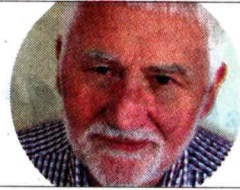


Horsham Society

Malcolm Willis



Car park is 'opportunity or eyesore'?

Every time a planning application is submitted there is the opportunity to create something special. For many years Horsham Society has commented on new proposals for our town. Obviously opinions and tastes differ, but there is normally a consensus among the people of Horsham over what constitutes poor design.

In November 2017 Horsham District Council submitted two planning applications for a replacement to the existing Piries Place car park. Using the same footprint, one was for four storeys and the other for five.

As a Society we recognised the need for a larger and better designed car park, but believed that the higher five storey proposed plans, DC/17/2511, were not appropriate. We felt, and still do, that the proposed car park should be limited in height so that it is below that of the parapet line of Burton Court roofline and the forthcoming hotel.

Five storeys will be above this, and the proposed steel mesh fence will dominate the skyline with its vertical support posts giving the impression of a 'fence in the sky'.



An artist's impression of the proposed new car park for Piries Place.

This will be plainly seen from Park Street, Park Place and Copnall Way.

The four storey application would not have the same conspicuous visual impact. The existing car park is effectively single storey facing Piries Place, whose floors are set back as they step up. This proposed extra height will be significant, creating a canyon with anonymous hotel windows on one side and the car park on the other.

Prior to Christmas, Horsham Society was invited to discuss concerns over the proposals. Planning officers at HDC are to be thanked for offering this meeting, and an open and frank discussion was held. We outlined a number of suggestions as to how the design could be improved.

On January 11th revised proposals were submitted by HDC, but only for a five storey car park. Does this mean that a decision over the ultimate height of the car park has already been made without referring it to the Planning Committee? This is a major decision and should be considered openly.

The revised façade design does have one improvement: the linear design has been softened by the inclusion of a tree relief on the cladding, drawing the eye up.

It is disappointing that the towers have not been given similar thought. The Society suggested that each elevation blend in with the adjacent buildings to harmonise the new car park with its surroundings. The planned view from Copnall Way and Park Street will be dominated by a dark brick tower, not blending in with Burton Court and the lighter brick of the new hotel. Why?

The lift tower, a main feature of the

design, is a particular key to 'Opportunity or Eyesore'. Our preferred suggestion was for a glass exterior; being open and light, making users feel safe, and providing reflected light to the public thoroughfare. From this tower there would be pleasant views across the town.

The alternative suggestion, which is now proposed, is for a 'green wall' of plants. Yes, this will soften the exterior design, but does not give the safe interior feel. In this era of limited council finances, it will require a significant annual budget to ensure regular maintenance.

This is a major concern when you consider how poorly the plants on the existing car park, and those in West Street, have been looked after. They have become eyesores, and what is to stop the new car park from becoming the biggest eyesore of all?

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.