Winchester Action on Climate Change

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Dear Simon

Station Approach Design Competition: how entrant B falls short of the City Council brief

I promised you a brief note setting out the sort of changes that WinACC believes are required to ensure that the preferred scheme meets the climate change aspects of the brief[1].

Our aim is to help you as you consult lawyers about what it is possible to change.

The Executive Summary of the brief (p 1) sets out the criteria for a successful project.

improve permeability of the area for pedestrians or cyclists;

1. reduce congestion with the associated benefit of improving air quality;
2. create a much improved relationship between modes of transport and their impact on the local environment;
3. contribute to a lower carbon Winchester District.

Examples of the changes that will be needed are summarised below.

1. Improved permeability for pedestrians or cyclists

Much more needs to be done to meet the Development Aims (p19) to:

- create a welcoming 'gateway'
- improve linkages through the site.

[1] WinACC welcomes some elements of the station approach brief, in particular the statement that a successful scheme will contribute to a lower carbon Winchester District. This paper suggests how the design could be changed to meet the aspects of the brief which we support. In November 2015, WinACC commented on the station approach area brief (see WinACC notes on the City Council Design Brief). We have not changed our view on the different elements of the brief, and there remain elements of the brief we cannot support.

At 17,000 per day, and increasing at 4% per year, passenger footfall at the station is higher than many parts of the High Street. Pedestrian circulation areas need to be bigger, especially for station passengers, let alone for people walking through the area (e.g. from Barton Farm and the new student accommodation to the west end of town). This may require less space to be occupied by buildings.

A good route across the area outside the station is needed to provide a strong welcome to Winchester.

The main circulating area risks being dominated by buses and taxis.

People on foot or cycle always take the shortest route whatever the layout shows, so routes across open spaces must reflect desire lines from corner to corner - diagonal routes.

On all but the traffic-laden main routes, pedestrians and cyclists are expected to navigate a series of right angles through relatively dead spaces. Pedestrian routes between buildings need to show the exit from the entry, or people feel unsure and potentially unsafe.

Conflict with vehicles is a major problem both on the Carfax site and at the Carfax junction. If anything, circulation areas have been reduced from what they are now.

Clear walking and cycling routes are needed that have a satisfying synergy between the Carfax site and the Cattle Market / Worthy Lane site.

2. Reduced congestion and improved air quality

The scheme includes a much larger number of parking places than the brief requires. It also proposes the moving of 92 public car parking spaces from Cattle Market / Worthy Lane to Gladstone Street. The increase and revised distribution will increase congestion and emissions/pollution, and cause unnecessary conflicts between pedestrians and cars at the Carfax Junction.

It is not an advantage to create more parking places. More parking will neither create high quality offices, nor improve economic vitality. And it certainly will not meet the development aim of increasing commercial potential by reducing traffic and maximising pedestrian and cycling facilities.

The scheme fails to take full advantage of its proximity to the station. It also needs changing to reflect and take advantage of the increase in the number of parking places shortly to be provided by a second storey of parking on the west of the station.

Architects are not best placed to design smart ways of tackling the traffic problems in the area, and need support from traffic planners and urban designers in resolving the many movement conflicts.

Hampshire County Council is planning a movement study for central Winchester. The results should inform plans for this area, so no design should be finalised, let alone amended, before the movement study is published.

3. A much improved relationship between modes of transport and their impact on the local environment

To enhance public transport facilities (p19), improve public realm quality (p15) and accessibility (p14) requires considerably more work.

The scheme does not adequately suggest how to enhance public transport facilities. More space immediately outside the station - and more thought - is needed to arrange for interchanges between train and bus so that people coming and going via Winchester station feel confident that they can find their way smoothly, without confusion or long walks with luggage, or creating elaborate bus route deviations. Arrangements need to be adequate for the frequency of service and number of routes required for confidence in the public transport arrangements.

4. Contribute to a lower carbon Winchester District.

To contribute to a lower carbon Winchester District must mean a scheme that ends in a smaller carbon footprint than the area now produces.

Everyone recognises that an attractive, vital station area will encourage people to leave the car at home. All the issues set out above are needed to ensure that people feel welcome and confident when they arrive by train.

As far as the buildings are concerned, the intention of delivering BREEAM outstanding buildings is welcome.

To contribute to a lower carbon Winchester, we would hope that the development would take every opportunity to create solar power, even with a “fabric first” approach, because the power generated will contribute to hitting the renewable energy target for the District.

It may be necessary to adjust the aspect of some of the buildings to maximise solar generation. It may also be necessary to review the windows to reduce over-heating as average temperatures rise by at least 2 degrees within 35 years.

We hope that a low carbon construction and waste disposal will be a planning required for every aspect of the development.

HCC has detailed feasibility plans for a district heating scheme which is both technically and financially viable, and reaches as far as the HCC offices. The only remaining obstacle to it going forward is that the parties originally expected to commit themselves to purchasing the heat (i.e. the prison and the hospital) are not currently in a positon to make that commitment. A commitment to use the District Heating scheme in some of the station approached development would not only make the station approach scheme lower carbon, but would also enable the whole HCC scheme to go ahead making a significant contribution to a lower carbon Winchester. Before any design is finalised, it is important to explore the possibility of a link to the HCC scheme.

Yours sincerely

Chris Holloway