

# Horsham Society

David Holmes



## Political parties set out their views

**H**orsham Society's planned hustings was well attended with more than 120 people present. The 'Any Questions' style event was chaired by the society's chairman, Malcolm Willis, and the parties were represented by Ray Dawe, the Conservative leader of Horsham District Council (HDC); David Hide, chairman of the local Labour Party, and Dr David Skipp, leader of the Liberal Democrats on HDC. All three were straightforward in their answers and treated each other with respect. There were no fist fights on the stage as perhaps might have happened in days gone by. Possibly a disappointment to the large audience.

The society had arranged the event in the hope that we might be able to secure commitments from the main political parties to the society's aims of protecting the town from inappropriate development and maintaining its pleasant character.

All on the panel recognise the need for more to be done to make cycling safer within the town and David Skipp admitted to having given up cycling recently because of the dangers.



Also, although not currently threatened, it was good to hear that they would all be against selling off any part of our superb Horsham Park.

Ray Dawe said that the town's green spaces are important and that key considerations when negotiating with developers are density, height and the provision of green space.

So hopefully we will not be seeing any buildings that are any taller, no lost green spaces and new green areas within all new developments.

All parties confirmed their intent to provide more affordable homes. The plan by HDC to establish a council-owned company to build new affordable homes was welcomed.

David Skipp considered that the number of additional affordable homes proposed should be significantly higher and David Hide wanted the percentage of affordable homes built by developers on their sites to be very much greater.

Inevitably with an election or two, or three on the horizon, many questions from the floor were political or related to the concerns of local action groups so we were not as successful as we had hoped in understanding each party's views on matters affecting our town.

It was unfortunate that the panel were not asked how they would protect and improve the quality and character of the town, protect conservation areas and improve enforcement so that neglected buildings and other issues are addressed more quickly.

Also, how would they increase local employment reducing the need to commute and what they would put in place of the removed Rising Universe.

A good question, with the Novartis site in mind and aimed at solving other local problems, such as safer cycling, was 'Why can't HDC work more closely with WSCC?' Ray Dawe said that they are. This would certainly be useful.

The suggestion by HDC's Governance committee that the present two planning committees could be combined into one with the result that important decisions about the town might be made by councillors from the south of the District with possibly little knowledge of the town was discussed.

Perhaps the best news of the evening was that this was rejected by all on the panel.

*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.*