

# Horsham Society

with John Steele



## Town centre plan lacks vision

**H**orsham District Council's consultation on a new Horsham Town Centre Vision has just concluded. The exhibition included recommendations from its consultants for a set of 'strategic directions' and a number of 'opportunity areas'. Given that it represents 18 months work the outcome is rather disappointing.

A vision should aim to create an integrated set of spaces that form a continuous route for pedestrians, provoking interest and curiosity, thus beckoning them to explore further. It should support the image of a vibrant, progressive, historic market town and be capable of being implemented in the years ahead as money and circumstances allow.

The suggested strategic directions are largely motherhood and apple pie, but none the worse for that. However, the more detailed consideration of opportunity areas fails to pick up on the strategy and in some cases conflicts with it. Instead of a coherent set of proposals, and enduring vision, we have a number of one-off ideas, each considered in isolation. Worse still, the vision shows all the signs of being led by



The Horsham Town Centre Vision has been outlined at exhibitions in the town.

developers.

The proposal to move the Sainsbury's store westwards to the edge of Worthing Road with underground parking covered by high density residential development has been badly thought through with the drawing begging more questions than it answers. The car park is already too small. Where will the hundreds of new residents

park? Where will the library be relocated? The consultants say there is a need for new larger shops. Surely if room can be made available, this is where they should go.

If the Sainsbury's store were moved, it would disrupt the pedestrian corridor from the town centre across The Forum. The current layout has been the success story of the last 20 years, attracting shoppers who also use the other town centre shops.

In contrast, as the consultants point out, the Waitrose/John Lewis development's poor location has not delivered the intended spin off benefits for the town centre, with Albion Way having the lowest footfall in the town centre. Instead of jeopardising what currently works well urgent attention needs to be given to improving the pedestrian access to Waitrose/John Lewis and its connection to the town centre.

Three options were shown for improvements to the east arm of Bishopric and the Lynd Cross junction. The proposals for changing the current oasis of water features, mature trees and seats are unnecessary and unwanted. The area is much appreciated as it is. Leave it alone and spend the money more wisely.

As for a central feature, we suggest retaining the trees within the bowl of the old fountain provided it is restored a little and surrounded by new seats with backrests. The suggested pavement surfaces are gimmicky design and would date quickly. Equally they ignored the consultant's own strategic aim of promoting Horsham as a modern market town by encouraging historic building forms and materials. What is needed on the north/south axis is something classic that will wear well and satisfy the test of time. And please bring back mature trees in planters.

Before proceeding further with Bishopric we hope the council will come forward with revised plans. As for Sainsbury's, if the council wants to move the idea forward, then much more work and a full, open consultation is needed.

*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 259038.*