

Oliver Farley: The value of perfect passages and tidy twittens



In a volume entitled *The Spaces between Buildings* we're told '.....gates and fences, alleys and parking lots – have an important architectural impact, influencing how a building relates to the spaces around it'. Indeed they do, and these details, minor in themselves, affect overall impressions for the visitor.

There is that singularly untidy aspect of the street scene in too many US cities where the apparent lack of a regulated civic framework leaves a multitude of messy perimeters. But how well does Horsham do at the smaller scale?

We have our twittens, linking our larger streets and they vary greatly

one to another. Morth Gardens plunges under a house, Furneaux Walk leads strollers past a giant weeping tree, Talbot Lane challenges who has right of way as you breach into Market Square and Chart Way could be called an aerial twitten. Each is well kept and forms an inviting addition to our town's atmosphere, though vigilance is needed as John Steele pointed out recently, to preserve our minor open spaces, like the one at the end of Morth Gardens. What lends them interest is not necessarily the lane itself but the sense of advance into a new area. The confines of the ends of two of them form a throat from which you suddenly emerge: to an expansive tree-lined thoroughfare, the Causeway, from Morth Gardens, or are confronted with the choice of left or right around the Old Town Hall as you leave Talbot Lane. The small scale dwellings along their length



Furneaux Walk linking the Causeway with the Forum in Horsham

subconsciously prepares you for the wider view at the terminus, and it's this sense of a small space being a preparation for a wider space which gives them their importance and charm.

Unfortunately, we have two twittens which do fail, not because of structure but because of an untypical neglect. There's the small

passageway from Middle Street to Market Square. It has been cleaned up lately to make it more pleasurably part of our town centre but the whole effect is ruined by the persistent storage of waste bins along the side blocking the view. The second failure is more serious. It's not a failure of the passageway itself, it

runs usefully from West Street to Blackhorse Way, it's the contrast between right and left in Blackhorse Way. To the left, there is the satisfying street scene of small shops, houses and shrubs. To the right a dismal scene of unsightly backs of shops and ill-kept waste bin areas.

This end of Blackhorse

Way really does let us down quite badly. Horsham District Council are aware of the problem. With regret, they remind us that this is private property and they have no authority to compel change. But do we always need authority to initiate improvement? Might not the shops themselves review the mess and take the matter in hand? It really does need a solution and it should be adding to the town's welcoming impression, not be an example of idle indifference to the small spaces which frame the wider picture.

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 272814.