

# Why Horsham's car parking strategy isn't credible



by **John Steele**  
of the  
**Horsham Society**

THE CURRENT debate over Horsham District Council's proposal to increase parking charges ignores some of the underlying issues and threatens to obscure the potential impact of the changes.

The real problem is that the local government finance system is no longer fit for purpose. Most council funding comes from central government in the form of grants. Councils don't even keep business rates, but simply collect them for the Government. The only way councils can cope with rising costs is to improve efficiency, reduce services, increase council tax or increase charges for services.

Large increases in council tax only generate small

increases in revenue – not an attractive option and in any case likely to fall foul of Government capping. District councils run very little these days so options are limited. The only significant cash generating opportunity left is off-street car parking.

The present proposals therefore have little to do with parking policy and are mainly a means to raise income.

That doesn't necessarily

make them wrong and those that oppose them in principle need to come up with acceptable alternatives that are open to the council.

The Horsham Society's concern is whether the increases are being applied in the right way and the underlying assumptions about their impact are sound.

We are unconvinced that shopping choices are as price-sensitive as some have suggested. Most people visiting Horsham for their weekly shop will be more influenced by the overall experience, variety and value than a small increase in the car parking charge, particularly if charges are on a par with alternative locations.

It is the day to day top-up shopper that could be deterred but the proposals for a new half hour ticket in Piries Place would help, and maybe this could be extended.

Our chief concern is the proposal to extend charging to cover Sundays and evenings. Sunday shopping is for many an alternative day out rather than a need. Free Sunday parking has attracted visitors and is gradually creating a vibrant addition to the local economy. It is still too fragile to threaten with a new parking charge.

The evening economy has really taken off but, again, it is very vulnerable to the whim of its patrons and those that come into the

town by car might be easily persuaded to go elsewhere where parking is free. The Capitol, in particular, could suffer from cinema-goers choosing the free parking in Crawley, as could the vibrant restaurant trade.

But the most serious objection to Sunday and evening parking charges is that they won't work because people will choose to park for free on single yellow lines, thus increasing congestion and blowing a hole in the council's income projections.

Hop Oast park and ride remains a problem which the council refuses to address. It has never been a success and arguably Horsham is too small to sustain a park and ride facility. But

withdrawing the subsidy and letting it die a slow death is simply not good enough.

These aspects alone are proof that this isn't a credible parking strategy. Increased charges may be inevitable but more thought is needed to ensure they support rather than endanger our local economy.

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 our website [www.horshamsociety.org](http://www.horshamsociety.org) or telephone 01403 261640.