

**THE ACADEMY OF URBANISM**  
**Place Partnering visit to Winchester**

**22 – 23 September 2011**



## 1. Background

- 1.1. The Academy's Place Partnering programme offers places selected as finalists in the Academy's Great Places awards the expertise and experience of Academicians to help them tackle obstacles to longer term and broader success. It is offered as a diagnostic service, to help, encourage and challenge the diverse interests that influence the success of places to recognise and tackle the issues and opportunities that are of greatest importance. (A copy of the prospectus for participating places is at *Appendix 1*.)
- 1.2. The visit to Winchester was at the invitation of the City Council. In early conversations with the Academy, City Council representatives recognised the potential value to the *Town Forum*, the body that brings together the various interests and influences on the success of Winchester town. The Town Forum is in the process of reviewing its vision and strategy, and the benefit of an external perspective was immediately apparent. The visit was arranged to fit the review process and this report will inform the later stages and, we hope, the future of the Forum.
- 1.3. The visit was on 22 and 23 September 2011. The Academy Panel comprised a chairman, a rapporteur, and three panel members. They met a total of twelve representatives from the Council and local organisations. The people involved are listed in *Appendix Two*. In the interests of open discussion both during and subsequent to the visit, opinions and positions are not directly attributed, and we have tried to reflect the tone and intention of what was said by all.
- 1.4. The conversations we had were friendly and helpful, in a manner we came to realise is characteristic of Winchester (of which, more later). They were also rigorous and challenging. Panel members, through a total of 12 hours intensive questioning of Winchester representatives gained a sufficient understanding of circumstances to offer a reasoned assessment of the relationship between the various perspectives and objectives, and their chances of a successful outcome. The initial conclusions of the Panel were well received by Council representatives at the end of our visit, and we trust this report will be similarly received by all parties engaged with the Town Forum. The Academy wants to ensure that its involvement is helpful, and will present its diagnosis to the Forum, if invited, at the appropriate time.

## 2. Local context

- 2.1. Winchester town is defined as the six wards that make up the built up area of the historic city of Winchester, plus the two contiguous parishes of Badger Farm and Oliver's Battery. This is to distinguish it from Winchester City, which defines the much larger administrative area of the District Council. The Winchester Town Forum was established in 2002. It is comprised of WCC Ward Councillors, with representatives of other bodies invited to participate.
- 2.2. Its *Vision* was first published in 2006. Since then, the City Council has undertaken the *Blueprint* initiative, carried out to strengthen public engagement in long term planning for the future of the whole District. The insights of this exercise informed the representations that the Panel received, and helped focus attention on the issues facing Winchester town in particular. Winchester town centre now also has a Business Improvement District (BID). This is nearing the end of its first five years, during which it has achieved significant improvements for town centre businesses and users. It will be seeking continued support from those businesses in 2012. The City of Winchester Trust (CWT) is a well-established

Civic Society which was established to resist, initially unsuccessfully, the insensitive and unnecessary demolition of an historic area of the town, but with considerable success has continued to protect the character of Winchester for over 50 years, without objecting to innovative change which it sees as an essential part of the city's evolving character. Winchester Action on Climate Change (WinACC) was established in 200[7?] by residents wanting to address and reduce Winchester District's carbon footprint, identified as one of the highest in Britain. Their action plan promotes changes to travel and lifestyle in and around Winchester town, as well as across the District.

### 3. Diagnosis

3.1. We present our analysis and assessment under the headings of the Town Forum's current vision, to help it fit the review process. The diagnosis offered is agreed by all members of the Panel; there was no dissent on any of the issues we address in this report. The Panel also considered matters of process – the way the Forum operates and addresses the issues that fall within its remit.

#### 3.2. Heritage

3.2.1. This is given the highest priority by the *Vision* and was a recurrent theme in all the Panel's conversations during the visit. The panel heard continual references to the attractiveness and importance of Winchester's historic buildings, the importance of its setting and the remarkable juxtaposition of the town and the surrounding countryside. These have been well researched by Wintonians and external experts. They are well understood and widely valued. We heard concerns that new development, particularly large scale development, could threaten these characteristics and that the planning system could not guarantee new development of a standard high enough to enhance its setting. The Panel shared concerns about the limitations of the planning process, but felt that concentrating primarily on the appreciation of Winchester's heritage and setting is becoming a constraint. The heightened local awareness and appreciation of Winchester's built and natural heritage reinforces strongly-held opinions that result in some residents objecting to just about everything. One panellist suggested that this awareness was acting as a cage – preserving something of value and interest to be admired, but constraining natural growth and development. The heritage that is admired and valued is the consequence of change over millennia, and another panellist detected an attitude in the town that "people were willing to accept change, as long as nothing was different". The quality and consequences of development may be unpredictable, but that cannot be a justification for avoiding it. Local and future needs have to be met, or the attributes of Winchester will fossilise. The vision and actions of the Town Forum should help to strengthen and supplement the Council's planning powers, to secure the best possible development. Winchester is in a strong position to do this. The Panellists were impressed not only with the historic character of the town, but also the generally higher than average quality of new development. By embracing the principle of change, local interests could have greater influence over it – setting standards rather than responding to what developers propose. The Panel suggested that greater use of design codes, review panels, planning briefs and other forms of active engagement in the design process could help to overcome local apprehensiveness over the quality of new development.

- 3.2.2. The Panel heard frequent reference to the setting of Winchester, and we were given summaries of the LDA study (1998) which concluded that “the historic, aesthetic, visual and nature conservation qualities of Winchester and its setting are exceptional”. This setting was described to the Panel as a bowl, with a sharp distinction between the edge of the built up area and the countryside, and green wedges penetrating close to the centre of the town. While the Panel acknowledged the attractiveness of the setting of Winchester, we felt that the setting was more intellectual concept than actuality. The visibility of the countryside from the town, and the views of the town from specific viewpoints are rightly valued as important elements of Winchester’s character and should be protected. The ‘bowl’ is, however, significantly modified by ridges and valleys within and beyond it. The urban area already ‘spills over’ the bowl in to the surrounding area, and the green wedges are actually the remnants of countryside enclosed by the outward expansion of past phases of urban development. In most approaches to Winchester the town cannot be seen, either because of the topography, or because of the dense cover of mature trees on streets and private land. It was this sylvan setting that the Panel found most distinctive about Winchester, and most important to protect. Many of the trees are mature and approaching senility. Ensuring the density of tree cover remains will not only protect the historic character, but also help to assimilate new development. Badger Farm is a good example of how the impact of a major new urban extension can be absorbed over time by a well-designed and densely planted landscape.
- 3.2.3. The Panel heard concerns about the cumulative effect of continued expansion on the character of Winchester and its relationship with the surrounding countryside. Panellists were asked at what point we felt such expansion would result in a fundamental change in character. The Panel drew a distinction between the distance of the edge of the town from the centre, and the nature of the edge itself. The former raises issues of access, and of the distribution of activities and services within the boundary. These are matters that Winchester, along with many other historic places, has managed over centuries, and we will address the implications under later headings. The latter is a matter of urban design and development management.
- 3.2.4. The Council as local planning authority has the power to control the location and form of development in a way that protects the ‘edginess’ of Winchester’s periphery. As one panellist pointed out; an onion, while growing successive rings, always look like an onion.
- 3.2.5. We will address the housing issues associated with Barton Farm later, but examine it here, in the context of setting, as many to whom we spoke referred to the intense local interest this aspect of the delayed decision on the Cala Homes appeal. The Panel visited the Barton Farm area. The site sits beyond the bowl in which the town centre sits, and there is no intervisibility. The site of the proposed development seems to be visible only from the surrounding roads, and the railway. It is understandable that such a large scale development should be controversial, particularly as here has been nothing similar for thirty years, but the panel felt that its impact on the setting of Winchester would not be significant. Panellists noted that the approach along the Andover Road has at present long-established development on the west side, as it passes the Sir John Moore Barracks, Harestock and Weeke. While some of the ‘green wedge’ would be lost, there seemed to the panel to be no reason why development could not be assimilated relatively easily into its setting, by maintaining the tree screens that dominate approaches to the town.

3.2.6. Panellists were taken by a reported comment from one of the leading opponents to the development of Barton Farm who said something to the effect that they would not object to the development if it were assured to be of a quality that “he would be proud to take his guests across the road and explain that this is such an exemplar that people come from a far away as Scandinavia to admire it”. The Panel feels that that is a laudable and reasonable expectation. If the decision is taken by the Secretary of State to approve the development, all parties involved in the Forum should work with the developer to achieve that outcome. If the appeal is dismissed, the town will still have to face the inevitability of growth. If it is not located at Barton Farm, similar capacity and eventually more, will have to be found somewhere.

### 3.3. Business

3.3.1. Local representatives emphasised the importance and significance of the scale of public sector employment to the economy of Winchester. The historic importance of Winchester as the County Town of Hampshire, and the public administrative and service activities concentrated here as a result will be an important component of its future success. Some reported local opinion suggested that the inward commuting that these activities generated was unsustainable in terms of energy use and environmental quality.

3.3.2. The Panel feels that in this context a wider perspective of sustainability is required. The County town role of Winchester is important to the wider area, to Hampshire and to the region as a whole. The prosperity that the concentration of public activities generates affects a wide area, and diluting this in the interests of short term environmental benefits could have long term unsustainable consequences. The Panel was told that public sector employment in the town could reduce in the near future by 1500 jobs as a result of current and predicted spending cuts. We feel that further destabilisation by relocating services would serve no-one's interests.

3.3.3. There remains however a significant imbalance between public and private sector employment, and this anticipated contraction of the public sector could have a significant effect on the local economy, at least in the short term. The Panel applauded steps to diversify employment, and stimulate new business activity. The BID has been energetic and successful in promoting the town centre, and the consequent recorded increase in footfall, if replicated in local business turnover, is extraordinary. The Panel applauds the efforts of the BID team, and hopes that it secures the votes necessary from local businesses to secure a second five year term.

3.3.4. There is a strong desire to attract new high-added value businesses to the town, and although most places have similar aspirations, the Panel agrees that Winchester has more potential than most to exploit the skills already present, and the quality of its environment. Winchester is constrained in attracting new, young start-up businesses by the cost of housing. We will return to this issue later, but the provision of cheap, flexible business space is already proving successful, and there is obviously demand for more. It was also suggested to the Panel that businesses being established at the other end of the career cycle, by established and experienced mature people interested in establishing their own businesses were better able to meet the high costs of a Winchester base. The Panel thought this was an interesting insight, and worthy of further exploration with local business organisations and academic institutions.

- 3.3.5. The Panel feels that the Town Forum's perspective on business development is unduly constrained by its declared boundary [eg it does not include the impact of IBM]. The Panel were made aware of the total number of people commuting into and out of Winchester daily, but the number that travel from the contiguous and local settlements – in particular Kings Worthy – would give a more useful understanding of “local” employees, and households who depend on Winchester town for employment and services. There are also significant employers located in the surrounding area. Not only do these provide employment for Winchester residents, but they may also be important contributors to future economic growth. There is no mention in the vision, for example, of IBM. Its Hursley campus is only three miles [check] from Winchester town centre, and must be by far the largest private sector employer of Winchester residents. While its location may not be the most sustainable, IBM's potential to stimulate further activity in high-value added business ought to be exploited, and embraced by the Forum.
- 3.3.6. Just as Barton Farm is generating concerns about the setting of Winchester to the north of the setting, so aspirations to develop Bushfield Camp by its owners the Church Commissioners is generating concerns about Winchester's southern border. Having viewed the area from Badger Farm to the east and Badger Farm Road to the south, panellists feel that concerns regarding its impact may be overstated. While this east facing downland is an important component of Winchester's setting (especially seen from the National Park), the previously developed area of the former military camp though only lightly screened has scope for further planting. With this it should be possible to accommodate the ‘knowledge park’ proposed by the land owners, if carefully designed, on this area without compromising views. Panellists noted that economic development policies related almost exclusively to diversification through incremental growth of small businesses. Winchester at present has no basis on which to respond to an approach from a new major employer to locate locally. If Rolls Royce had decided to move to Winchester rather than Chichester, or Vodafone to Winchester instead of Newbury, what would Winchester have done? Planning is not good at accommodating unexpected opportunities, but the Town Forum could identify possibilities without allocating them in statutory plans. The Panel did not have time to visit Morn Hill, but understands that development here was the consequence of a response to such an opportunity.
- 3.3.7. Perhaps more importantly, the Forum should know how it would respond to the unexpected declaration by a major employer to move out of Winchester. Local representatives referred to the discussions over many years about the future of the Police headquarters. The importance of major employers to the status and economy of Winchester as County town are recognised by some, but active encouragement of, and engagement with public and private sector employers could strengthen the long term sustainability of the town. The negative aspects of accommodating large scale employment in a small historic city can be mitigated by planning and transport measures, such as park and ride, of which, more later.
- 3.3.8. We discussed the role of Winchester as a conference town, and the constraints of hotel accommodation on strengthening this aspect of the economy. The size and status of the University of Winchester is an important contribution to the town's attractiveness and capacity, but the Panel feels that the economic potential of the conference market, without major investment in facilities, is likely to be limited. Additional hotel space will help to maximise use of current facilities as well as strengthen the town's tourism offer.

3.3.9. In discussion of the ratio of inward to outward commuting, local representatives referred to the potential development of the 'Carfax' site opposite the railway station entrance. Panellist agree that this could be a good location for new office accommodation for businesses employing people that currently commute out of Winchester, notably to London. This site is owned by the County and City Councils, and there are sites in the vicinity owned by others, notably the surface car parks serving the station, that may offer further development potential. We heard concern that there may be pressure to accommodate residential development on this site in order to maximise its development value, but the Panel feels that designation for commercial development should give the local planning authority sufficient control to ensure the most appropriate use. This would also be a suitable location for a hotel. A planning brief for the site, and possibly a wider area should ensure that the scale of development is sympathetic to the local context and views across the town.

### 3.4. Retail and leisure

3.4.1. Just as housing and heritage discussions are dominated at present by Barton Farm, so discussion of retail activity in Winchester is dominated by the long-standing proposals for Silver Hill. The Panel did not explore the plans in detail, but having walked the town centre, sees the logic of accommodating retail growth in a purpose-built extension to the retail core. The low level of vacancies, and the competition for units that do become available shows strong retail performance. The quality of the town centre as a place to visit and shop in, and the opportunity to combine shopping with other service and leisure activities helps Winchester to compete with larger centres in the sub-region.

3.4.2. While the High Street may be predictably dominated by familiar national names, the Panel found the peripheral streets to have a healthy mix of independent retailers, restaurants, pubs and other attractions. BID surveys show that footfall has increased by nearly 40% since it was established, which if accurate, is a remarkable success. The historic buildings of the core do well to accommodate modern trading, and infill development is generally well-designed and sympathetic. It may be more difficult to achieve this at Silver Hill, with the scale of development apparently necessary to make it viable, but it will take pressure off the High Street, and enable the town to hold on to and attract the national retailers that shoppers expect, and provide the footfall on which the independent retailers depend.

3.4.3. The Panel heard concerns that further growth of Winchester would put unsustainable pressure on the town centre as it struggles to meet the needs of a growing population. The Panel feels that such fears may be overstated. There is scope for the town centre to grow, for access to be improved and controlled, and for local centres to expand (as Weeke is doing) to meet local needs. Many historic towns in Britain are facing similar challenges, and there are examples of how this can be done. [eg Norwich, Cambridge and Exeter]

3.4.4. We heard of recent expansion of the market into the High Street and its successful trading despite concerns expressed by some High Street retailers. The market was in full swing during the Panel's visit. The High Street is a distinctive, attractive and popular space. The market increases the retail offer and is likely to be particularly attractive to visitors. It does however take up a lot of space in the relatively narrow pedestrianised area. This makes some areas congested and obscures many shop fronts, particularly with the style of stall used. The Panel feels that the Broadway (as intended) would be a more appropriate location for the market. Although this will be

compromised by bus routes until the Silver Hill development is introduced, steps could be taken to rationalise public car parking and taxi ranks to allow space for at least some stalls. Panellists applaud the ambition to make major improvements to the Broadway once the bus station is relocated.

- 3.4.5. The capacity of the town centre may be increased by developing the surface car parks following rationalisation of access (which we turn to later). Panellists feel these could be used for a variety of uses, including hotel accommodation, to encourage visitors to stay and spend more in the town.

### 3.5. Housing

- 3.5.1. Future housing provision is the issue that seems to attract the greatest attention locally. As we have already discussed, the proposals for Barton Farm have raised the debate to fever pitch, and current changes to national development policies and planning processes are complicating the picture. The Secretary of State's decision is imminent, and if it is to grant consent, as we have said, the Forum should work with all interested parties to secure the best possible development. If it is refused, the issue will not disappear. At some time in the future, the demand for housing will become irresistible and this site, accepted generally as the best available for large scale development, will come forward again. The Panel feels strongly that the Forum should acknowledge and tackle the inevitability of growth, and concentrate on ensuring that when and where it happens, it is carried out to the highest quality and in the best interests of the present, and most importantly the future, residents of Winchester.

- 3.5.2. The demographic projections set out in the Council's *Blueprint* make clear the consequences of restricting development to accommodate local changes only. An ageing population will become increasingly dependent on a shrinking economically active cohort that cannot afford to live in Winchester. Local representatives explained that this issue had been recognised and accepted relatively easily in the District's smaller towns and larger villages, where these consequences were already apparent, but denied so far in Winchester town, possibly because these issues are not yet at crisis point in the larger population. One panellist suggested that the issue might be brought into sharper focus by extrapolating the demographic generation for a further 20 or 30 years to emphasise and illustrate the unsustainable consequences of not allowing growth. Another suggested that the issues might be illustrated further by using the fictional characters of the *Blueprint* document, which have apparently been so useful in helping people to focus on the current issues. Projecting their circumstance in the future, under different scenarios could help people grasp the long term consequences of short term avoidance of change. In reality, change of some form will happen, even if the town adopts a 'do-nothing' policy, as its demographic profile evolves.

- 3.5.3. Accommodating new housing through urban intensification is well-established in Winchester. Panellists heard that some interests in Winchester object to the loss of larger houses and gardens while others see this as a sustainable alternative to urban extension. The Panel agrees with those who see the future of Winchester as requiring both, and encourages the Forum to promote standards and scrutiny that will ensure the best development in all circumstances. The Panel were generally impressed with the standard of infill and estate development in Winchester. Panellists suggested that visits by interested parties to successful projects elsewhere [eg. Hammarby, Stockholm; Accordia Cambridge; Bruges and Ghent; Delft; Edinburgh; Lincoln] in Britain and Europe could identify better solutions and broaden awareness of Winchester's



achievements so far. The possibility of media criticism of such 'extravagance' could be avoided by inviting the press representatives to participate, and perhaps to use twinning links as a starting point. The Academy of Urbanism has strong links with communities in Europe, and could help to broker and facilitate reciprocal visits.

3.5.4. Panellists share the local exasperation over the provision of 'affordable' housing. It is difficult to achieve significant provision through the development of small 'windfall sites' which are usually, and sometimes deliberately, below the threshold for such provision. If approved, the Barton Farm develop will provide 40% affordable homes, but with residential values as high as they are in Winchester, the Panel accepts that the likelihood of these making a significant contribution to local needs is small. This is not, in the view of the panel a reason for not proceeding. The population projections show that Winchester will need more economically active people in the future, and for this reason alone, major new housing development will be necessary, if the medium term stability and prosperity of the town is to be secured. A number of local representatives referred to the failure of social housing policy and finance, and the value locally of retained council housing. The Panel agrees that the future of affordable housing, locally and nationally, requires a radical overhaul of housing provision, the regulation of the housing market, and the way social housing is financed. These will not be resolved by local action, so in the meantime the Forum partners should do what they can to ameliorate a deteriorating situation. One way might be to identify sites suitable for 100% affordable houses for adoption, not as 'exception sites', but as a local planning policy allocation. Sites already in public ownership would be an obvious place to start. The promotion of Localism by the Government, and the desire by many agencies, public and private, to tackle the affordable housing issue provides a fertile context for innovation.

### 3.6. Transport

3.6.1. It was reported to the Panel that traffic congestion and access to the town centre are a major local issue, used by some to resist further growth. The Panel takes the view that access for cars is causing congestion, and that by restricting such access, significantly greater town centre capacity could be released for pedestrians and new development. The park and ride facilities reduce if not remove the need for commuting workers to drive into town. The reduction of cars parking in the town allows the amount of parking to be reduced, reducing the incentive for cars to drive into and around the centre. (Some congestion is likely to be caused by drivers searching for parking spaces.) Converting long stay parking spaces on the edge of the town centre to short stay, allows the short stay spaces around Friarsgate and North Walls to be closed and redeveloped. This will no doubt cause short term consternation, but experience in places like Durham and Bury St Edmunds suggest that the advantages will soon become apparent. The historic town centre is easily walkable for able-bodied people, and facilities for those less mobile can be maintained. Removing traffic will improve walkability, extending the range and increasing the attractiveness of pedestrian routes.

3.6.2. WINACC has prepared a persuasive overlay of the supposedly car-friendly Bluewater Park shopping centre in Kent on the centre of Winchester. This shows that the distance from the more peripheral car parks is no greater than from car parks used by Bluewater customers. Greater footfall between these car parks and Winchester town centre would increase the commercial potential along these routes. Removing cars seeking parking from town centre streets would allow them to be restricted to service and public transport vehicles only, closing them to through traffic. This would reduce pollution,

improve safety and environmental conditions, and encourage investment in areas like St Georges Street. It may help to prioritise access to all spaces in the town centre, in descending order: pedestrians, service vehicles, buses, cyclists, cars gaining access, and general traffic.

3.6.3.Reduced traffic flows would allow more streets to be pedestrianised or given pedestrian priority, and the one way system to be abandoned, allowing service vehicles to take shorter routes and public transport to serve better the most popular origins and destinations.

3.6.4.Public transport is apparently not well-used. It is expensive to operate and expensive to use by those who do not have a bus pass. Panellists questioned whether in the long term it would be better to provide public transport free at the point of use for all, recovering costs by other means. This would significantly increase use, reduce car use, encourage leisure activity and diversify the evening economy of the town centre. Such services could be linked to the park and ride buses which already provide a free service and could be used more intensively in off-peak periods for short central trips. These would be quicker as a result of reduced congestion and two-way streets.

3.6.5.The Panel understands the complex relationships between local and highway authority, and the income derived from public car parking. These should not constrain those engaged with the Forum in pursuing the benefits of radical changes.

### 3.7. Culture

3.7.1.The historic city of Winchester with its Cathedral, Crown Courts, Royal and military origins, Winchester College, Bishop's Palace, hospital, university and art school has cultural foundations of which the diverse components of the local community are justifiably proud. They have attracted an educated populace with high expectations and a willingness to promote cultural activities and events. Panellists were also made aware of the fragmentation into different communities of interest, and the possible reluctance to join forces and co-operate. Winchester increasingly promotes its festivals, but this could be more effective if they were better co-ordinated and mutually promoting,~and linked to other town centre improvement strategies, as for example, in Birmingham and Lincoln. The Panel felt there was a risk that events~organisers and the town as a whole interpret the enthusiasm of those involved as widespread popular support. This can breed complacency, and the reputation of the town and particular events can be devalued if they are not constantly refreshed and promoted to new markets. The Forum could provide the medium through which stronger mutual recognition, co-ordination and promotion could be encouraged.

3.7.2.The Panel observed that the expansion of the Discovery Centre on Jewry Street appears to be a real asset to the town, while the River Park leisure centre is still in need of improvement.

3.7.3.The town has a small theatre, but no music venue for smaller orchestra or rock music tours. It has no gallery for touring exhibitions. The opportunity to develop town centre sites may provide a suitable location in the future, and the Forum could encourage private and public sector institutions, especially the universities, to support additional cultural facilities appropriate to a growing town. There are many and diverse models that may inform future ambitions for Winchester: the Pallant House Gallery, Chichester; the Turner Gallery, Margate; the New Art Gallery, Walsall; the Barbara Hepworth

Gallery, Wakefield; Salts Mill, Saltaire; Lakeside Arts Centre, Nottingham; the Albany Empire, Deptford. Local representatives referred to the need for start-up facilities for artists, artisans and small creative businesses. The Panel agreed that these would assist not only cultural development and diversity in the town, but also increase its general attractiveness to investors.

### 3.8. Environment

3.8.1. The environmental benefits of traffic and transport changes are obvious, and the concentration of the population in a high density, high quality environment will help to reduce the carbon footprint of Winchester by reducing the need and desire to travel. As we have said in the context of the heritage of the historic city, fears of doing damage to the environment should not result in paralysis. We heard of frequent comparisons, from local people and visiting admirers, of Winchester with the walled hill towns of northern Italy. While this may be flattering to some, it is a simplistic and unhelpful comparison. We can learn much from other places, but Winchester is not a hill town, it has not had a town wall for many centuries, and it is not surrounded by vineyards. It plays an important role in the economy and society of Hampshire and the South East of England, and has to strengthen its relationship with its hinterland. It is not in a position to pull up its drawbridge however attractive that might sometimes seem. The Forum has a role in promoting a realistic role for Winchester which takes a wide and long term approach to sustainability to balance short term focus on energy saving and waste reduction.

### 3.9. Community

3.9.1. This element of the Forum's visions was not challenged during the Panel's visit, possibly because it focuses on the activities of the voluntary sector in Winchester, which was perhaps under-represented among the people we met. The main aspect of community activity addressed in our conversations that is not summarised above is education. The role of the state and private schools in the town seems well-established and uncontroversial. The importance of the Sixth Form College, Peter Symonds, was made clear to us, as was the increasing profile of the University of Winchester. We presume there is some forum for discussion and co-ordination among education providers outside the Town Forum, but the latter could be an important medium for connecting education, business, culture and environmental interests and ensuring that education at all levels is providing future generations of Wintonians with the skills and understanding to strengthen the sustainable success of the town.

3.9.2. The Panel felt that more could be made of the character assessment that has been carried out for the town, using it to promote greater awareness of local distinctiveness among the resident communities of the different areas, as has been achieved in Lincoln to good effect. As well as informing appropriate approaches to change, it can engender civic pride in individuals, and greater self-esteem for local communities.

## 4. The future of the Forum

4.1. We have referred already to the fragmentation of interests in Winchester. This seems to be a historic feature of a historic city which has been dominated for centuries by Royal patronage, the Church, the Law, the Military and public administration. The Forum should be just that -

an opportunity for the aspirations and expectations of the diverse interests of the town to be aired, in public, and conflicts recognised and resolved.~The Panel detected a remarkable degree of consensus among the representatives we spoke to, given the diversity of interests and priorities. We think this is a false consensus that focuses on the minor matters that are common ground and avoids the big issues on which there remains dissent and conflict. As the voting members of the Forum are all City Councillors, this consensus tends to be managed to minimise the potential for political point-scoring on a closely balanced council. The Forum and the City Council are excellent at caretaking by consensus, but appear constrained from exploring realistic policies for the future.

- 4.2. The Forum could either change its constitution or establish a subsidiary body within which dissent could be aired and argued over without forcing City Council members to adopt a particular position (at least at the outset). This could help reduce the intense scrutiny of matters that are of little importance by people with the time and inclination to endlessly debate pet issues, when they could be helping the town recognise its role in stimulating economic activity regionally and nationally at a time when other parts of the Country are at a disadvantage. We were told that the possibility of a Town Council to represent the six unparished wards of the town had been debated in the past and that the Forum was widely accepted as a sensible alternative. It was suggested at least once that the City of Winchester Trust acts *in loco parentis* for an elected parish/town council as far as planning matters are concerned. While this may be local shorthand, there is an important distinction between a lively and dedicated Civic Society, and a democratically elected third tier of local government. This should be acknowledged.
- 4.3. The social and economic challenges for some members of the Winchester community are acknowledged and addressed, but the combination of a well-educated and articulate community, living in a town blessed with few significant problems, tends to result in lengthy argument over minutiae~that is possibly stifling the creativity and progress that has shaped the heritage of Winchester over centuries. This is reflected in the lack of impetus behind the Local Strategic Partnership, and perhaps the Forum itself.
- 4.4. The Panel is certain that the Forum, in its future role, has to be the place for arguing and resolving where the future shape and nature of Winchester as a growing place, rather than a place for agreeing its finer qualities and the means of protecting them. The Panel heard that resistance to change arises from fear - of mediocrity in future development, of the loss of the familiar, and of the devaluing of the historic city's heritage.
- 4.5. The Forum has to damp down these fears and encourage local groups and individuals to tackle the real challenges of affordable housing, an ageing population, and an imbalanced economy. A confident community, valuing the past but focussing on the future, should be able to avoid mediocrity by asserting what it wants and expects from new development . With well-articulated policies and standards, what will be new development tomorrow can in time become the familiar and valued heritage of generations to come.
- 4.6. As part of our Place Partnering programme, the Academy will be establishing and facilitating a mutual support network among those places that participate. We hope that this will strengthen local capability, capacity and confidence, and we look forward to maintaining contact with the Winchester Town Forum through this medium.

**The Academy of Urbanism**  
70 Cowcross Street, London, EC1M 6EJ  
+44 (0)20 7251 8777