



THE
NORWICH
SOCIETY

Reference: NS4

Planning Application 18/00330/F
PINS reference PCY/RTI/G2625/3216532
Land at Anglia Square, Norwich

Proof of evidence: Dr Peter Doll

I am the Canon Librarian at Norwich Cathedral and am submitting this proof on behalf of myself and the Cathedral Chapter.

Proof of Evidence

The Dean and Chapter welcomes the recognition of the need to redevelop Anglia Square and Sovereign House. The construction of these buildings was opposed at the time because of their obliteration of the surviving mediaeval street pattern, the destruction of historic buildings, and the imposition of a mini-motorway onto the vulnerable historic fabric of the city. The failure of that earlier development to sustain itself economically, to gain any aesthetic appreciation, or to win any public affection lends force to that opposition in hindsight. It is a blot on the face of the city.

Chapter is concerned that, rather than learning from the failure of the previous development scheme, this new proposal seeks to impose an even greater and more disproportionate scale on this site, with six, ten, and twenty storey buildings forming a wall between the outer and inner zones of the city and dwarfing its immediate neighbours. What attracts residents and visitors to Norwich is its human scale and living sense of continuity with its past. This new proposal would create a zone of bland, cloned buildings that speak of anyplace and no place, but certainly not of Norwich.

The developers argue that the industrial developments of the twentieth century and the buildings of Anglia Square and Sovereign House 'established a precedent for buildings of a more massive scale' and thereby justifying another incremental increase in scale. What they don't acknowledge is that it is precisely this massive scale that has created the current white elephant, that has already failed and alienated the community and led to the massive challenge of trying to sort it out. There is the obvious danger that allowing this new development would create a new and yet more damaging precedent, potentially leading to a rash of tower blocks around the city. In this context, the developers' claims that their plans would introduce a 'dramatic squint of the Cathedral tower and spire' or that they would 'reinforce and celebrate' the Cathedral's historic primacy within the city sound like just so much empty rhetoric and cynical manipulation of language.

The community around Magdalen Road and St Augustine's is currently one of the most dynamic and attractive areas of the city. Its affordability and its dense historic streetscapes (despite the disastrous flyover and Anglia Square) have attracted a lively ethnic mix, with tech entrepreneurs and artists contributing to a particularly youthful vibe. These are precisely the elements that would be squeezed out by the gentrifying and shopping-mall-chains retail environment envisaged by the developers – and which are constituencies already abundantly represented in the city-centre malls. And given that the market for flats in the city is already saturated and that more empty shop-fronts are appearing in the city centre, it is arguable that this development would drain yet more life from the centre.

Norwich City Council are sponsoring the creation of a Vision 2040 document and action plan for the city, to celebrate the historic and the contemporary, youthful ambition and established values, the dynamism of tradition. This development speaks of none of these. It would overwhelm the distinctive, the local, and the vibrant with the generic, the gentrified, and the bland. The Dean and Chapter cannot support the plans as they stand.

This proof deals with the extent to which the proposed development is consistent with the Government policies for building a strong, competitive economy and the extent to which it is consistent with the Government policies for ensuring the vitality of town centres

The proposed development is not consistent with the Government policies as stated in Chapter 12 of the NPPF concerning well-designed places, in particular it does not recognise that 'The creation of high-quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities'.

For these reasons the proposed development is clearly not consistent with the Government policies for building a strong, competitive economy (NPPF Chapter 6).