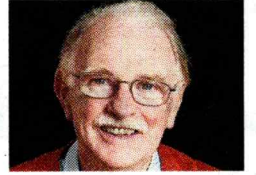


Horsham Society

with Oliver Farley



Filling in the spaces in town centre

Before me is a map of Horsham dated 1831 and wasn't the town a very small affair then? It straggles along East Street, West Street and on to the Bishopric with the familiar bulge of the Carfax in the middle.

If you kept this skinny map in mind and then followed how the town later developed you'd notice an anomaly.

Almost all the area of the current town was built up in large stages over the last hundred years or so, leaving the central built area much as it is in this map.

Of course the buildings themselves have changed and there's been some infilling but nevertheless there are good sized patches of Horsham which were still undeveloped well into the 1980s.

In most comparable towns there's a strong disposition to develop the central areas first, so that the sites closer to the main streets are filled in and the town expands only after all the inner regions are completed.

Think of how Lewes on its hilltop presents a picture of solid, dense streets and lanes, lined with buildings and the later, newer structures are at the edges,



Redevelopment of Horsham's Carfax in 1992.

even right down by the river. Horsham still had good-sized sites right in the centre,

underused or just left blank for a curiously long time.

Piries Place was an open market area thirty years ago; Caffyn's the motor dealers had a generous yard on Springfield Road and behind East Street lay the Denne Road car park. Inevitably, development has come to many of these patches, though rather late in the day considering the age of the town.

Piries Place is being developed for the second time, Caffyn's are long gone, being replaced with Potters Court, which perhaps lacks singular architectural merit but does combine variety with density and sets a good example of how to make good use of space close to the centre without looking crammed or too bulky.

Anchor Court is nicely structured in bands of brick and fills the space closest to East Street while the remainder stays as Denne Road car park.

Is there something pending for this tempting inner-town site? It looks too large to be left only as a car park and it is surely open to some intelligently planned development.

Look a little further along at the development in Denne Parade and ill-judged planning is evident.

A planning application has been made to squash in a small, cramped few dwellings on the last open side of the rectangular site at the end of the street close to the railway. This previous print shop was left in place while all around was redeveloped.

Two or three houses occupied the corner site and most awkwardly the new flats were erected about them.

The whole site should have been amalgamated into one large square and developed imaginatively as a unit, perhaps around an inner courtyard, taller maybe and denser.

Whatever the possibilities, they are lost now and we face the unpalatable prospect of a crushed in-fill where better vision would have yielded better results.

Might planners pause and reflect before the next development?

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.