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Chairman: Keith Leaman



NEWS RELEASE

Statement from the City of Winchester Trust – Station Approach

Although the City of Winchester Trust has had, and intends to maintain, a constructive and friendly relationship with the Council, we felt that the Council's recent decision to grant itself outline planning consent for a 200,000 square foot building on the Station Approach (Carfax) site raised too many issues that need to be challenged. Unfortunately, the only way in which a planning approval can be effectively challenged is by way of a Judicial Review, and after taking soundings from our Trustees and others, we reluctantly commenced a legal action three weeks ago.

The main plank of our case is that, in the report to the Planning Committee, the Council failed to assess the impact of the proposal on heritage assets in the locality and on important views across the City. There are obligations within national and local planning policies and in law that require such assessments, and to their credit, the Council quickly acknowledged that these were significant omissions. When the legal process is completed shortly, the result will be that the decision to grant consent will be quashed.

A further very worrying aspect of the case, though not amongst the legitimate grounds for a legal challenge, was the Council's intention to sell the site to a developer with outline planning permission. This would have allowed developers wide scope for altering the scheme. They would be constrained by overall dimensions and uses, but would be free to alter all the details. Theoretically such changes could be refused at the detailed planning stage, but would this happen? And if approval were refused, wouldn't the developers get their own way on appeal?

We look forward to contributing to the process moving forwards and with greater control over the outcome. We appreciate that the Council needs to make good use of this site, but we would prefer to see the gardens that were designed as part of the Records Office retained, and the scale of the development on the remainder of the site made more sympathetic to the station and to nearby residential streets within the City's conservation area. We would also prefer the parking for any development to be as restrained as possible, to accord with the Council's commendable environmental aspirations.

To consider taking such action has been a challenge for the City of Winchester Trust. However, we felt that the development proposed would be detrimental in so many ways to Winchester's core conservation area that action had to be taken, and a judicial review was the only way of providing the opportunity for a better and more appropriate scheme to be achieved.

City of Winchester Trust
28th October 2019

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