

Public Questions Cabinet 25 September:

1.

Guild Hall – Great Hall, Small Hall, Council Chamber

Having attended a number of open sessions with the architects and officers directing the Civic Quarter project, and participating in a session with one of the architects and Cllr Richard Swift about plans (termed ‘proposals’) for the Council Chamber, I am extremely concerned that little attention is being paid to refurbishment of the Great and Small Halls, all focus being on turning the Council Chamber into a tacky, architecturally deficient, and ahistoric ‘space’ that ignores the significant place of the Guild Hall in Cambridge City, and of the Chamber as a famous and celebrated assembly room serving and showcasing the centre of this City’s democratic heritage.

Will the Cabinet assure Cambridge residents and business that:

(1) The Great Hall and Small Hall are set as a specific responsibility for the Civic Quarter Project architects/designers so that each is refurbished to a standard ensuring that instead of the woeful track record of 40 events per year, focus is directed towards these important facilities providing full and proper scope for multifunctional use for a proper events programme recognising that a year comprises 52 weeks and 365 days, not 40.

(2) The Council Chamber not be turned into a tacky, tasteless and uncouth shadow of itself but be retained in perpetuity in its role as the seat of democracy, recognising that the configuration provides for access promoting functions complementing its assembly role – attracting use by national bodies, schools, Anglia Ruskin University, local community groups, NGOs (non-government organisations) and others with the wit to exercise their imagination to attract not only residents but the many people who visit Cambridge to enjoy and participate in its remarkable place in the history of the United Kingdom.

2.

Cambridge market traders have consistently asked for, right from the start of the redevelopment project for “traditional market stalls”, by which we mean open, versatile, high standard stalls that remain in situ.

In the trader meetings the civic quarter team have repeatedly stated that if footfall doesn’t increase then market rents will be reviewed and potentially reduced. The “high street” as we know it is in decline, with many large retailers going out of business, and in Cambridge the Grafton centre being unable to be commercially viable as a shopping centre. In this current commercial climate it is increasingly hard to attract the public into the city centre to shop, stay and spend money. If this trend continues then the council will not be able to justify the huge rent increase for market traders over the next five years (on average 35% but for some traders up to 100%). If, by the councils

own plans, footfall does not increase and therefore rents aren't increased in line with the business plan then there quite quickly become a deficit, caused in a large part, by the financial liabilities incurred by the erecting and dismantling of the gazebos.

The current plan for the Gazebos also bring a huge logistical nightmare. As with any high street business market traders need a constant location for their stall. Customers need to know where to find them, as well as, the consistency which makes set up and display easier and better. With the current plan to have an area that shrinks and grows to "demand" this means that only the amount of gazebos will be set up for that amount of traders that day. This makes this consistency for all traders (to my mind) impossible. What happens if a trader is on holiday? Will everyone have to move up to fill the gap? What about if someone does an extra, casual day, how will their location be allocated? How will hot food traders be kept separate from traders with delicate products that could be damaged by the grease? In 1-2-1s we have asked to have a seven day a week gazebo but we're told due to the plans it would be impossible for this to be in one spot.

The current plan for the gazebos is complete folly, financially and logistically and a death knell for market business that rely on a constant pitch to allow them to operate. The many 3-5 day a week retail and non retail sellers, the traders that don't do enough days to be eligible for a kiosk, include books, coffee, fruit and veg, clothing and fish. These are the retail heart of the market and the stalls that bring many Cambridge locals into the city centre.

Would the council consider installing a section of open, well designed, traditional market stalls to help support the heart of Cambridge market and preserve it for the future?

Given all of the many serious concerns outlined in detail by market traders, how can the council say the current proposals will fulfill the project brief and support a thriving seven day a week market rather than hinder it?

3.

The report recommends proceeding to planning applications without first resolving key interdependencies and potential conflicts between them.

There are overarching issues that absolutely need to be resolved before it would be in any way sensible to submit individual planning applications.

Most important of the overarching issues include:

- 1) Every proposal for the revitalisation of the Market has failed in trying to find a solution for decanting the traders. The proposals before you now have not yet solved this crucial challenge.
- 2) The Cabinet papers don't show how ALL potentially concurrent Civic Quarter construction activities, plus existing servicing (e.g. Arts Theatre) can be accommodated together, and within the limited space available. (e.g. How will

scaffolding, construction, and site compound for the Guildhall works affect the public realm and the Market decant?)

Appendix 7 (draft Market and Public Realm design and access statement) covers some of these issues, but completely inadequately, and is seriously flawed in its approach. This proposal is not the product of any recent public consultation.

Issues include:

- 3) Treating the west side of Market Square as part of Peas Hill, and not the Market, which is just mad in terms of retaining a thriving market.. Once again, trying to cram too much into an already very busy and small space... Totally misconceived!
- 4) Incomplete and misleading plans showing adjacent uses – of the ground floors only, not upper floors in different or no use (KIng's and Caius student accommodation; Radcliffe Court residential; no 5 Market Hill - listed Grade I, 3-4 Market Hill - Grade II, upper floors used for storage only) and
- 5) Misleading claim to be increasing cycle parking by 10% - when up to 60 cycle spaces will be lost (not shown) from the racks and railings on the Market side of Great St Mary's!

So of the 4 options being presented, option 4 (capital budget of £4.4M. Submit a separate planning application for each of the 3 proposals; continue to develop technical design for approval in Autumn 2026) seems preferable because it doesn't give Carte Blanche, BUT

6) There's still no report, let alone a clear strategy, covering potential cultural, conference, and other events within the Guildhall Large and Small Halls, Corn Exchange, and Market Square - and their needs in terms of facilities and servicing.