

THE TAMWORTH and DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY
"PROTECTING THE PAST, PROMOTING THE PRESENT, PLANNING FOR POSTERITY"

**Planning Department,
Tamworth Borough Council**

28th February 2021

Dear Sirs,

Gungate Regeneration Quarter Consultation

The Tamworth and District Civic Society (TDCS) notes the online consultation open to 'residents', 'visitors', and 'town centre businesses', but as the area's Civic Society, we wish to express our keen interest in this matter, and our desire for direct consultation and dialogue with the Council over these key and sensitive matters affecting the future of our town.

At this stage we would like to make the following observations.

The online documentation states: "Any new uses proposed in the Gungate Regeneration Quarter must work alongside each other, complement the rest of the town centre and also take into account the neighbouring proposals associated with the Tamworth Future High Streets regeneration program that include the relocation of South Staffordshire College to the site of the Tamworth Cooperative Society Department Store, the creation of a new Enterprise Centre at the Cooperative offices and the public realm improvements proposed at St Edithas Square. We are therefore seeking your views and opinions on these key design themes and principles which will in turn inform the future development of the Gungate Quarter".

We are concerned that such meaningful public consultation cannot be achieved when the public knows very little about these proposals, which have been worked upon behind council closed doors for the last year with - it has only recently been revealed - discussion with selected partners, but not with the public or planning and conservation bodies like the Civic Society. This goes against an undertaking by the former Council Leader to our TDCS Chairman that he would instruct officers to include TDCS in discussions and plans. From the scant information provided to date via press releases to the media TDCS has cause to fear that mistakes are likely to be made and opportunities lost. The funding available could and should be used to put right the planning and design errors and blunders of the past, and create a great economic and social and architectural future for the historic town centre based on its amazing and unique history and heritage.

The trumpeted relocation of the College to Church Street may prove problematic. Clearly the present site of the College occupies a much larger area and enjoys vastly superior accommodation to that potentially available at the Co-op building. What facilities are there to cope with students and staff, such as parking? What happens to the current college site? What exactly is being proposed for Church Street, and St. Editha's Square, and Market Street? We have the chance of a life-time to put things right in this historic town, and we believe that the expertise, knowledge, and insight of The Civic Society should be utilised in consultation and discussion with the Council.

With specific regard to the Gungate area proposals, we stress the need for sensitive and sustainable design, and quality architecture and building materials. The artists' illustrations in the Gungate documentation are disappointing. What happened to "Building Better, Building Beautiful"? It appears that the unloved flat-roofed, glass and concrete of the early 1970s, is to be replaced by flat-roofed,

glass and concrete of 2021. Please employ consultants with more vision, and understanding of and empathy with an historic market town.

On the basis that we have a four storey Police Station building, it is stated that we can therefore have high-rise buildings in the north of the town. No, this a chance to be rid of that unsuitable building, not replace with like for like. Spinning School Lane was a street of character and interest prior to the 1970s redevelopment - of which only Guy's Almshouses remain - and this is a chance to return it to that status with quality and appropriate architecture and design.

Tamworth's historic skyline does not need high-rise buildings other than the Castle and Church. We appreciate that the loss of parking off Spinning School Lane is driving the idea of multi-storey parking to compensate, but it should be noted that many people dislike or refuse to use multi-storey car parks, and that such buildings are usually inherently unattractive. Reducing the amount of ground-level, open-air parking in the town centre is not a good idea for encouraging visitors and shoppers.

For some reason the consultation plans do not specifically name the redundant Youth Centre building although it is included in the site, and other affected buildings are named. The site was given by a town benefactor for the Youth Centre, with covenants as to that use. What steps have been taken to honour and preserve that usage for the young people of our town in the proposed new development? Why is there no mention of youth centres or youth clubs in the proposed uses? One of the main social problems we have in our community is anti-social behaviour by young people with no such places or direction on offer to them with alternative horizons and opportunities.

Whilst efforts have been made since 2018 with Victoria Road as a 'gateway' into town, the pedestrian route from the Railway Station along Albert Road merits improvement. It is currently not clear to visitors where it leads, and is not very welcoming. Is this to be addressed?

The proposed leisure spaces need genuine green space and water features, with lots of links and allusions to local heritage and history. TDCS would like, given the close association of Mr. Thomas Guy (not "Sir Thomas" as the documentation erroneously states) with this area, to see a plaza or square fronting Lower Gungate where the Gungate Precinct was (and NCP carpark is) and adjacent to the Almshouses, named after Thomas Guy, with a central statue of Mr. Guy. The plaza - maybe with a built frontage to Lower Gungate and an archway through to the plaza - bounded with small quality shops/eateries and residential flats above, and the plaza/square providing somewhere for food and craft markets and farmers markets to be regularly held. The architecture should of course sympathetically reflect the historic site and neighbouring properties.

As the community planning and conservation body for Tamworth, with much local knowledge and information, and broad-ranging skills and experience among our membership, we would appreciate the opening of direct dialogue with the Council on these important development proposals relating to Gungate and the High Street Fund. Consulting openly and in detail with the public at every stage of the process will be crucial to achieving a sustainable and supported outcome.

Yours faithfully.

The Tamworth and District Civic Society