



Town and Country Planning Act 1990 - Section 77  
Town and Country Planning (Inquiries Procedure) (England) Rules  
2000

**Summary Proof of Evidence – Design and Heritage**

Site:	Anglia Square including land and buildings to the north and west
Applicant:	Weston Homes PLC and Columbia Threadneedle Investments
Local Planning Authority:	Norwich City Council
Name of witness:	Ben Webster (MRTPI)
PINS reference:	APP/G2625/V/19/3225505
LPA reference:	18/00330/F
Reference:	NCC2/2

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## 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 I am Ben Webster, the City Council's Design Conservation and Landscape Manager. The purpose of my role is to manage a team that is dedicated to the conservation and enhancement of the city's built and natural environment for the benefit of its citizens. I have performed this role for 14 years, which has included shaping public space, transport and building conservation projects near Anglia Square; commissioning all the conservation area appraisals in the city and negotiating the current scheme for Anglia Square. Earlier in my career, I worked as a policy officer for the Civic Trust, a charity that campaigned for the conservation of the historic environment and high standards of design in the built environment. In that capacity, I supported civic societies and wrote a tall buildings policy for the Trust.
- 1.2 My evidence to this Inquiry covers design and heritage matters and addresses main issue (d) in the secretary of state's letter: "the extent to which the proposed development is consistent with the Government's policies for conserving and enhancing the historic environment." My evidence is based on the detailed content I provided for the planning Committee Report of December 2018(CD9.1).
- 1.3 In addressing main issue (d) I have naturally assessed the proposed development against the relevant legislation, national and local policy and in doing so touched on main issue (e) "the extent to which the proposed development is consistent with the development plan for the area, including any emerging plan".
- 1.4 The relevant legislation and policy that I have considered are:
- Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990
  - National Planning Policy Framework
  - National Planning Guidance
  - Historic England documents offering advice on tall buildings and the setting of heritage assets

- Joint Core Strategy
- Norwich Development Management Policies Plan
- Anglia Square Policy Guidance Note
- City Centre Conservation Area Appraisal

1.5 Historic England captured the importance and defining characteristics of Norwich's built environment well in their response to the planning application (CD11.24): *"Norwich is one of England's – and Europe's – great historic cities. Set in the valley of the River Wensum, the historic centre of Norwich can still be read as having been defined by the longest circuit of city walls in medieval England. Containing more medieval churches than any city north of Alps, large numbers of historic buildings, many of exceptional interest, and streets and spaces rich in character, the centre of Norwich is an extraordinary historic place. The heart of the city is articulated by its major landmarks. On the hills to the south of the river, stand the castle, City Hall, the Roman Catholic cathedral, and a number of the most prominent churches, including St Peter Mancroft and St Giles. Below them, near the river, is the medieval cathedral, one of the great churches of Europe, whose spire rises to form the central landmark of the city. Norwich north of the river has its own character, the streets within the circuit of the walls still rich in historic incident, but without the landmarks of the south."*

1.6 The Anglia Square site is a wound in the city. Much of the development site is a wasteland. Several of the largest and ugliest buildings on the site are empty. The layout is introverted and inhibits movement through the city on foot and by bicycle. The condition of Anglia Square has been deteriorating for years due to its inherent design failings. These features mean that the Anglia Square character area has the lowest possible rating of significance in the City Centre Conservation Area Appraisal (CD2.10) and the greatest scope for improvement.

1.7 My assessment of the development proposals concludes that the design strengths of the scheme are:

- (a) The provision of new and improved movement connections between St Augustine's Street and Magdalen Street and between St George's Street and Edward Street on the general alignment of historic routes in the area.
- (b) It is well served by local facilities and offers better facilities so that residents would have excellent access to the goods and services they need.
- (c) Residents and shoppers would enjoy excellent access to public transport and high-density development in this location would help to reduce dependency on using cars.
- (d) The size of the new homes is appropriate to the identified need.
- (e) A sense of place would be created that is distinctive, interesting and vibrant.
- (f) Mature trees would be retained and more trees planted.
- (g) Wildlife habitat would be created on a site that is ecologically barren.
- (h) Well-defined and interesting streets and open spaces would be created with good natural surveillance.
- (i) There would be a clear distinction between public, semi-private and private space helping with management of spaces and combatting anti-social behaviour.
- (j) Clear building entrances would be provided on street frontages.
- (k) Plentiful and well located cycle parking would be provided.
- (l) Residents would have access to generous shared podium gardens.

1.8 The design weaknesses of the scheme are:

- (a) The scale of the development fails to harmonise with its surroundings in terms of the height of some buildings and the size of block footprints.

- (b) Fewer affordable homes are provided than the policy target.
- (c) Locally listed buildings on Pitt Street would need to be demolished to facilitate the development.
- (d) There are long internal routes from the residential lobby entrances to many flats through windowless corridors.
- (e) The public car park cannot be accessed directly from Magdalen Street.

1.9 The development has not been found to inflict substantial harm on any designated heritage assets, although substantial harm through total demolition would be caused to a locally listed heritage asset - 43-45 Pitt Street. It was found to have a less than substantial impact of differing degrees on twenty-nine designated heritage assets, some of the highest importance.

1.10 This cumulative harm identified is to some extent offset by other beneficial aspects of the development for the historic environment, the serve to enhance the Anglia Square character area as part of the City Centre Conservation Area:

- (a) The removal of areas of undeveloped wasteland off Pitt Street.
- (b) The removal of buildings identified as negative in the city centre conservation area appraisal.
- (c) The reinstatement of streets on an alignment close to those that previously existed on the site resulting in clear relationships between surrounding streets and the development.
- (d) New streets and squares with a high quality landscape treatment that, combined with the new accommodation, will attract people to the area and resulting more people appreciating the surrounding parts of the conservation area.
- (e) Framed views of St Augustine's Church and the Anglican Cathedral from within the development.

(f) Higher quality replacement buildings on Magdalen Street

- 1.11 The elements of the scheme that enhance the Anglia Square character area are outweighed by the more diluted and dispersed but nevertheless significant cumulative harm to the wider conservation area and numerous important heritage assets within it. On balance, therefore, in heritage terms, the harm caused by the scheme is considered to be greater than the benefit to be derived from it. I conclude that this harm is greater than claimed by the applicant but lower than claimed by Historic England, the Norwich Society and especially SAVE.