



CITY OF WINCHESTER TRUST'S POSITION STATEMENT ON SILVER HILL

The Trust has always supported the proposals for the Silver Hill redevelopment in principle, although we have had reason to raise objections from time to time and we continue to have reservations. In view of the wider controversy that has arisen lately, it may help any who wish to understand our position if we summarise our involvement up to the present time.

BACKGROUND HISTORY

We have taken part in every stage of the public consultation about the proposed regeneration of the area, from its outset in the '90s, including a very well attended meeting with the City's first planning consultants in the Woolstaplers' Hall (who remembers that?). We had no serious complaints with the first brief when it eventually emerged and, after the process was explained, accepted the propriety and benefits of appointing a single developer. Having met Thornfield's specially engaged project director, we were optimistic about the standards he aspired to, not least because he agreed with us that the company's current architect was unsuitable for the project and wished there to be a selection process from a list of 6 practices, and invited us to submit the names of two firms. After interviews that included a presentation by each architect of their approach to the project, the selection panel unanimously chose the present firm.

2004 – 2006

We were generally pleased with the way in which the scheme evolved, although there were many times when we disagreed to a greater or lesser extent over aspects of the content or detail of the scheme. Generally the critical comments by the Trust and others were evaluated by those concerned and changes made or reasons given why an adverse comment could not be accommodated.

For example, we disapproved when the City required the developer to commission the master plan. Our thinking was that such a plan would be better produced in-house or independently, however, we were pleasantly surprised with the master plan produced by the developer's architects.

We objected when the City's original brief was revised to include much more than originally planned, resulting in what we considered to be over-development of the site. Too many of the buildings were too high, with an overpowering and unfriendly Friarsgate frontage. At the time we also took pains to meet London & Henley and to study their proposals, which we concluded were totally unsuitable for Winchester.

The scheme was finally submitted for planning approval in 2006. We submitted our objections but, apart from some minor revisions, it was approved by the City Council in 2008 without major change.

2011 – 2014

When Henderson took over from Thornfield and Stage Coach decided it no longer wanted an off-road bus station (arguing that buses should be on the road maximising their service to the public rather than sitting in a bus station), we were very relieved by the effect on the project. Lowering the height of one of the major buildings, easing the Friarsgate frontage and amending the traffic flow, allowing the pavement to be widened sufficiently to create a pedestrian friendly environment with tree planting, made a number of our previous objections unnecessary.

Our foremost remaining design concern at that time was the architectural detail: having chosen to re-create Winchester's historic street pattern, we held it was equally important to re-create the texture of the

City's street frontages, and believed this to be a major challenge when all were to be built at the same time, unlike the widely varying and contrasting styles caused by past incremental changes throughout Winchester's history. On the other hand in our view it would be disastrous to attempt to artificially copy this phenomenon. We were once again pleased with the architects' design solution, which we believe will work well as a modern perpetuation of street texture. There are other more detailed considerations where we have argued for a number of changes that have been made, and some that have not, but there was only one, a new design in the High Street, where we felt it necessary to object in the current application.

We remain very concerned about three other aspects of the scheme:

1. The increase in the retail floor area - we have recently been advised by our expert consultant, Harvey Cole, that the increase now greatly exceeds what is needed at the present time, risking the viability of Winchester as a shopping centre. We consider that this very significant difference of opinion between experts should, as he has suggested, be evaluated and resolved before the scheme is determined.
2. The loss of affordable housing - the government's ruling on viability appears to leave WCC no option but to accept a financial contribution from the developers instead with the amount to be assessed by independent experts. Some of us in any case have doubts about the design-viability of low cost housing in this particular situation but we consider the location of an equal number of low-cost units within walking distance of the centre should at least be planned for by WCC at this time.
3. Car parking space - we believe the number exceeds what should be incorporated within a city-centre site because it conflicts with the Council's long term policy (which we support) of reducing traffic in the central area. While the reduction in central parking must be balanced with the provision of alternative parking arrangements, multi-storey provision in the centre is unlikely to be reduced even in the long term, although we have been assured that the parking floors could be converted to other uses in the future.

CONCLUSION December 2014

Although we shall continue to voice our concerns, we do not consider these reservations to be grounds for a Trust planning objection to the development as a whole, because on balance we consider the scheme well designed, appropriate for its location and (subject to further investigation about the retail space) to be good for Winchester.

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