair, perhaps even those unsightly buildings we might be happy to lose.

This would give a framework against

which design of applications could be judged to assess how they benefit the town environment. Decisions concerning important landmarks should be about appearance and the context, not solely on what retail benefit they might bring. Without such a strategy framework, there is a danger of no effective control by authorities, who are reluctant to risk pressing for improvements to proposals.

Horsham Society stands for a developing town. Yes, there are historic buildings and conservation areas to protect, but equally importantly there is new architecture to welcome and encourage.

Horsham is a growing town, trying to be modern, so we need to have high quality landmarks, well designed small buildings, good contemporary buildings and new views created.

To me, the concern is less about clay tiles and ancient brickwork where there is already protection, but much more about encouraging new architecture using modern materials and finishes, all which bring colours to the environment.

Horsham Society, using the knowledge of our members, has prepared our own design brief, to consider how to respond

to applications by outlining the important factors. As a voluntary society this document can only be guidance, so it should be matched by a Council led Design Guide.

Looking ahead to North Horsham, Liberty has said they will be responsible for the design of their site. Each group of buildings, or package, will apparently have Liberty's own design approval system. So how will councillors and officers approach this? There needs to be a Design Forum and planning guide where officers and interested groups can review designs.

There is no point in criticising a design, as happened at a recent meeting for Piries Place, then voting in its favour. Councillors and officers, you are in the position to improve design of new buildings, please stand up for good architecture in Horsham.

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.