



Piries - Place, Passage or Predicament?

Work is near completion on Piries Place and parts of the new area are successfully open. We've added

the Red Deer to our list of potential dining destinations and await further offerings from premises next door.

A photo of the same place taken in 1950 is definitely worlds away. The row of houses built by William Pirie form the background while the edges of the space are lined with market stalls. The scene is thronged with shoppers reminding us that in the days before fridges were a common household item, shopping was a daily chore. All the houses are gone, along with the stalls and shoppers, and the entire site is currently undergoing its second iteration, this time with a hotel, a coffee shop and good restaurants among the establishments.

One shop has an interesting variation on how to decorate to attract attention by painting a yellow triangle across the front extending well beyond the usual limits of door lintel or window frame.



An artist's impression of the new carpark currently still under construction

The car park is looming higher and was described in this column in February 2018 as a carbuncle, a prediction some might consider is being realised by the day.

Let's think of it in another way.

Will the ease of parking promote the greater use of the passageways around the entry as crowds seek the cinema, reach the hotel or set out for dinner? Could these access ways be designed into the square itself so they join up and give some sense of continuity from the necessity of parking to the pleasure of indulgence? The square itself has got off to a less than good start in that the shop fronts on one side were to have curved frontages and are now flat, allegedly a necessary economy. A single tree stands forlorn at one end of the open space while Pirie still sits, reins in hand, awaiting the children who clamber aboard his bronze cart. (The frequency of their patronage is mutely witnessed by the shiny metal, polished brightly by acid from the touch of hands.)

Once all the space is let and nightlife moves in, the atmosphere will improve and with a little luck and perhaps a tweaking of the street decoration, Piries Place will become central to Horsham as a whole, a complement to the Carfax, and as frequented.

Clearly, its role as passageway is

undeniable with multiple twittens into the Carfax, East Street, Park Place and Copnall Way. Something is needed to lighten the walls and encourage pedestrian adventure. Perhaps an idea could be borrowed from the flower bed in the Carfax with its medallions mounting the art on display currently in the museum. In Piries' passages, illuminated wall panels could be erected much as they are in the fashion fair in Berlin or as they line the walls of Stockholm's metro. Projected, changing art works or even images of the rest of the town would enliven the saunter from dashboard to smorgasbord – and discreet ads could help pay for it 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.