

## **Station Approach Q & A**

As debate continues about the development of the railway station area, we felt it would be useful to outline the background to the proposed development in the area and our concerns about the scheme put forward by the City Council that was granted planning permission last year.

It is important first to clarify that the Trust supports development of the Station Approach area, and indeed was involved in the various steering groups and advisory groups before the City Council's planning application was submitted in March last year. However, it became apparent to us that we could not support the type of development that was being proposed, and despite making our concerns plain over and over to the City Council both before and after the planning application was made, we felt we had no alternative but to give them notice of our intention to apply to the High Court for leave for a judicial review of the decision to grant the application.

### **Q1 What is the extent of the Station Approach area?**

**A** The Station Approach area extends in the north to the Jolly Farmer public house on Andover Road, and to the Coach Park on Worthy Road. To the west it extends to the junction of Stockbridge Road and St Paul's Hill, to the south it extends to Newburgh Street and to the east it extends to the Carfax junction (i.e. where City Road meets Sussex Street and Andover Road). Within the area are two major development sites, Carfax and the Cattlemarket.

A large part of the area borders the Winchester Conservation Area. The Council has a duty to ensure that new development will not detract from its special quality and character or harm the setting of listed buildings.

### **Q2 Which part of the area is covered by the City Council's planning application?**

**A** The proposed development is on the Carfax site. This island site is bordered by Station Hill, Station Road, Sussex Street and Gladstone Street.

### **Q3 Are there any requirements on the type of development that should be built on the Carfax site?**

**A** Yes. The current Winchester District Local Plan, which specifies development in the District, allocates the Carfax site for a mixed-use development, including not just office space but also residential, small-scale retail or leisure/cultural uses and open spaces. It also states that any proposals should respect and retain the Hampshire Record Office and Station buildings and look at the feasibility of retaining and re-using the former Registry Office.

In March 2017 the City Council appointed consultants to prepare a brief for the development of the two sites. The brief set out what the Council would like to see

on the Carfax and Cattlemarket sites. In terms of office space, the brief stated that there should be 13,000 square metres of office floor space spread over both sites.

**Q4 What type of planning application was made for the Carfax site and what type of development is proposed?**

**A** The planning application is what is known as an 'outline' application. This type of planning application allows fewer details about the proposal to be submitted. These details may be agreed following a 'reserved matters' application at a later stage. Reserved matters can include appearance, means of access, landscaping, layout and scale.

The proposed development on the Carfax site consists mainly of large office buildings, one of which is, in effect, six storeys in height. The total proposed office space is 17,972 square metres. This is well in excess of the 13,000 square metres of office space proposed in the brief for both the Carfax and Cattlemarket sites.

**Q5 Why are the office blocks so tall and why is so much office development needed on the site?**

**A** It is unclear why the Council proposed office floor space on the site so far in excess of the figure stated in its design brief.

However, it is a fact that employment analysis shows that there is a high level of out-commuting by high paid professional workers to other employment centres, especially to London which is just an hour away by train. Office development could therefore reduce the number of out-commuter trips. The Council has also said there is a limited number of office vacancies in Winchester and that many existing offices do not meet modern day requirements.

**Q6 Why does the Trust oppose the proposed development?**

**A** The Trust objected to the application on a number of grounds:

- The application was submitted as an outline application and should have been submitted as a full application. Our concern is that once the site is sold to a developer (as the Council plans), the designs in the 'reserved matters' application could be significantly different, and the local planning authority would have difficulty resisting the changes as long as the developer had complied with the approved parameter drawings.
- Even though the Local Plan allocates the Carfax site for a mixed-use development, the application submitted is predominantly large-scale office development with a small amount of retail (retail being restaurant/café uses and convenience shopping) and no residential. There is a real need for affordable housing in the city and there would undoubtedly be a demand for housing in this sustainable location.

- The proposed offices are in two large blocks and the massing and scale are completely at odds with the character of the surrounding area, much of which is Conservation Area. The tall office blocks are proposed on the highest part of the site and will be seen in medium and distant views. They will impact on the setting of listed buildings and the setting of the city and also on the adjacent Conservation Area.
- The offices will be overbearing on the existing residents of Gladstone Street.
- The application proposes up to 95 car parking spaces for office workers with an access off Gladstone Street. The Trust has consistently argued that in such a location (next to the railway station and adjacent to bus stops including park and ride buses and in view of the fact that the site is within easy walking distance to the city centre and residential areas), no employee car parking should be provided on the Carfax site (other than some street level spaces for disabled workers).

A scheme with no car parking would be in accord with the recently adopted Winchester Movement Strategy (a joint WCC and Hampshire County Council document), which states that city centre traffic should be reduced.

- The proposed car parking is provided beneath the buildings and is accessed by a ramp down from Gladstone Street. This results in a 'dead' and unattractive frontage at street level, which is directly opposite the existing terraced houses.

**Q7 Is the Trust alone in opposing the proposed development?**

**A** Many other bodies and individuals have expressed concerns over the proposed development, including statutory and non-statutory bodies such as Historic England, as well as Council officers responsible for the historic environment and urban design who were consulted on the application. Some relatively minor amendments were made to the application as a result (eg a small reduction in the height of the office blocks, a small increase in active frontages and a reduction in car parking spaces), but these did not address the main concerns.

**Q8 Why did the Trust embark on a Judicial Review?**

**A** The Trust was very reluctant to challenge the planning decision and before doing so gave it a great deal of consideration. However, because its concerns had been ignored many times by the Council, it decided that a legal challenge was the only way of securing a review of the decision.

**Q10 Why was the Council's decision to approve the application considered to be unlawful by the High Court?**

**A** The Trust gave notice to the City Council that it intended to apply to the High Court for a review of the planning permission on five grounds. Before the proceedings had been issued in the Court, the Council accepted it had made a mistake on one of the five grounds and then consented to judgment, which was enough for the decision to be quashed by the Court. This one ground stated that the Council had erred in law as it had not fully considered the effect of the development on the setting of listed buildings and the surrounding conservation area.

**Q10 What is the £5 million grant that many have said has now been lost because of the Trust's action?**

Before the application was determined, the City Council had secured the promise of a £5 million grant from the Local Enterprise Partnership. This was to be used for site preparation works, for archaeology and for public realm improvements. The grant was dependent on planning consent being granted.

It has recently been reported in the press that the City Council is hopeful that grant money might still be available in the future: "...the Enterprise M3 Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) have indicated that they would be receptive to a future funding application for grant works at Station Approach" and also "...any other potentially available funding sources will continue to be explored, working closely with Hampshire County Council aligned with the Movement Strategy implementation."

**Q12 Is the City Council likely to progress the planning application?**

**A** In a Cabinet report (21 May) there is a recommendation to pause development on the Carfax and Cattlemarket sites until the impact of the pandemic crisis is better understood. The report states that the economy, property market, investor confidence and occupier demand may all be significantly affected. If the Cabinet recommendation is accepted, it seems unlikely that the application in its present form will be progressed. This will provide time to reassess the proposals and design a scheme that will be supported by the community.

**Q13 What does the Trust plan to do next?**

**A** The Trust has written to the Leader of the Council for an update on its plans for the Carfax site. We are convinced that there are much better townscape solutions for development within the Station Approach area, and in particular on the Carfax site. To look at this in more detail, the Trust has set up a small group of architects, planners and urban designers to prepare an outline brief for more sympathetic and sustainable development. The group will make sure new proposals will have good townscape credentials, will respect the character and setting of the city and the setting of the adjacent Conservation Area and listed buildings, will comply with local planning policy and will be financially viable.

When things have got back to (the new) normal after the lockdown, we plan to arrange a public meeting where we will present our proposals for the Station Approach area.

*This is an edited version of a document prepared for the Trust by John Hearn, Trust member and Planner and Urban Designer.*