

A hole Waverley Council will find very hard to fill

Sir, – The news that Matthew Evans, head of planning at Waverley, is leaving will not come as a surprise to those who have followed the affairs of the council in recent years. To have to have been accountable for both the local plan and East Street must have been a severe test of anyone's integrity, and no one can blame Mr Evans for throwing in the towel.

As someone who has more than a passing acquaintance with Farnham, he has been palpably ill at ease with some of the decisions he was forced to endorse, most noticeably the East Street planning enquiry; he is under no illusions about what Farnham thinks. The leader of the council says his departure will make no difference to the timetable for the local plan. To the timetable maybe, to its effective implementation, that is much more problematical. If Mr Evans had no useful contribution to make, why was it necessary to empty him in the first place?

In reality, his departure leaves a hole Waverley will struggle to fill; we all know what rats do to sinking ships. The council's reputation is now such that quality people may now be reluctant to apply for a poisoned chalice that includes a local plan in utter disarray and a failed and outdated development. With Robert Knowles, leader of the council, due, unlamented to resign his post before the council year is out, the number of experienced heads left to cope with the mess they themselves are making is diminishing.

It was reported last week that the Riverside car park had flooded. The ineffable Adam Taylor Smith promised us at the time of its construction this would not happen. Did I

hear the sound of surprise at the back? No, I thought not; after all, the last broken promise was that East Street was shovel ready! They'll none of them be missed, they'll none of them be missed!

As Richard Sanders pointed out in a detailed and well-researched letter last week, as the world of retail moves on, Waverley is not moving with it. It is much too entrenched and obdurate. Ongoing lack of interest in the retail outlets – still only five uptakes out of 24 after more than three years – provides ample evidence the market is becoming ever less propitious for this drab and dispirited scheme. Waverley must be grateful the mild winter so far is making more gritting sand available in which to bury its blinkered head.

Given such a stalemate, you'd think someone in the bunker might have put two and two together and made four, by deducing that a scheme that had taken 14 years not to launch might, just possibly might be not quite perfect.

But no. When Waverley adds two and two, it comes to five, because you have to allow for a huge capacity for wishful thinking and for sheer intransigent pig-headedness. The council is in the same position as Macbeth "in blood stepp'd in so far ... to return were as tedious as go o'er"; in other words, in such a deep hole, it might as well go on digging.

Never mind, Macbeth ended up defeated and dead. Let's hope the same fate, metaphorically, awaits Waverley, and the sooner the better.

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