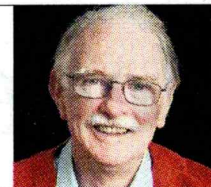


Horsham Society

with Oliver Farley



Changing axis for our town

There's an apocryphal story about Queen Victoria who was supposedly asked where Prince Albert was and replied "He's out boating with his grocer." The boat was a huge expensive yacht and the grocer was the tea millionaire Lipton.

Many of us living near the town centre have received a letter from a grocer recently, though not sadly an invitation to join a millionaire on his yacht. The German discount store, Lidl, has written to all households in the vicinity to ask their views about an impending planning application. Lidl want to open one of their stores on the site of a bedding store, now defunct, in Foundry Lane, and have asked a series of questions about people's views on the store, its location and the desirability of this change of use.

Some of us may recall that there was discussion about one of the discount stores coming to Horsham a few years ago when Waitrose moved out of Piries Place, and Lidl was mentioned then. Nothing came of that opportunity, largely I believe because there was no agreement about free car parking at the car park alongside. Apparently,



Lidl prefer to supply free parking to their customers as a means of attracting them to the cheaper grocery stores.

Whatever the merits or demerits of the present case it's pleasing to record that for once the public is being consulted before the event and given a chance to influence the outcome.

If the store were to go ahead it would form an interesting alteration to the layout of our town. Readers may remember that last October we commented in this space

on the town vision document published by the council and its lack of broad concepts for the town's future. We've also described the slightly odd layout of our town which is orientated east-west from the Brighton Road in the east to the Bishopric in the west. The arrival of Lidl beyond North Street, indeed over the railway bridge, would swing some of the customer flow northwards and change the predominant axis we have at present.

At the same time there are plans afoot

for the redevelopment of several sites along Hurst Road, sites which have become vacant or are about to be vacated by mainly public sector entities. Further housing is an obvious choice but we need to consider the needs of new dwellers in our midst and their shopping opportunities. Many families today make a major shopping expedition once a week or so and the car is the obvious - indeed the only - way of shipping the hefty bags back home.

If Lidl were within walking distance of more citizens then that's so much road transport saved. We would then have two heavyweight food stores near the centre, one small co-operative along the Guildford Road, a local convenience Tesco at St Leonards Road and then Lidl swinging us northwards.

It's still at the planning stage but there is a logic to it, if that is, you the public actually want it.

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.