

Response to the public consultation on the Mitcham's Corner Development Framework

The Friends of Mitcham's Corner (FMC) have participated in preliminary meetings, attended the public consultation exhibitions, read through the Draft Development Framework, and consulted our membership. The proposed framework advances the thinking about Mitcham's Corner hugely, and FMC greatly appreciate the effort and expertise which have gone into compiling it. We believe this represents the start of a process to facilitate the successful regeneration of the area.

The following points have been raised in response to the consultation:

1 Objectives

We suggest that the list of objectives (page 11) be polished more so that it is a good, persuasive summary of the proposals. It would be good to eliminate repetition and reduce the number of items, to increase impact. We have the following comments on specific objectives:

Theme 1 – Creating a connected place

- **Maximise the benefits of the Greater Cambridge City Deal.** We believe this point should have less prominence. Moreover, given the highly controversial nature of some City Deal proposals so far, it might be better phrased (borrowing from page 34) as “Increase the use of sustainable modes of travel, supporting the aims of the Transport Strategy for Cambridge and the Greater Cambridge City Deal”.
- The first item should be the **transformation of the highway layout by severing the gyratory system.** We strongly believe that removing the gyratory system is a precondition for any significant redevelopment of Mitcham's Corner, and therefore the word “potentially” should be deleted.
- **Create a low-speed, simplified and integrated highway space.** This is the key to the approach being suggested in the Development Framework. Our impression is that while most stakeholders want a low-speed and simplified system, they need more convincing about an “integrated space” with no segregation of cars, cycles and pedestrians. There is no precedent in Cambridge for such an innovative design at a major junction, and people need evidence-based assurance that the approach would be safe (and – importantly – *perceived* as safe). We appreciate the examples from other towns and cities that are used to illustrate the ideas being put forward. Nevertheless, for the layperson it is hard to visualise what the concrete application to Mitcham's Corner might mean. In the next stage it would be good to have more visual impressions of the proposals for the junctions and public space; some videos of similar schemes elsewhere would also be useful, plus comments by users on how well those schemes have worked.

It would be good to explicitly mention **safety** in this point, as this is a major concern for pedestrians and cyclists who use Mitcham's Corner. There is also the question of how the elderly, visually impaired and users of mobility vehicles will be able to cross the highway safely and with confidence: expert advice and consultation with relevant stakeholders are essential to ensure the design meets the needs of these users.

We note that only a single approach to redesigning the highway system is being suggested – the “shared space” concept. This runs the risk that if the traffic modelling is unfavourable, or if stakeholders dislike the proposal, there is no Plan B. We would suggest putting forward at least one other design for consideration and modelling – for example, a scheme with more traditional segregation of vehicles, cycles and pedestrians, or a design that simplifies the connection between Milton Road and Victoria Avenue, eliminating the “dog leg”.

- **Improve bus facilities and connections to them.** Again, this is a very desirable objective: local stakeholders want better services and less spatially dispersed stops (the term “rationalised” is used on page 22 and should be included here).
- **Improve access and connections through the area.** We agree that connectivity should be encouraged throughout the Opportunity Area, as illustrated on the plan on page 43.

Theme 2 – Improving the District Centre

We agree with the objectives grouped under this theme; in particular, we strongly endorse the aim of **promoting connections from Mitcham's Corner to the River Cam**. Since this could be achieved through appropriate redevelopment of the site of Barclays Bank or the Tivoli, we suggest adding some guidelines on these windfall sites to the Development Framework. On a related point, we agree with the proposal that the boundary of the Opportunity Area should be extended to the riverside, as shown in the map on page 33.

Theme 3 – Creating places for people

Again, good objectives. The idea of a public space where people can sit and meet is an attractive one, but for this to be achieved successfully, the space needs to be designed carefully so it is suitable and appealing for casual relaxation as well as occasional public events such as pop-up markets.

2 Additional objectives

A couple of objectives that were high in our survey results are missing from the list of objectives:

- An emphasis on **affordable residential accommodation** for local people. Many of our members are uneasy about opportunistic development of aparthotels and student hostels turning the area into a dormitory district. These erode the cohesion of the community and its sustainability. (At the same time, it would be destructive to Mitcham's Corner as a thriving local centre if too many commercial premises were turned into flats. A balance must be struck.)
- In general there is scant mention of **car parking facilities**. Provision of parking is relegated to phase 3 of the redevelopment project, when it should be designed in from the start. Some stakeholders (especially retailers) regard parking as an extremely important issue. With the redesign of the highway system there would be space for “woodland parking”, i.e. an area primarily for car parking planted attractively with small trees, and also suitable for occasional other uses such as pop-up events.

We note that one reason why there is demand for short-term parking is that the bus services are unreliable and poorly coordinated, and in particular the Park and Ride does not stop at Mitcham's Corner with regularity.

- There is also considerable opportunity for **additional cycle parking**: at present the provision of dedicated parking spaces for cycles in the area is really poor, despite the number of shops

and pubs. This should be improved greatly, thus encouraging more people to visit Mitcham's Corner on their cycles.

3 Planning guidance

- In the discussions of both Henry Giles House and the Staples site there are statements that "development should **improve the quality of the public realm**" and that an "**urban-design-led approach**" should be taken – this should be made a general principle applicable to *any* new developments in the area.
- On page 44 it is said that "the **heights recommended** in this guidance will be the starting point for consideration of any new development" – but we could actually find no explicit guidelines on building heights except when specifically discussing Henry Giles House and the Staples site. On a similar topic, the discussion of Henry Giles House mentions the 'possibility' of 5+1 storeys, which is surely just placing temptation in the way of developers!
- We have already mentioned the possibility that **redevelopment of the Barclays Bank or Tivoli sites** could provide a connection to the River Cam, and have suggested that the Development Framework should include some guidelines on these windfall sites. We recently canvassed our members on what uses the Tivoli should be put to: there was a strong preference for a use that continues to serve the public in some way, perhaps with flats above. The historic frontage should be retained, and conceivably the rear of the site could provide access to a pedestrian/cycle bridge over the river. Similar possibilities may exist for the Barclays site should it become available.
- In the design guidance, reference is made several times (e.g. page 45) to **what architects must do and how they should design**. However, developments are primarily the result of clients' requirements and briefs, and therefore it would be more appropriate to direct the comments on e.g. G.R.A.I.N and water-sensitive design at *developers and landowners*.
- FMC are concerned that many recent developments in the area have been **implemented in a way that is different from that authorised** by the planning department. For example, the Student Castle is not solely for Anglia Ruskin students as stated originally; the Trafalgar Road flats are not residential in nature, but like an aparthotel; and Kings Residence is no longer for PhD students but consists of private flats. In order for the development guidelines to achieve the desired objectives, it is vital that they are enforced robustly.

4 Further points of detail

We list below a range of comments on specific points within the Development Framework.

- Move the gateway on Victoria Road up to Greens Road, to slow traffic down before it gets to Mitcham's Corner.
- Include Whichcote House on Milton Road within the Opportunity Area because it has now been sold to a private developer.
- The discussion of potential funding sources (page 48) should also mention the possibility of selling freed-up land for development ("land exchange").

5 Conclusions

FMC are delighted at the progress that has been made in recent years in thinking about Mitcham's Corner. After being largely ignored for many years, the area's importance and potential is being recognised: it has been designated as an Opportunity Area and given its own

section in the Local Plan; it has received much media attention and been assigned a Co-ordinator; and a sense of community and purpose has grown among local stakeholders. The development framework is another major step forward, and we are pleased to give it our full support. We urge the Council to approve it as a binding Supplementary Planning Document associated with the Local Plan, and begin the process of identifying funding.