

# Horsham Society

with Ron Bates



## Horsham gets multi storey carbuncle

**W**hen it was announced that the unloved Piries Place car park was to be replaced there was general approval of the idea, particularly when

Ray Dawe, Leader of Horsham District Council, was quoted by the County Times as saying any redevelopment needed to 'fit into the townscape of Piries Place'.

However, what has emerged demonstrably fails the test he set. On 7 February the Planning Committee for the north of the District approved plans for a huge five storey brick monstrosity which will loom over the area. The public will be appalled when they see this go up, and rightly so.

The irony is this is not just another proposal from some outside developer - this is our own council's plan to redevelop its own (our own!) multi storey car park. They could do much better than this and Horsham deserves better.

The new car park design is simply too bulky and it will dominate Horsham's medieval centre. Although partially redeemed by the late addition of a 'green wall', this will run up maintenance costs of



An artist's impression of the new car park.

up to £30,000 each year - simply to try to hide an overlarge development.

The Shelley fountain was scrapped because of maintenance costs far lower than this.

Presumably the idea is to create the largest possible cash cow for the District, in the shape of extra parking revenue, at the lowest possible cost. Maybe understandable in these times - but not at the price of serious and lasting visual damage to the town centre.

The normal HDC excuse for waving through some sub-standard development is that the councillors dare not risk losing some expensive legal challenge - but here HDC is the developer applying to itself for planning permission.

There was no risk of legal challenge and councillors should have insisted on a better solution.

It is particularly disappointing to note that not all the councillors attended the meeting and not one of the district councillors representing our town voted against this application. Maybe they spoke up in the private planning briefings given to councillors.

But for democracy to function, there needs to be genuine open debate with all the arguments for and against planning applications played out in public. It is hardly surprising in this case that some will feel that when the time came to stand

up and speak out for the town we were badly let down.

For the record, it was left to the Horsham Society and Denne Neighbourhood Council to speak against the proposed scheme at the meeting.

Unfortunately what was said seems to have made no impact on councillors who followed the party line.

Car parks are rarely things of beauty but they don't have to be as intrusive and poorly designed as this. It is difficult to feel other than anger and despair at the way our council has failed to achieve a redevelopment to 'fit into the townscape of Piries Place'.

This is a big mistake that will cause lasting damage but, because it is a council scheme, there is still time for a change of heart and a return to the drawing board.

*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.*