

Draft 14.10.2016

The Salisbury Cathedral Close Preservation Society's response to "An exceptional place."

"An exceptional place" is a collection of proposals at an early conceptual stage each of which will require detailed consideration and planning permission before implementation. This framework is submitted to The Council's 'Spatial planning' department and is a statement of the long term development plans for those parts of The Close that come within the responsibility of The Cathedral's Dean & Chapter. The plan does not, for example, take account of the developments that Sarum College and The Salisbury Museum each have for a lecture theatre and/or additional presentation space.

Whilst this submission does not have the status of a Neighbourhood Development Plan nor is it an Outline planning application, it does afford interested parties the opportunity to put forward their comments at a very early stage. First, we summarise our principal points:

- The guiding principle for any developments in The Close must be to preserve its ecclesiastical, historical, and residential character. In particular further commercialisation and its signage are to be deplored. There are references in the plan to The Close providing retail opportunities; we believe that such developments are to be resisted.
- Public access to the South side of the Cathedral and the Works department could be achieved relatively quickly and inexpensively and need not await the end of the major repair programme, nor – we believe – planning permission; we commend this proposal and encourage its early implementation.
- The Welcome Point proposal is a solution in search of a problem that doesn't exist. Development of Ladywell to the West will obscure the sight lines to the Cathedral, of which the report makes great store, and to no purpose.
- North Door development to enable visitor (as opposed to worshipper) access will prove to be hugely architecturally controversial, eye wateringly expensive and probably unachievable. Its consideration should be at the end of the queue.
- The development of a shared space, kerb free, roadway from the High Street gate southwards should be seriously considered. It would be costly and inconvenient to implement but would bring significant benefits and be aesthetically pleasing.

Public access to the South side of the Cathedral

We support the plan to open up the grounds to the South side of the Cathedral to the public. It will not be possible to restore the Constable View as protected trees have put on nearly 200 years' of growth since Constable's days. However, the land South of the Works yard and by the pond would provide a most attractive area that is currently hardly visited by anyone.

The implementation of this initiative could be comparatively inexpensive and could be moved to the top of the implementation queue.

Improving access in The Close and a Welcome Point.

Much is made of the imagined confusion that visitors have in finding their way into the cathedral. In many decades none of us has ever been asked by a visitor how to enter the cathedral. The traffic staff who are in a prime position to be questioned share our view that this is not an issue.

We have repeatedly enquired what exactly is going to happen in this Welcome Point and have yet to receive any satisfactory answer. We think that this is a 'bee in the report author's bonnet'. Let's concentrate on solving needs and difficulties that exist rather than devise solutions to non-problems. It follows that we are strongly opposed to Westerly development of Ladywell.

The North door does attract attention but it is noteworthy how few visitors take the path towards it; with the iron gates closed it looks locked. The vast majority continue straight ahead across the West Front to the visitor entrance. The entrance through the old consistory court works well and reception desk staff and Cathedral guides involved will tell you that North door experiments for visitors have been a complete failure. The North door is inhospitable for the reception desk and the entry point within the cathedral, being part way along a wall rather than in a corner, is much less practical for the guides. The North Door entry works well for those attending services who immediately head eastwards towards the choir.

It may be possible to devise a tasteful glazing and heating proposal that would make the North porch space usable. However, such a significant and visible change to the North face of the Cathedral will meet entrenched opposition from many quarters. We believe that there is much else to be addressed that is far less contentious, time consuming and expensive. Therefore, we think that planning a visitor entrance via the North door should be at the end of the development queue.

We see little wrong with the planters which are well cared for by the Cathedral's Flower team and are unfairly maligned in the report. These usually look attractive and colourful. However, it should be possible to provide much improved accommodation for the traffic staff rather than the shed from which they currently work. This is on its last legs and ready for long overdue retirement to a welcoming allotment. A more fitting and attractive replacement, perhaps in oak, might be the subject of a design competition.

The mixture of vehicles and pedestrians through the High Street gate is so obviously an issue that drivers and pedestrians are all on full alert. The High Street entrance has not proved to be an accident black spot.

There is a passing reference in the report to the use of shared space in this area which we proposed in our previous submission and strongly support. Watch the pedestrian flow and you will see endless hopping up and down the kerbs. A kerb free, shared space would be a blessing for wheelchairs, prams and such other vehicles which have a difficult time here and would be greatly facilitated.

Song school, Magna Carta, Cathedral Library & Archive

Any permanent, new structures close to Salisbury cathedral which, unlike most other UK cathedrals, has remained largely unchanged for 700 years, will need to be sited sensitively and to be of the highest architectural merit. Any construction in the current Works yard space runs the risk of partially obscuring the view of the Cathedral. Accordingly we suggest that the height and width of the new workshops and song school should not exceed those of the South facing wall of the cloister.

The area currently occupied by the works department is mentioned in connection with: new, but smaller, permanent workshops; a new Song School; and a new home for Magna Carta. However, there is no mention of square metre requirements of these new developments. We support the development of a much reduced and aesthetically pleasing works facility. We are strongly of the view that the Saw shed and any storage for stone stock and scaffolding stock should be relocated outside The Close.

From a priority viewpoint the Song School is a pressing need but a new Magna Carta facility has a much lower priority. Assign some space for the latter, but until funds are available the Chapter House and Cloister (which handled the 800th anniversary visitor numbers well) are more than satisfactory.

Other correspondents have mentioned that there would be a certain logic in displaying Magna Carta in the Salisbury Museum, on loan from the Cathedral, and we incline to seeing this option as preferable to a separate, new building.

When the Song School is built, the room over the Vestry might perhaps make a suitable space for the archives.

An outline plan for the current works site south of the cloister should be developed to specify the reduced space needs of works department, the area required for the Song School and an allocation for any new home for Magna Carta. The last two mentioned will both need good access to the cloister.

Meeting rooms and function spaces & new clergy housing

We support the use of No 20 for offices and the development of the space to the north of this property for new, residential accommodation for the Chapter Canons. However, In Salisbury's current rental market we do not think that there are sufficient high net worth prospective tenants able to pay realistic rents for the large canonries in Rosemary Lane. These properties are more likely to fetch a worthwhile sale price.

Cathedral school & Auditorium

We are pleased to note that the plans to build an auditorium and to re-allocate the Bishop's Palace have been abandoned.

Movement around The Close

The traffic issue in The Close is a great cause that will never be won or lost. As the report states, a continued mix of solutions will be the best way forward. The timed restriction on exiting via the High Street gate during the busy tourist season has worked well.

Best use of buildings

There is a passing reference to The Close being an attractive retail space. We are strongly of the view that commercial intrusion is not compatible with The Close. In particular the High Street entrance properties 50 -52 must not be used as retail outlets.

Signed by *Richard W. Owen*

Chairman - The Salisbury Cathedral Close Preservation Society

The Close Preservation Society was formed in 1991 to counter proposals to introduce new roads and coach parking into the southern end of The Close. Following success in this campaign it continues to promote interest in The Close and contribute financially and in other ways towards protecting its ambience for future generations. There is more about The Society's activities and aims on our website. The Society's full response to the earlier report entitled: 'After the major repair programme' is also on the website. The summary of principal points from that response dated September 2015 is attached as an appendix.

October 2016

Appendix

Summary of principal points from our 2015 response to the master plan entitled 'After the major repair programme'.

1. Refurbishment of the properties opposite the Matron's college is our top priority. ***
2. Consideration be given to resurfacing the roadway through the High Street gate in 'shared space' kerb free style.
3. The case for a new auditorium is not made.
4. The case for the a visitor centre by Ladywell is not made.
5. The Bishops Palace is not a suitable site for Magna Carta.
6. We support the construction of classrooms and facilities for the school east of the Bishop's Palace.
7. We support the construction of visually attractive facilities for an on-site works team.
8. The stone and scaffolding stores and the saw should be relocated away from The Close.
9. We support the construction of a song school south of the cloister.
10. We support the construction of homes for the Canons, north of No 20.
11. We consider that Magna Carta, the shop, refectory and library should all remain as presently located.
12. In all developments within The Close quality of design and execution should be paramount.

September 2015

*** We are very pleased to note that the Chapter have already begun the redecoration of the properties opposite the Matron's College and we do hope that they are able to remove or box-in the unsightly skeins of telephone and electric wiring attached to the medieval arch and this façade.