

David Moore: Worth keeping wary eye on station sculpture idea



What's all this about a sculpture outside the railway station?

The present Horsham railway station was built in 1938 and given its grade II listing in 1996. It's therefore of special interest as one of the more modern (20th century) listed buildings in our town. Extensive internal and external refurbishment work has recently been completed but the story doesn't stop there.

We now have some talk and resultant publicity about the possibility of placing some type of work of art outside the front



Horsham railway station

of the railway station. At the moment, it's only a suggestion but it's already generated a lot of heated debate within the town.

You can understand why this has happened as I'm sure that many of you will recall

the reaction to a similar proposal, which was made in Ilfracombe, North Devon earlier in the year. In that case, the suggestion was that an enormous statue of a pregnant woman should be placed on the town's pier.

The furore that this caused was not really surprising, as it was completely unsuitable for the location and it in no way represented the past, present or future of the town. On the face of it, the proposal was intended simply as a way to generate publicity.

So it's fairly obvious why a proposal to put something outside our railway station has alarmed many people. Is it simply another PR exercise? What will it look like? What's its purpose? Will it be made of Horsham stone? Is our local stone suitable for the creation of an interesting and durable sculpture? There is no doubt that something, which is different, interesting, attractive and durable could be of benefit to the town.

It's the sort of project, which seems ideally suited to a competition. If it's decided to proceed with the idea, why don't we invite artists to

submit their proposals for consideration by a panel of experts? At the same time, we mustn't forget the need to consult with the general public to find out what they think about the idea and also listen to their views on the subject.

Exactly where it would be located, if such a project ever sees the light of day, will be just as important a consideration as its appearance and size. This would require major consideration. What we would have to achieve to make such a project worthwhile would be to ensure that the right piece of work is created in the right place. This is no easy task, though not impossible.

It's good to see that there appears to be considerable interest in and enthusiasm for the proposal. Horsham needs to continue to show that it can be creative and add new features of interest to the town. Mind you, we also need

to be aware that it's so easy to create a white elephant, which we become stuck with and I'm sure that we can all think of examples of where this has happened.

Even though it's just an idea at the moment, it's easy to understand people's concerns. Too often ideas are floated and before you know it they become reality without any discussion. Hopefully, this won't occur in this case but it's worth keeping a wary eye on what happens next.

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 or telephone 01403 261640.