

Chester Conservation Area Advisory Panel meeting at HQ, 12 January 2016

Panel members present:

John Herson – Civic Trust

Andrew Pannell - RTPi

Paul Kidley – Cheshire Society of Architects

Peter Carrington - Archaeology

David Clough – Landscape Institute

Apologies:

Peter Boughton – Grosvenor Museum

Norah Edwards – Chester City and Guilds

Peter Howell-Jones – Chester Cathedral

CHESTER NORTHGATE

Presentation from Chester Northgate team comprising:

Mark Paynter – Rivington Land

Friedrich Ludwig – Acme

John Simons – Donald Insall Architects

Jordan Eggleston – Donald Insall Architects

As a result of the presentation, members agreed to provide feedback to the developers on the following basis, noting positive aspects of the scheme, negative aspects and concerns which merited further exploration/ reassurance.



CAAP is positive about and supports the following aspects

- Progress in bringing the Chester Northgate redevelopment towards fruition – CAAP is keen to see Chester thrive and prosper but this must not be at the expense of its special heritage and architectural qualities
- The alleged high interest from potential partners in occupying the development e.g. cinema chains
- Respect for archaeologically sensitive areas and re-use of previously archaeologically disturbed areas
- Proposed general zoning of uses within the site and the contribution that this makes to the wider City Centre
- Permeability of the site for pedestrians, though only from Northgate and Town Hall Square
- Redevelopment of Crowne Plaza Hotel, which is seen as a major detractor
- Relationship of the leisure quarter (Hunter's Walk and cinema) to the New Cultural Centre
- Proposed views out of City Centre along Princess Street and Stone Street towards the Welsh hills
- In principle, the creation of a new Market Square - but also see objections below
- Retention of existing library façade and creation of internal Hunter's Walk arcade
- Re-use of the Town Hall building
- Introduction of residential accommodation within the scheme
- Extension of the retail loop from existing City Centre via the ∞ approach from Town Hall Square
- Simple arrangement of proposed car parking at 2 levels and ease of use for visitors though also note concerns



CAAP is critical of and would object to the following aspects

- Treatment of the entrance into the site from Watergate Street, considered to be hugely out of scale with that charming and intimate street. Would it not be possible to enhance the

historical southern end of Goss Street and use the existing alley by the side of Amber Lounge to connect to the Row

- Design of the proposed hotel – dislike the recessed brick detailing for windows and openings
- Design of proposed department store façades – concerned about design which would be more appropriate in Birmingham rather than Chester
- Monotonous and regular treatment of proposed roofscape – will detract from variety, charm and intricacy of remainder of Chester roofscape
- The lack of respect of historic street lines particularly in moving the historic and surviving Trinity Street (with potential surviving nationally significant archaeology) and failure to restore the northern part of the historic Crook Street
- The plethora of fake gables
- The failure of the proposed Market Square to effectively address the new Cultural Centre's frontage and its activities. The partial screening of the Cultural Centre by the north side of the Market Square will create an unpleasant rear face to the Market Square development and will be a disincentive to Cultural Centre's users channelling through, and making use of, Market Square. The latter could therefore become a backwater, particularly in the evening. We are not convinced by the arguments put forward for the current proposal and feel an opportunity to really integrate the Northgate and the Cultural Centre and make a bold urban statement is being lost. The Cultural Centre should be seen as the jewel in the crown of the Northgate, not a peripheral adjunct.
- Design of Market Hall external canopy – will quickly become dated and look tired. Needs a major rethink
- Design of retail units and need for internal access between ground and first floor – concern about workability of this and likelihood that 1st floor units may be left vacant
- Stepped approaches adjacent to Guildhall and at western end of Princess Street will create impediments to movement from the site heading south and westwards



CAAP is concerned and requires further reassurance about the following aspects

- Reliance of scheme on obtaining suitable anchor department store
- Use of Town Hall above ground floor restaurant
- Material proposed for paving details for all new/restored streets will be critical
- Accuracy over respecting the historic street patterns

- Architectural treatment of new St Martins Way frontage – need to see CGI of proposals in context with existing and approved developments
- Distant views of City Centre skyline from the west where Town Hall, Cathedral tower and Guildhall must continue to dominate
- Quantity of proposed carparking, especially with the loss of surface carparking at Linenhall
- Remoteness from both the relocated bus station and the existing railway station making sustainable transport methods difficult
- Location of bus stops on St Martins Way beneath proposed hotel frontage and consequent impact in design of hotel façade
- Façade treatment of the new intervention to the Watergate Street
- Roofscape of the whole development, especially given the existing visibility from the Walls, Cathedral Tower and the proposed visibility from the new rooftop restaurants on hotel and department store
- Outline aspects of the planning application, particularly form and massing of department store, and agreeing to these and finding future negotiating position is undermined
- Concern re archaeology potential damage, especially if below ground parking was to be extended across Trinity Street and below the Market/Hotel
- There remain outstanding concerns about the use of a 'level' floor plate for the development in order to accommodate 2 levels of carparking beneath. This approach results in the loss of historical ground levels and gently falling ground between Town Hall Square and St Martins Way and its replacement by level ground from Town Hall Square with a need for steps at St Martins Way to negotiate the created level difference. Members remain concerned about this issue
- Retail mix shop units supposedly aimed at chain retailers. Part of Chester's retail problem is already that it is dominated by the national chain shops. The city lacks a thriving specialist and niche retail sector, a problem presumably resulting partly from the letting and rental policies of the dominant city centre property owners. The Northgate scheme will be a major destabilising factor in Chester's property market but members continue to be worried that the consequent relocation of current occupiers from premises in Bridge St, Eastgate St and Foregate St will merely exacerbate the trend to pound stores and empty premises in these streets rather than offering opportunities to small private specialist businesses.