



The Drill Hall – an informed decision?

Horsham Society cares about the future of the Drill Hall. Following initial concerns about HDC proposals for the Drill Hall's future, the council very sensibly promised to commission a review by independent consultants. As a result of this review, we trust that appropriate, well considered and justified decisions will eventually be made.

This review will be district wide, and will cover the adequacy of provision for all community buildings and their usage across Horsham district. What must be remembered though, is this review is as a consequence of the public outcry and Horsham Society's meetings with councillors and officers relating to the Drill Hall proposals. Our hope is that this will result in the eventual provision of a fit for purpose community building in the centre of Horsham town.

The society was pleased to be asked for our views on what the consultants should consider, especially as 51,000 of Horsham district's 130,000 residents live within Horsham Town itself, a significant proportion of the population. It was



good too, to learn that four of our eight suggestions submitted have been adopted. Some text that we felt was inappropriate has been removed, as too has some ambiguity about the environmental performance of the Drill Hall. The need has also been recognised for the consultants to talk to the town neighbourhood councils as there is no parish council representing the

town centre.

However, our biggest concern currently remains. We believe that the consultants will not consider a wide enough range of issues in relation to the Drill Hall. We fear that in practice only capacity, use levels and future demand will be considered.

We wish to see other issues objectively reviewed. Consideration needs to be given to the Drill Hall's value as a historic building, set in a conservation area. Furthermore, the present condition of the hall, and the work required to make it fit for purpose, should be part of the assessment. If the building is to be demolished, then there should be a full environmental analysis as to the total impact, compared to that of the hall being refurbished.

The question of marketing should also be addressed. HDC has stated that the Drill Hall is underutilised, but questions need to be asked as to whether it has been effectively marketed.

The consultants should also give detailed consideration to the existing location, compared to the suitability of alternative locations. A comprehensive comparison of costs with any alternatives is needed.

Horsham town residents make up 39

percent of the district's population. There is the potential to increase community activity, and subsequently vibrancy, within the town centre. This is even more important in these current testing times. Many of our businesses are struggling, and to provide community facilities within the actual town can only improve footfall. The nature of many towns will change as a consequence of Covid-19. HDC needs to do as much as possible to encourage support for our businesses, and to help retain what is special about our town. We are lucky to have many independent shops and restaurants.

On completion of the consultant's report, Horsham Society asks our district councillors to consider the results, and make an informed decision that is appropriate to the best interests of our town.

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 267712