

Winchester Town Forum (St Maurice's Covert) Informal Group

Notes of the Working Group Tuesday 26 January 2016

Attending:

Adrian Browning, Historic Buildings Specialist (Closed Churches Division), Church Commissioners

William McWilliam, General Manager, Mercure Wessex Hotel

Fay Johnson, Store Manager, Debenhams

Catherine Turness, Executive Director, Winchester BID

Cllr Fiona Mather)

Cllr Liz Hutchison) Winchester City Councillors

Cllr Martin Tod)

Eloise Appleby, Assistant Director (Economy & Communities)

Apologies: Emma Williams, Manager, Greggs

1. Welcome and Introductions

Mrs Appleby welcomed guests from outside the Council, and briefly reminded the group of the purpose of the project under discussion. This information is largely set out in the draft specification (attached) and is not therefore repeated here.

2. Appointment of Chairman

It was agreed that Cllr Tod would chair the meeting.

3. Stakeholder views and suggestions

Cllr Hutchison explained that St Maurice's Covert and its surroundings have the potential to be a very special area of the city, but the enhancement project requires a partnership approach to be successfully delivered. The views of a range of stakeholders must be taken into account as part of this.

Debenhams: there are windows on one side within the Covert. Many charity stalls use the space which can appear to downgrade it. These are often squeezed in alongside the florist stall. The former church tower is the fire exit out of Debenhams café. The window looking onto the Covert often features large promotional posters, but on the Debenhams side of the windows there are cosmetics counters.

Church Commissioners: after demolition in 1950s the site was conveyed in two parts – one to a private company (Edwin Jones & Co) which developed and built the store. The area around the tower and footprint under the Covert were conveyed to the City Council. There are covenants on both parts, including WCC's responsibility to maintain the Covert as open space and in good condition.

Action: EA to check on ownerships and maintenance responsibility (eg for tower).

Action: EA to check on gravestones behind the Covert – are they actual graves or just stones?

Wessex Hotel: Used to let market traders park in staff car park, but this has been stopped. Hotel customers comment on overlooking the 'bin area' and the Hotel would welcome the opportunity to improve the Covert. The staff car park is now maintained every Saturday by the weekend handyman, and trees have been lopped. There is a fire door at that end of the car park, which is also used as an accessible entrance. There are no plans to stop using this as a car park because staff are travelling in from a long distance and late/early hours

Winchester BID: There is a missed opportunity for directing foot flow between the High Street and Cathedral via the Covert. The BID is keen to see the retention of the strings of Christmas lights which have been introduced in recent years. In order to encourage use it needs a 'feature' – eg sculpture, possibly events. Charity stalls do not achieve this. The BID would like to see less antisocial behaviour, skateboarding and general 'hanging around' which deters visitors.

The bins are a key challenge for this project. Market Lane and Market Street suffer, as do other parts of the city. In other places, businesses use sacks rather than wheelie bins so they do not clog up the street. The BID offers a local service for trade waste collection, but the contracts are often let from head office and decisions are not made locally. Is there an immediate solution in this area? Is there a wider project here to improve the trade waste situation across the City Centre?

Action: Cllr Tod to propose Informal Scrutiny Group on commercial waste collection.

Excellent WCs in Market Lane. Need to be maintained and highlighted for visitors. Look at timings and lighting in the evening.

Lighting in general needs to be considered.

4. The Brief

The group requested the following be incorporated:

- Opportunity to bring out the history and architecture of the church/site.
- Talk about range of uses (eg at Christmas), and explain about the way the charities operate in the space
- Clarify stages of work (bid, designs)
- Add in a little more information under the contextual analysis
- P7 – top paragraph – do not present covenants as a definitive constraint
- Mention bike stands
- Add in the BID under stakeholder list
- Criteria – refer to minority groups/backgrounds

Action: EA to include suggested timings when the next revision

Action: EA to circulate brief to Receiver General at Winchester Cathedral for information.

5. Next Steps

- Revised brief for comment – to be agreed by email
- Publish on SE Business Portal/Contracts Finder websites
- Evaluation process – to be timed to take place post election period
- EA to draft consultee list ready to give to chosen bidder
- Next meeting will be evaluation meeting – w/c 9th May

CT: reminded the group that when it came to doing the works, consideration should be given to business within the town – eg Christmas trading period, summer visitor season. This was unlikely to happen in the very near future, as there may be a need for listed building consent, wider consultation etc.

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