Cathedral Magdalen Street and St Augustine’s Forum

GNLP Consultation Team

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Cathedral Magdalen & St Augustine’s Forum

c/o Tombland Bookshop

8 Tombland

Norwich

GNLP Consultation

Anglia Square Site and wider North City Housing Site Allocation

The Cathedral, Magdalen & St Augustine’s Forum (CMSA) is a group of local residents and businesses with an interest in the Cathedral Quarter and North City Centre of Norwich.    Having unsuccessfully attempted to put forward the case for a neighbourhood plan and neighbourhood forum, the group refocused as a grouping to give expression to local concerns as to the nature of development presently planned for the area (over densification of Anglia Square and related sites) and to initiate positive plans for the area of optimise regeneration and sustainable development in this important part of Norwich City Centre.

CMSA objects to the designation of the Anglia Square site for 1200 housing units.  This represents an over-densification of the site, and one that fails to take account of the principally mid-rise nature of this part of the city centre, its heritage context, and the mixed use and fine  grain nature  of the surrounding areas, which is emerging as Norwich’s creative and digital industries quarter.

The proposal to designate this are for 1200 residential units flies in the face of the very high level of local opposition to a scheme of this nature  both at the consultation stage prior to the Planning Officer recommending permission in his report, and at the Public Inquiry following the ministerial Call-In to the Columbia/Threadneedle and Weston Homes proposal.   This plans to redevelop Anglia Square and adjacent sites in their ownership (18/00330/F). The Planning department recorded 483 comments of which 399 were against the hybrid development as against 62 in favour and 18 comments where the individual making a representation described him of herself as ‘neutral’

The separate Consultee objections included those of Historic England; The Norwich Society; Norwich Cycling Campaign and the Norwich BID. The two former bodies had indicated their strong opposition to the scheme in advice given at an earlier stage of the Planning Process.

These representations, and much of the evidence presented at the call-in suggest that the quantum of residential development proposed for the hybrid development application, which we note is being proposed as the allocation of residential units for the purposes of the Greater Norwich Local Plan, was plainly too great combined with that of commercial units to be sustainable on this site.

The proposed GNLP repeats the same inherent mistake in planning to have allowed a monstrous scheme of this scale in tis sensitive location.  This does not conform to the requirement to allocate ‘sustainable development’ as set out in the NPPF.  The recent Heathrow decision demonstrates the Government’s resolution to deliver on sustainable development, and we suggest that if the plan incorporates this intention in this location, then it will not meet the test of sustainability.

There are further issues of building safety attaching to high and over dense development which are highlighted by the Hackitt report and which the public enquiry on Grenfell currently underway is beginning to reveal.  We do not believe that there is any reason for central Norwich to accept this level of density given that there is an ‘overhang’ of unexercised permissions across the greater Norwich area which are a hangover from the GNDP.  As land supply is patently not the issue in solving Norwich’s housing needs this ill-conceived and over dense allocation should be removed from the plan.

We suggest that there is a critical absence of a detailed middle layer of planning – ie between the GNLP and the site brief, which is the key to securing high quality regenerative development in this important part of Norwich City Centre. It was our contention when offering to undertake a neighbourhood plan process, that the now expired North City Area Action Plan should have been updated by Norwich City Council, to consider a strategic regeneration and intensification approach to the *wider area*.  This would have ensured that infrastructure needs of the fully regenerated area and its catchment could have been properly considered; parking could have been solved on an area-wide basis, and an appropriately scaled set of developments at both Anglia Square and a range of sites that may come up across the area over time at the ‘gentle density’ could have been planned for, such as was recommended in the Building better, Building Beautiful report as more desirable, valuable and liveable on a long term basis.   Without having undertaken technical capacity studies it is our view that the 1200 residential units allocated to Anglia Square in the draft GNLP plan is both an over-densification of tis sensitive site, and an under ambitious allocation for the wider North City Centre Area – were a coordinated area action plan to be put in place for the North City Centre area.

·      Cathedral Magdalen Street ad St Augustine’s Forum believes the 1200 dwellings allocated to the site which was the subject of the Weston development to be too great a number

·      Further we contend that tis density of residential units precludes other uses such as those cultural, economic  and community uses for which there is a need and local ambition, and which should be prioritised on a site that is so well served by public transport (of which there are not many across the whole of Norfolk).

·      CMSA believes that a quantum of residential dwellings considerably in excess of 1200 could be achieved in the North City Area but over a wider area drawing upon a number of redevelopment sites.

·      Further, there should now be an imperative (following the representations made by many objectors during the course of the public enquiry which showed that the form of development proposed by Weston/Columbia Threadneedle will not meet local housing needs)  to adopt a strategic regeneration framework to deliver housing appropriate to meeting locally defined need with units with a range of typologies designed to meet identified needs of local people.

In the light of the points made, the Anglia Square opportunity should be part of a wider regeneration strategy, and should be allocated to  deliver a lower quantum and density of housing, however with synergies to an enhanced retail, educational, cultural and community offer which could appeal to present and new locals , along with building on the inherent tourist and visitor attractions of a City of 1,000 years standing.

Designating 1200 residential units on such a sensitive site with all the challenges, and opportunities highlighted by a costly and avoidable Public Inquiry concerning the site in question seems to CMSA to be inappropriate and not deliverable without potential harm to the wider prospects of sustainable development for the North City area.

A second critical objection to the plan is the anticipation that Magdalen Street (and other key arterial routes) which are narrow historic routes lined with heritage buildings have the capacity to accommodate the level of increased bus use to serve the growth aspiration set out in the proposed plan for the North East Growth Triangle.   Magdalen Street already suffers high levels of pollution, potential structural damage to buildings and endangers pedestrians through the high level of buses using the route.  The plan appears to be looking to compound tis to service the movement requirements of the peripheral growth areas.  This is not acceptable to us.  The strategy as currently cast will see residents and businesses in the city centre carrying the cost in terms of increased pollution; harm to the built fabric; harm to the liveability and amenity of the city centre and potential harm to individuals through accident.

 It is our view that that transport strategy under-pinning the proposed level of growth for the great Norwich area needs to be urgently reviewed in the light of the requirement to deliver sustainable development as set out in the NPPF, and now backed up by the Heathrow decision.    In order to sustainably unlock the high level of growth anticipated, a fundamental rethink of the movement infrastructure  required to service this should take place, backed up by a revised land use/land allocation  strategy to support investment in public transport and a disposition of uses and densities of new development that will enable viability and underpin an ambitious public transport proposition.  This would also serve to underpin a value capture model to enable delivery.

Unfortunately, we therefore have to object to the plan as currently cast.  We are keen to engage with the GNLP to help to identify  alternative land use solutions which we believe would lead to an enhanced growth proposition; would be popular locally; would  support a sustainable growth model and would ultimately represent better value to the city when considered against a range of longer term financial and social value indicators.

Hugh  McGlynn

Pipa Clements

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