

Castle View - Your Questions Answered

OVER the last two weeks, city council leader Ian Barker has answered some of the most frequently asked questions about plans for the Castle View development, in which retail and cultural outlets and parking would be built on the canal corridor site, which encompasses land bounded by Moor Lane, Edward Street, St Leonardgate and Stonewell. Here, he answers questions sent in by readers.

1. [A draft development agreement has been signed with Centros Miller. Is the document available for the people of Lancaster to see and do the terms refer to the land becoming a multi-storey car-park?](#)
(Jase Reynolds, Lancaster)

The full agreement is not available as it contains commercially sensitive material. However a summary which is in the public domain was presented to the council's overview and scrutiny committee and is in the public domain. A multi-storey car park of 800 places is envisaged. However, part of this will be below ground. Centros Miller (CM) have said that the total height will not rise above the roof line of the new terraced housing to be constructed on the western side of Alfred Street.

Park and Ride is also needed as part of a sustainable approach to Lancaster's transport problems. The county council has recently announced plans for a Park and Ride site at junction 34 and I have been urging them to look at other sites too. Park and Ride is probably more appropriate (though not exclusively so) for long stay commuter parking rather than the short stay associated with retail. Some long stay places will be lost and the city council is looking at replacing these with park and ride.

2. [I think that the current car-parks are unattractive and should be re-developed in the best way possible for the people of Lancaster. Does Coun Barker believe that a retail-led development with associated car-parking offers an imaginative re-development of our land that will be cherished by future generations? Following on from this question, I would welcome his views on why the city council felt that there was no need for a national design competition for architects over the future of our land? I personally believe that creativity, design and architectural merit in Lancaster will not be best served by signing a pre-agreement with single retail-led developer.](#)
(Jase Reynolds, Lancaster)

The car parks are unattractive and have been so for a long time since the land was cleared for a relief road scheme that was never built. Two reasons exclude a design competition of the type you suggest. First, the car parks are only 40 per cent of the proposed site, the rest was in private ownership, predominantly Mitchells. Clearly a design competition would have to be sponsored by all relevant owners. Secondly the finance for the development does not come from the city council but the developers. The council does not have access to the finance to implement a development by itself; it needs a developer partner.

As I have indicated in previous answers there is a development brief for the site which was subject to extensive public consultation. The CM proposals respond to that brief. We haven't got as far as detailed architectural designs yet. Lets see how CM's architects respond to their brief.

3. [Have you a reasonable explanation as to why the resident's survey conducted by Centros Miller wasn't put before the cabinet? And is it true that the questionnaires sent in by residents closest to the development were excluded from the results of Centros Miller's consultation, and if so why?](#)
(It's Our City)

The cabinet did not rely either on the surveys (of shoppers and of residents) carried out for Centros Miller. These will be available to planning committee when they consider the planning application. The decision of the cabinet was primarily about the terms of the development agreement; it did not anticipate the decision on the planning committee. Nevertheless, cabinet noted that the proposals had the potential to fulfil the requirements of the planning brief for the site. This was arrived at after extensive public consultation and was independent of any pressure group or developer.

I have no knowledge of the exclusion of nearby residents from the consultation. However, I do find It's Our City's stance on consultation somewhat confused. On the one hand they repeatedly criticise CM's methods as

flawed; on the other they repeatedly criticise the cabinet for not using these supposedly flawed consultation results in arriving at a decision. There is a glaring contradiction there that they either ignore or are unaware of.

4. The council's own canal corridor north development brief recommends "extensive public involvement in the development of the proposals" - what is LCC doing to ensure that full public consultation is being carried out? And when and where is the next full public consultation meeting with the council and CM to discuss plans for the canal corridor north?

(It's Our City)

CM have had several rounds of public consultation in arriving at the masterplan. They will be undertaking more as they develop their plans further both with the city council and with local stakeholders. I understand It's Our City have been specifically invited by them. Then, as previously indicated, there will be statutory consultation on the planning application and, in all probability, a public inquiry at which evidence will be invited.

5. Are you aware of the recent article in the national Guardian (October 6) which reports that retail figures are showing a national decline? Given this context, why then do you support a retail led development?

(It's Our City)

I wasn't aware of the article at the time the cabinet met. That would have required a degree of clairvoyance since it was published some two months later! Nor have I been able to locate it since. However, I would comment that it is the longer term trends that are important in considering such a development. The White Young Green retail survey that was carried out for the local development framework looks at long term trends. It does show two things. First, that Lancaster is losing market share to competing centres that are developing their retail offer. Secondly we need to add about 30,000 square metres by 2016 to retain the existing share. That's what the CM proposals do.

6. How and why did CM become the preferred developer without any kind of competitive process in which their proposals were tested against others?

(It's Our City)

Centros Miller, having acquired an interest in the Mitchell's land, approached the council and expressed a willingness to work within the development brief. Clearly the council could not carry out a competitive tendering exercise for the land Mitchell's owned. Previous attempts to attract a developer for the canal corridor produced a proposal that did not, in my view, fulfil the council and community aspirations as set out in the Local Plan.

The advantage of working with CM as preferred developer is that they are able to adopt a master planning process and go through a number of rounds of consultation before producing a final scheme. Incidentally, the cabinet did not take this decision alone. There was informal consultation with all five political groups on the city council before the decision was taken to cabinet and all five approved this as the way forward. Recent letters from Coun Barry on this point in the Guardian are misleading. The Green Group just as much as the other four groups agreed that this was the right approach.

Of course appointing a preferred developer without a competitive tendering exercise does place an obligation on the council to demonstrate by other means that it is obtaining 'best value.' In order to do this the council obtained independent valuation advice to make sure that we would be acting properly and prudently in awarding preferred developer status.

7. If planning permission is refused, is it the case that CM will be able to appeal that decision and will any council tax payer's money at all be spent in defending that appeal?

(It's Our City)

Yes CM could appeal if they thought the council had unreasonably refused permission. Costs would be a matter for the Inspector to decide.

8. Does any councillor or council officer have any shares or other interests in CM or any associated company?

(It's Our City)

Not as far as I am aware. Its up to councillors and officers to declare interests. There is a public register of councillors' interests and a register that the chief executive keeps of officers' interests.

What saddens me about this question is the implication that decisions are being taken for improper reasons. It's Our City have not produced a scintilla of evidence to support this implication, yet it is a leitmotif of all their questions - and Emilie Secker's in particular. It really is about time she put up or shut up on this point.

9. [How many jobs will be created by this development, how many will be full-time, secure, with pensions etc? How many will be temporary and part time?](#)
(It's Our City)

I don't have an exact figure. I understand that, based on like for like comparisons, the Debenhams could produce around 300. That's about a third of the development in terms of retail floor space so you can make your own estimates. The exact number depends on the mix of retailers. Clearly it will produce several hundred jobs for Lancaster. I don't think we should idly turn them down.

I am on record as saying that we need a broad spectrum of jobs for people with different qualifications. Retail is bound to be an important component of that. We shouldn't put all our eggs in the basket of hoping to attract high tech or high salary jobs.

Most retailers rely on a mix of full time and part time jobs to meet the weekend and seasonal peaks. I don't expect this development to be any different, but of course I don't have numbers at this early stage.

10. [You stated that CM's traffic impact and retail impact studies will be independently scrutinised. By whom?](#)
(It's Our City)

The county council will look at the traffic impacts. Government Office North West, as well as the council's own independent retail consultants, will scrutinise the retail impacts. GONW has to look at retail impact from a regional perspective and this would certainly be a feature of any planning inquiry.

11. [You said that Lancaster is the preferred centre for people from the wider district to come to for major non-food shopping. How will existing non-food traders in Lancaster city centre not be damaged by the building of a massive non-food shopping retail park?](#)
(It's Our City)

To reiterate the point. We are losing market share to Preston, the Trafford Centre and other places. There are major retail expansion planned in both these places and also in Blackpool and Kendal. To retain market share and thus keep jobs in Lancaster we need to keep our centre attractive we need to offer a variety of shops. The key to this is attracting the major department store that the city lacks.

12. [The old Mitchells brewery and others on the site are large and are built from local stone which is in keeping with the rest of town. Does the council have a policy to ensure that any development \(Centros Miller or otherwise\) recycles this stone into the new buildings? Also, what are Ian Barker's thoughts on the environmental/landscape importance of the trees in Alfred Street?](#)
(Alison Murray, Lancaster)

So far, designs for the elevations of the buildings have not been produced, CM are at the "block planning" stage, so I can't give a definite answer. The city council through its adopted Local Plan has tried to encourage development that is sympathetic to local styles and materials. I think we have to avoid both the sort of copying of old styles which looks like pastiche and things that are totally out of character. I think the point about local stone is well made and I will raise it at the next opportunity.

With regard to the Alfred Street, the plans are to make this a residential area without through traffic. The sketches I have seen incorporate trees.

13. [Centros Miller have talked about creating a 'permeable development.' Has Coun Barker spotted that some of the streets to be created by Centros Miller pass between tall buildings and are half the width of the streets we currently have in Lancaster? I think these will be more like dark ginnels!](#)
(Alison Murray, Lancaster)

CM have recently revised their plans to remove one of these ginnels (the one leading to the back of the Grand

from the centre of the development) entirely. Other have been realigned and widened (eg at St Anne's Place). We do need to avoid creating unpleasant spaces such as Anchor Lane and Chancery Lane, which haven't been improved by the cinema development. So again its something to be looked at in the detailed designs but CM have made some alterations already to avoid this.

18 October 2006