

31 December 2007

Peterborough City Council
PSQ Consultation
Planning Implementation
Bridge House
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PETERBOROUGH
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Peterborough Station Quarter Development Brief

The Civic Society has inspected the revised Development Brief for the Station Quarter and has a number of comments to make as listed below. We would however note that the period for Consultation has been quite short, spanning the Christmas period, and the Society had to purchase a hard copy of the Brief document in order to be able to study it in detail. This is not conducive to receiving all constructive comments for what is a key element of the regeneration of Peterborough City Centre.

Summary Comments

- a) The Station Quarter Brief appears to have changed very little since it was first issued over two years ago. Whilst certain elements have improved there has been little thought for the urban design implications of the redevelopment, particularly the overall height of new buildings which will challenge the rightful dominance of the Cathedral on the Peterborough skyline.
- b) We consider too much is being swept away with no retention of the few remaining landmark buildings -our greatest concern is that the Great Northern Hotel will no longer grace the station entrance.
- c) The design of Station Square East is poor and shows a lack of integration with the North Westgate scheme and Bus Station. A major opportunity would be lost if Peterborough did not create an important civic space fronting the station so that both citizens and visitors are able to move freely towards the City Centre and bus station/ parking facilities. This would address the current poor image Peterborough gives to new arrivals and create an imposing space spanning both sides of Bourges Boulevard.

Our specific comments on each area are as follows:

Area 1: North West

1. Whilst we have no objection to the residential/mixed use proposed for this portion of the site, we have concerns regarding the tightness of the development to the west side of the tracks. The indicative layout of lines does not seem to show the retention of fast through lines. In order not to restrain future rail development, we would suggest the retention of a buffer/ expansion strip to the west of the railway line to allow remodelling of the station to accommodate longer trains and extra platforms, increased and segregated freight capacity and additional capacity on the East Coast Main Line as proposed by Network Rail. EERA's response to Network Rail on the ECML Route Utilisation Strategy contained Peterborough station's capacity enhancement, including improved facilities and the provision of additional platforming for local services as well as the development of an intermodal freight facility. Importance is also given to improved levels of accessibility by public transport to key development areas in Peterborough. It is therefore vital that sufficient land be safeguarded for potential future expansion of both passenger and freight travel; it would be a major failing if Peterborough Station could not accommodate growth in rail use in the future. This also impacts on Area 2 with the western element of the Station perhaps also being shown too tight to the tracks preventing westwards expansion.

Area 2: Station Square West

2. We welcome the western station access and land bridge with ticketing facilities and parking to the west of the existing tracks.
3. The opportunity has not been taken for a grade separated link between the west station, River Lane and Thorpe Road, heading west, which would allow car traffic to leave the station without having to negotiate the Thorpe Road/ Midland Road junction.

4. We wish to ensure the retention of the Grade2* listed railway repair shop at the corner of Midland Road and Thorpe Road as identified in the Brief. However, unlike the Carpenters Shop in Area 3, these have not been shown on the illustrative plans, which gives us concern that demolition is intended. These should be integrated into any design proposals for this area given that they are, as stated in the Listing Notice “A classic example of a large timber framed industrial building... and... the only all timber wagon shop surviving in Britain”
5. 6-8 storeys is too high for this area, bearing in mind the need to retain Cathedral views. 5-6 storeys would be preferable and indeed comparable to the proposed car park on the corner of Crescent Bridge and Bourges Boulevard (see N Westgate proposals where the car park proposed to replace the existing Perkins car park on the Crescent Bridge roundabout is 6 storeys in height).

Area 3: North East

6. 6–8 storeys is too high for the north east area. It should be limited to 5 storeys maximum, again for urban design and Cathedral views issues.
7. We welcome the retention of the listed railway buildings and the integration into any new proposals.
8. There is conflict between Area 3 and the proposed bus layover site (part of North Westgate scheme). The current Planning Application for North Westgate indicates that buses need to be drawn from the bus layover area to the north of the Spital Bridge and it is unclear how this could be effectively achieved from a new road junction shown at Bourges Boulevard/ Mayors Walk.
9. We assume the Volunteer Fire Brigade will be relocated elsewhere on a major route within the city and are surprised it is not even mentioned in the Brief.

Area 4: Station Square East

10. The design of this area appears to be somewhat arbitrary with no integration of the urban design between Station Square East and North Westgate. We

recommend the proposed pedestrian/cycle crossover bridge be moved slightly to the north to allow more direct (and obvious) access to North Westgate (Area 2/4). An indicative block is shown abutting Bourges Boulevard which has the effect of blocking the railway station from the re-ordered bus station as part of the North Westgate scheme; this is plainly wrong in that passengers should be able to move easily from train to bus without a commercial building getting in the way. The removal of this block would also avoid a “canyon effect” being created on Bourges Boulevard.

11. We have great concerns over the proposed loss of the Great Northern Hotel. Over the years Peterborough’s heritage has been demolished because of expediency. We consider that this “clean slate” approach is doing the same with the Great Northern Hotel. Whilst the Civic Society were unsuccessful in getting English Heritage to list the building as being of national importance, we strongly feel that it is of local historic importance and, with careful architectural design, could be integrated into the scheme proposals to good effect.
12. We believe the Great Northern Hotel (the historic Victorian part rather than the modern rear extension) could be treated like the Westgate Church and be a focal point for the new buildings that surround it. If the back of the hotel was to be redeveloped, instead of a new and arbitrary building alongside Bourges Boulevard as indicated, it would remove the canyon effect from Bourges Boulevard and retain some of Peterborough’s history to very good effect.
13. In addition, should the bus station on the east side of Bourges Boulevard not have adequate capacity in the future for the potential growth of bus travel, we would be able to add a similar facility with additional bus stands on the west side of Bourges Boulevard; ie, this should be left as a reworkable space. We consider it important to provide a well designed, welcoming and easily accessible transport interchange.

Area 5: South of Crescent Bridge

14. We welcome the addition of pedestrian/cycle access on Crescent Bridge.

15. Diagram 3-8 of the Urban Design Appraisal fails to identify the key view of the Cathedral from the crest of Crescent Bridge along Cowgate, the main gateway to the city. Peterborough City Council has purchased Norwich Union House (old Corn Exchange site), adjacent to St. John's Church, with the express intention of demolishing it in order to improve the setting of the church and to remove this modern building from the sightline of the Cathedral when viewed from Crescent Bridge. It would therefore be a disaster to allow any tall "landmark" building to be constructed on the land immediately to the south of Crescent Bridge so obscuring this major vista.

16. The brief should be re-drafted to ensure that only a low rise building (3 storeys maximum) is constructed at this point and 3-D modeling of this element is undertaken to prove that the vista is preserved and enhanced.

Conclusion

We trust that due attention will be paid to the constructive comments stated above; it is the wish of the Civic Society to see the best quality redevelopment of the Station Quarter take place- there is some way to go before the Brief for this area is appropriate.

David Turnock
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