

Business leader says council must find a vision for town

HORSHAM business leader Lord Lytton has thrown down the gauntlet to Horsham District Council.

In a letter to the County Times (right), the chairman of the executive committee of Horsham Chamber of Commerce and Industry said the town's park and ride scheme had been a 'waste of money' and that the unpopular parking policies had failed to carry the confidence or support of shoppers, traders or employees of the chamber's members.

And in an open and frank interview with the County Times, he tackled the key areas of concern for Horsham district businesses and spelled out the problems facing Horsham traders and industry bosses.

He challenged Horsham District Council to show more imagination in its management of the district and revealed the very real fears of the wider business community.

Lord Lytton on the challenges facing Horsham's industry and retail bosses:

"Heaven knows it's difficult to shift office space in Horsham. But why is that?"

"A lot of investment has been put into the town and it's a very pleasant environment. But there's something there that's not gelling."

"There's something there that's not attracting the people in that should be bringing in that net new investment."

"We need added value because it's that that gets the tills ringing in the shops and makes it an attractive place where people will want to set up for business and employ people."

Lord Lytton on town centre car parking:

"If you're deploying scarce resources – and parking is inevitably a scarce resource – then you need to think very carefully about how you manage it."

Video

The interview can be seen in full on the County Times website at www.wscountytimes.co.uk

"We are at risk of losing shoppers in the town if we militate against their parking practices because we haven't really provided a viable alternative and that's about it really."

"It's all about choices. It's all about alternatives. And if you want people to do something different you've actually got to make it really convenient."

"That's the same with anybody running a retail operation, running a business, running a municipal facility. You've got to make it convenient for people."

"People in the South East have a lot of mobility and a lot of choice and if you don't give them what they want they have the money to go elsewhere."

Lord Lytton on the threat from neighbouring towns and cities:

"Heavens we've got enough challenges facing us."

"Look at the additional floor space that's going to be added in Crawley."

"We have got a window of opportunity, between now and when they get their act together on that, to do something about it. But we don't have time to waste."

"We don't have months to sit around wondering what's happening."

Lord Lytton on the Conservative cabinet's vision for the future of Horsham town centre:

"I haven't seen a great deal of it yet, certainly not in its economic terms."

"I think its going to need to be fast forwarded."

"They've got Philip Circus in place, presumably to take

that vision forward."

"I'm sure he's a very able chap, and I certainly look forward to working with the council. But we feel slightly that we've been left out on a limb having had a meeting with the chief executive earlier this year and a subsequent meeting, which Philip Circus attended."

"We need to take that forward and we need to be sharing what that vision is."

Lord Lytton on park and ride:

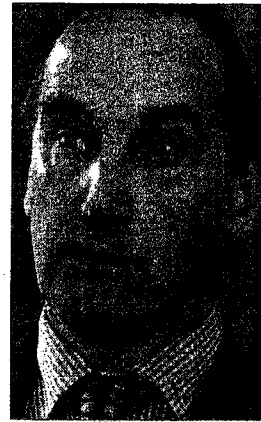
"The park and ride was a bad move. Not that it was necessarily an intrinsically bad thing to have a park and ride, but I don't think Horsham had the critical mass that was going to be able to sustain that sort of thing in terms of the number of people who were going to be able to use it."

"We need a really slick system – and that does require serious investment – where you have an electronic board and the bus comes every ten minutes on the minute, and there's no mucking around."

"This is what happens in any major city which has a quality bus service."

"If we had all this, then we would get the commuters coming through and spending £1.50 on their parking instead of £3.50 or whatever they are being charged at the station. But it's no good if the bus doesn't go really regularly so they can set their clocks by it."

"Right now people are having to wait 35 minutes for a bus in a cold, windy, draughty place without a decent shelter. Nobody's going to use that. That's not convenience. That's not customer service."



The Earl of Lytton.

Lord Lytton on the council's role in revitalising the town centre:

"The council has a huge role in its own right."

"First of all the council has a very large commercial stake itself in things like Swan Walk and other infrastructure and it needs to start using these assets more imaginatively. Also it has access to, and is able to co-ordinate, things like studies."

"I'm sure it's done lots of studies but I wonder if there has been enough sharing of that information with other stakeholders saying: 'Look, your guys say you don't want to come to Horsham to set up your businesses and occupy however many square feet of office, but why is it actually you want to go to Haywards Heath or you want to go to Crawley?'"

"We've got to find out what those underlying reasons are."

"I think there's still a lot of information that can still be drawn out of the system to help with that."

"I don't have a monopoly on the answers there but I think we need to have a very clear idea of why people actually do things and not just what they say but what they are actually doing."

"As ever, actions speak a lot louder than words."

Lord Lytton on the implications of Horsham's historic Britain in Bloom victory:

"Horsham in Bloom has been a fabulous success nationally and it's something really to celebrate."

"But we need to translate that into why Horsham has to be the location of preference for people to come and work, to do their shopping, to have their recreation and also a place in the peripheries to live in."

"We've got to get all of those things together. It's no good just getting one or two things right."

"We can't just say we are going to have new housing because, without all the other things, where is everyone going to go to work?"

"Are they going to go and work in Gatwick and Crawley, blocking up the A264?"

"I'm not keen on that because if sustainability means anything then it means making sure people don't have to travel out of necessity."

"People must feel that their needs can be met locally and I think the real risk is that we are not going to meet these needs in Horsham."

Lord Lytton on the future:

"The community will vote with its wheels and disappear off elsewhere if we're not careful."

"They will go to Crawley, to Gatwick, because those are the places where people are going to be drawn to work. The whole Crawley/Gatwick area is the driver of the Gatwick Diamond. That is the regional driver."

"Now unless we are going to become a sort of shell operation, a sort of dormitory to that, which I would absolutely resist to my dying breath, we've got to make plans, and we've got to be quite resolute and actually have a vision for how we go forward."