

Horsham vision needs a guiding hand



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HORSHAM District Council has recently published a report commissioned from Experian on Visioning Horsham. People should not be put off by the title; it is an excellent and sobering assessment of economic and social trends and their implications for the future prosperity of our town and the wider district.

Essentially, the message is plain. Unless we continue to

maintain our economic strength, the skills of our workforce, and the attractiveness of our environment, and nurture small businesses, Horsham will decline into a dormitory of Crawley.

There are clear pointers to what we need to do to keep Horsham vibrant and successful and they will not come as a surprise to anyone.

We should not seek to compete with Crawley. We need instead to foster our local community spirit, protect and enhance our open spaces and other leisure opportunities and provide a different and distinct experience for shoppers and visitors.

Niche high quality retailers and an exciting and

comprehensive range of complementary tourist attractions are needed to encourage people into the town.

Visitors attracted by one aspect of the town – shopping, restaurants, shows or exhibitions – will patronise the others. A busy, bustling town is a successful one.

But this will only be achieved if the council is prepared to put its efforts and our money into creating the right conditions. It must provide opportunities for small retailers and other businesses to thrive, including subsidised starter accommodation and help with marketing and business advice.

More needs to be done to revitalise our markets and build on the success of the Saturday

Carfax local produce market. And there should be live music on the bandstand every weekend.

Horsham should aim to develop as a local centre for culture and the arts. We already have an excellent museum, and the Capitol provides a range of stage and screen entertainment, but the wider arts scene is woefully neglected.

The town desperately needs somewhere where the work of local craftspeople can be showcased and a gallery capable of hosting both permanent and temporary art exhibitions.

There are plenty of high quality travelling exhibitions that could be attracted to the right venue and would provide people with a reason to visit the

town.

It is ironic that when the council consulted over future uses for Horsham Town Hall two of the ideas canvassed were for start-up business units and an art gallery. There is no doubt the need exists for both and if the town hall is not the right answer the council must come up with concrete ideas of its own.

What the town needs above all else is a single guiding hand which can ensure that every aspect of the council's policies – environment, planning, licensing, arts and leisure – contribute to a single vision for the future.

Is it time for the council to have a cabinet member for Horsham town?