

Horsham Society

with John Steele



Town 'vision' is a missed opportunity

Horsham District Council's long awaited Horsham Town Centre Vision has turned out to be a huge disappointment. There is so much that could have been included, but instead of a real vision for the future the document seizes on a handful of already known sites, for relatively short term attention.

A town vision should be just that: comprehensive, thought provoking, full of ideas. It should include imaginative concepts about how residents and visitors can live, work, shop and be entertained. It should address the mix of land uses within the wider town centre that will help determine whether Horsham simply becomes a commuter town or retains a vibrant commercial economy. 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.

Instead we have a document that lacks real vision; one that fails to ask questions about the long term development of Horsham, the development of the town centre and what form it should take.



An artist's impression of one of the ideas in the Horsham Town Centre Vision.

For example, the town is becoming choked with traffic, some accessing town centre facilities, but much simply passing through. What is the council's vision for future traffic and pedestrian movements around the town, east-west and north-south, and what impact has this had on its vision? The council sees a need for more off-street parking but should we instead be seeking to improve public transport? What has happened to the council's earlier vision in its Town Plan to transform Albion Way into a boulevard, encouraging better linkage between the historic town centre and the park?

What are the council's plans for Hurst Road? What co-ordination has there been

with the county council as the highways authority in developing the vision?

The document talks about the town centre's heritage without recognising the importance of its two Conservation Areas which already provide the statutory framework against which the merits of any development proposals must be judged.

At an earlier stage the Horsham Society said that the vision should aim to create an integrated series of spaces that form a continuous route across the town centre. The vision should reflect the changing appearance and character of the street scene, be coherent and beckon pedestrians to explore further. We are pleased to see some recognition of this in the reference to

developing a public realm strategy.

There are other suggestions within the vision with which we agree including, for example, the need to make improvements to Blackhorse Way. Also, hiding deep in a table is a proposal to develop a cycling strategy, a walking strategy and a tourism strategy, all as key projects. These are important and we hope they will cover many of the issues we highlight.

As usual, the consultation period is far too short to allow proper engagement with the public. The document is 97 pages long and does not even have an executive summary. One wonders how the council could possibly believe this is the right way to consult on such an important matter.

Overall, the vision leaves difficult questions unanswered and is lacking in breadth and ambition. A missed opportunity.

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 259038.