

## **Chichester Society Response to the consultation on Chichester Tomorrow...A Vision for Chichester**

### **Richard Childs**

The Chichester Society welcomes the District Council's attempt to articulate a Vision for the city centre over the next 20 years. Our response comprises a critique of the Vision document, comments on the series of exhibitions during the consultation period, and most importantly a number of suggestions for the improvement of Chichester which the Society would like to see included in the final version of the Vision.

The Vision document should have been explicit from the outset that it is a vision for the city centre and to avoid confusion it should have been entitled as such.

In 2009 Chichester City Council produced a not dissimilar document *Towards a Vision for Chichester*. Has there been any attempt to refer or learn from that document?

On page 6 of the Vision document reference is made to 'Creating Tomorrow's Heritage'. However much of the recent built environment approved by Chichester District Council was listed as 'negative' by its own Conservation Area Appraisal.

A considerable amount of the Vision is not new. For example the various sites comprising the southern gateway have been discussed for the best part of 20 years. The difficulty arises from finding a time when all the sites will become available to be redeveloped together.

Proposals for the further pedestrianisation of South and West Streets are to be welcomed though adequate alternative bus routes would have to be found.

Encouraging greater use of buses is welcomed though there would have to be improvement to the frequency of services, the addition of more late night running services. The issue of a park and ride service needs to be revisited if inner city car parks are closed.

On the issue of the inner city car parks we feel it is vital to consult very thoroughly before releasing car space for other uses. Priority should be given to city centre residents and disabled car users. Maybe reduce the size of Little London car park and use surplus space for kiosks/small low-rent retail units of a type that can be removed again if it transpires

that the parking space is still needed, or a larger space is needed for a special event (e.g. Christmas Market). Electric car charging facilities at all car parks throughout the city.

Improving the connectivity between the Festival Theatre and Northgate is a laudable aim which could be achieved with a segregated pedestrian walkway.

There is little evidence of the need for improved connectivity between the university campus and the city centre.

We were struck by how little the cathedral features in the document, other than in photos.

Turning to cultural matters, the future use of the Novium is a critical issue. It has to move from being an albatross around the neck of the District Council to being a valued contributor to the cultural life of the city. This still feels like making a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

Has the re-instating of the original more ambitious Chichester Festival been considered?

There is considerable demand for a flexible use space that can, in particular, be used as a concert/events venue.

Sport should have been included in the Vision. There are good tennis and gym facilities that attract people into the City.

The composition of the Chichester Vision Group should have had more private sector representation.

We were underwhelmed by the so-called exhibitions which simply comprised blown-up pages of the Vision document. We had expected something more thought provoking, possibly some imaginative CAD drawings of possible developments.

The Chichester Society would like to offer the following suggestions for improvement to the city

### **Development opportunities at the 4 Gateways:**

**NORTHGATE:** Abolish the gyratory. Build an attractively designed hotel at Northgate on the footprint of Metro House. Provide a signal-controlled pedestrian/cycle crossing at Northgate on desire line from St Paul's Road to North Street. Redesign Northgate car park to provide a landscaped walkway diagonally across the car park from the pedestrian

entrance at Oaklands Way to the entrance to CFT/Minerva, with low level bollard lighting. The walkway to focus on CFT and on the Cathedral spire. Provide a signal-controlled pedestrian/cycle crossing on Oaklands Way.

**SOUTHGATE:** Abolish the gyratory and make the northern leg two-way. Convert the Crown Court to a multi-use venue capable of use as a concert hall. Convert the bus garage to an events space (like the former 'Venue' at Quarry Lane.) A 4 star hotel/restaurant/terrace overlooking canal basin (but retain cathedral view.) Widen pavements at Southgate and along South Street but retain bus access. Provide a 'gateway' feature at the former location of the South Gate. Relocate bus station to northern railway station forecourt (a glazed structure as at Horsham and with toilet and tourist information as at Havant.) Examine feasibility for a road bridge on Basin Road across the railway and closure of the two level crossings.

**WESTGATE:** Provide a landscaped park on part or all of the Orchard Street car park at Westgate, to compensate for loss of Westgate roundabout and green spaces due to highway works. Retain Cathedral Green (albeit a small, but typical English cathedral green. Paving would be out of keeping, and would seldom be put to beneficial use, and could lead to flooding of cathedral foundations.) Explore the untapped potential use of the Cathedral Green. Provide frequent ramps linking raised footway to West Street carriageway. Gradually remove diseased lime trees and replant. Retain bus stops but provide two heritage bus shelters outside former Post Office.

**EASTGATE:** Abolish the Gyratory. Make St Pancras and The Needlemakers two-way; Pedestrianise The Hornet to create a 'Quirky Shopping Quarter on lines of those at Brighton, Lewes and Hastings all of which are flourishing with small traders since pedestrianisation projects; Removal of Kwik Fit to periphery of city and provide a retail development of small units from St Pancras to The Hornet. Consider developing small retail units on N and/or E side of Cattle Market car park. Possibly provide a 2 level decked car park on part of Cattle Market car park. Fitting its historic use (and existing use on Saturdays), part of the cattle market could be used as a covered market, of the kind seen in almost all French towns. This would replace the covered small-trader premises now lost from the Butter Market. Such buildings can be extremely attractive, and (unlike the French equivalents) outside market days this market building could be kept open as dry covering

encouraging walking and cycling journeys across the market, and dry parking for which a small premium could be charged (paying for the costs of construction and ongoing maintenance). The Road Space Audit suggests that part of the Cattle Market might be re-purposed as a multi storey car park (Appendix, p. 115). This is also felt to be inappropriate. Multi storeys (even the "award-winning" Avenue de Chartres car park) are not structures that invite cyclists and pedestrians (including shoppers) to pass through, let alone linger. Any multi-storey placed hard-up against the historic centre would have a significant adverse impact on the attractiveness of greener travel choices, and on lingering to shop nearby. Specifically, a multi-story in the Cattle Market would have a significant deterrent impact on journeys currently made on foot and by bike from a whole quadrant of the outer city, from the far East to the far South, which meet up at the corner of the Amphitheatre and the top of Whyke Lane and currently pass either through the Cattle Market or through the Whyke twitten.

**NIGHT TIME ECONOMY:** Make the city centre more attractive by imaginative floodlighting/spotlighting key buildings (e.g. Council House, Guildhall, St Olaves Church, former Corn Exchange, St Pancras Church, St John's Chapel, as well as sections of the City Walls at Jubilee Park and Westgate Fields, Bell Tower & St Peter the Great , Gateway to Canon Lane & Wildwood.

**CITY CENTRE ACCOMMODATION:** Regarding accommodation over city centre shops we feel that a proactive attempt should be made to encourage freeholders to develop surplus accommodation for beneficial uses, ideally for flats or small business units. This need was identified as long ago as in the Government's Four Towns studies in 1968.

**QUARRY LANE:** Gradually relocate low-employment users from west part of Quarry Lane/Gravel Road, to sites on periphery of city, and develop resulting brownfield sites for affordable housing. Users such as the scrap yard, van rental, and distribution depot in Gravel Road are monopolising sites close to city centre which should be used for housing. Much more use to be made of the flooded gravel pits as leisure venues alongside housing development.

### **CHICHESTER'S SPECIAL CHARACTER**

Chichester's "Special Character" (see Local Plan) owes much to its rural setting and rural features in town. The rural aspects of Chichester's character need greater acknowledgement, and protection with real teeth. Even if the current extent of rural lands cannot be preserved, the

replacement features should be rural in nature: hedges not fences, mostly wooden/rustic street furniture, not steel and plastic (*rus in urbe* - as it's sometimes called).

There should be a policy that new build should "knit together" the street scene, without too many stand-out, statement buildings. Most new build within the city centre should be quietly sympathetic, not seeking attention. Even the odd "statement building" should pay due regard to the cityscape (E.g. Opinions about the Novium may be mixed, but most can agree that it intrudes jarringly on views south from the Northern section of the city walls.)

## **GENERAL:**

Improve the appalling state of the city centre's pavements.

Provide high quality Tourist Information Centre under the Council Chamber with glazing in the arches.

Use architectural competitions for larger development sites to ensure high quality design.

A campaign to encourage shops, pubs and restaurants to display 'Well behaved dogs on leads welcome'.

Provision of more seats in city centre, particularly in South Street and Southgate.

Campaign for fixed ramp accesses to shops to replace steps.

Campaign for 'rest-a-while' seats in shops, for elderly and others needing a brief rest.

Re-open the public toilets that have been closed in recent years.

We trust you will find the above comments and suggestions helpful and hope you will consider some of them worthy of inclusion in your final version of the Vision.

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