

English Heritage  
10.09.2007

**From:** FISHER, Alison [mailto:Alison.Fisher@english-heritage.org.uk]  
**Sent:** Mon 10/09/2007 17:57  
**To:** Philip Gray; cjones@nmjm.co; Appleby, Peter  
**Cc:** Riley, Janine; REDFERN, Neil  
**Subject:** CofYC offices

Dear all

As discussed last week English Heritage's Planning and Development group held an Important Application Review meeting this morning and we discussed your emerging proposals for the Hungate site.

The paper I put to the review sought the comments of colleagues on the principles of the scheme as well as those of a more general nature. For the purposes of giving you a summary of the views expressed this morning in advance of a more formal response (which will be delayed as I am about to take study and annual leave for just over a week) I set out the views informally below. Whilst there was positive support for this centrally located council office suite there were several reservations about the footprint, streetscape and design elements. These included:

- 1 the split of the site into 3 elements was well received. However the footprints illustrated on the A4 sketch developments appeared smaller than those suggested by the A3 images. The height of the bio tower and its juxtaposition with the Black Swan was particularly a cause for concern as the tower stands as a block rising heavily from the back of the PH which as a diminutive grade II\* listed building is not in keeping. A fine, slim tower may well sit more comfortably and further design work is needed here we feel. Also we are unclear about the role of the building block which appears to be behind the Black Swan and in front of the bio tower.
- 2 The scale of the Black Swan is so petite that the relationship with the civic frontage will need to be very carefully modelled and there is concern that the sketch suggests a structure which will dwarf it. The space in front of this building was formerly the Wool Market and historical maps suggest that the space could be recreated without much difficulty (albeit that it is now a bus route in to town) and offer a sense of civic arrival and place to the frontage of the civic hall. We suggest that this townscape issue is considered alongside the planning aspects of the new buildings.
- 3 What will become of the listed and historic buildings which will be made redundant? We are primarily concerned about the future role of the Guildhall.
- 4 We consider that the civic suite fronting Stonebow has to be a welcoming building which should have a human scale that will relate to its civic function. Grandeur is always tempered by humanity in the best of the civic buildings be

they historic (York 's Guildhall or modern such as Stockton or Norwich) together with the architectural hierarchy throughout the elevations. The palette of civic buildings in York is human in scale and massing and we are concerned that the design shown, albeit as you say that the interaction of the interior to exterior remains to be resolved, does not pass this test.

5 The views from St Saviours Place offer vistas of the trees at the river's edge beyond and this adds a pleasant aspect to the site which we would wish to continue to have sight of. This would be even more pleasant if the Peasholme Green space could be returned to the historic form it had and could then introduce residents to the civic offices as they approached from the Minster. There was a consensus that this route would become more heavily used once the site was functional.

We had a very constructive meeting and these comments summarise a lively discussion. In essence the theory of the 3 buildings made sense although there was a strong view from some that the offices should be on the front with the civic space behind wrapped around a pleasant space for civic functions and general enjoyment. Nevertheless there was consensus that the offices and civic frontage were generally considered to be brutal in composition ("offices looked like a multi storey car park") and elevation though and are not sympathetic to the highly graded buildings adjacent and that a civic design such as may be found on an Oxbridge campus for instance would be more appropriate, welcoming and respected.

We are clearly keen to continue this design review process and suggest that we reconvene shortly continue our discussions. Please keep in touch.

Regards  
Alison Fisher  
Historic Areas Adviser  
Planning and Development