

Response of the Chair and Vice Chair of the Conservation & Heritage Advisory Committee to the brief for the City Centre Urban Design Guide

1. Introduction: what is the organisation's role and interest in the city centre?

The Conservation and Heritage Advisory Committee (CHAC) is committed to safeguarding designated heritage assets across the City. Our mission is to provide advice and guidance in respect of planning applications involving listed buildings, scheduled monuments, conservation areas and the world heritage site. Our focus is on seeking to ensure that development proposals pay due regard to the significance of these assets and their settings, and that proposals for change are designed with sensitivity and care.

2. Do you support the preparation of a design guide and why?

We wholeheartedly support the preparation of design guidance, as we believe this provides a valuable opportunity for DCC to 'set out its stall' in terms of what is expected of developers and their design teams. It also provides an opportunity to communicate what it is that makes Derby special, and in some cases unique, and how important it is to protect this special character and uniqueness.

3. What are the three most common issues in delivering quality design in the city centre?

- Making sure the document is ambitious and aspirational, with clarity that it is putting 'meat on the bones' of the Vision for the city, with a clear 'read across' to other guidance (eg. tall buildings strategy) so that developers understand that all the policy guidance is joined up/complementary and they are clear about the context they're working in.
- Setting out some clear ground rules in terms of process to create a level playing field for all, and testing the guidance properly to ensure it will raise the bar, even when in the hands of the unimaginative or cynical.
- There will be a temptation to make the guidance overly prescriptive which should be avoided. The emphasis should be providing evidence as to how a new development respects the context in which it is placed.
- Ensuring the document has 'teeth', ie. is adoptable/enshrined in planning policy and can stand up to challenge

4. What are the key five topics that the design guide should cover?

Not counting the Introduction, the 5 chapters appear to cover what is required, but suggest the WHS is 'front and centre' in the overarching principles section, where the importance of the City's heritage in defining its character and appearance is discussed – ignoring this will be fatal, especially given the city's growing vulnerability when it comes to this precious and enviable 'badge' Also, urge caution when it comes to character areas, as these are often multi-faceted with a wide range of factors contributing to 'character'. These can often be over-simplified in the interests of assigning 'character'. Evidence should be provided to demonstrate how these multiple characteristics are woven in to a design proposal.

5. What type or scale of development should specifically be covered?

Suggest the guidance needs to focus on the major developments, but ensure the principles are transferable to smaller schemes – a clear message that DCC is serious about protecting the key characteristics of the City and addressing the steady undermining of this that can occur when mediocrity and ignorance prevail. It may also be pertinent to identify areas where failings have already occurred in order to ensure they are not used as precedent.

6. Which areas/sites in the city centre require area-based guidance?

Be good to see the riverside treated properly and with some seriousness, in recognition of its contribution as a character-defining element of the City, plus other key sites (Arboretum Square – small but looking increasingly vulnerable?) If the guidance is to be successful it needs to be

applicable to all central areas of the city without exception. Currently the principal connection routes across the city have lost identity, having been eroded predominantly by poor design of frontages. A degree of cohesion and intimacy of scale needs to be brought back to these areas.

7. What level of detail would you expect for these?

Development briefs and design codes provide scope for more detailed guidance – these are useful tools in the armoury when it comes to raising standards of design and development. It is also important that development briefs and design codes engage developers in demonstrating how proposals respect the grain, character, scale and evolution of the area and how these factors are integrated in to the design proposals. In the end however, it is about raising the bar significantly and attracting the best design teams to come and work in the City. If they know what is expected, good designers and conservation professionals will rise to the challenge.

CHAC 15th December 2023