

Nottingham Civic Society: Submission to the Call-In Panel: Delegated Decision 2649 Central Library site on Angel Row

Summary

The Civic Society believes that the decision should be called in as:

- a commercial agreement is being made that effectively closes the Central Library without clear safeguards to maintain the Central Library, in its central location, in both the short and long term.
- that a major development has been implicitly approved (based on office space) without apparently taking into account the planning constraints that exist in this area

Introduction

The principle that the City Council can enter into commercial arrangements to help provide resources to deliver its services is not disputed by the Civic Society.

However, where the asset involved is the site of a publicly accessible resource, in this case the Central Library, then those arrangements should be open and transparent not only to ensure that the Central Library continues to be based in the centre of Nottingham but also that the due planning process will fully scrutinise the development.

Central Library Location

The Civic Society believes that the Central Library should remain in the centre of Nottingham at a location that is equally easily accessible as now.

Although an email from Jon Collins to the Society states *“The arrangement is based on the Library remaining on Angel Row within the development and the Council getting a capital sum to meet the internal set-up and transition costs,”* this is not a commitment as shown by the additional caveat *“I have nevertheless asked that before we make a final decision to keep Central Library on Angel Row we look to see if there are better options.”*

The concern is that the Central Library will be “temporarily” relocated elsewhere, possibly less accessible, during the development and then subsequently that this location becomes its permanent home.

The Central Library must be, as its name implies, not only the main collections site, but also located within the city centre, easily accessed by the city’s bus routes, and prominently situated on a well-used thoroughfare, in order to maintain current, and encourage new, use.

Attention must be paid to the proper accommodation of both printed and digital facilities and specialised sections such as the Children’s and Music libraries properly accommodated. Concern has been expressed that the well-used and well-respected Local Studies library may be at risk of being moved away from the city centre. This must not happen.

The library must remain a central resource for the city and the aspiration for new and improved facilities, ideally within the current site, is to be welcomed. This new library could, and indeed should, become an iconic symbol of Nottingham UNESCO City of Literature.

To be fair, Jon Collins does say *“that the whole reason for taking this decision has been to enable us to fulfil our Manifesto commitment to provide a new and refurbished Central Library”*.

Therefore, the formal Delegated Decision should contain, in the publicly accessible documents, detailed commitments to the intermediate and long term location of the Central Library.

Planning Considerations

The Central Library currently occupies a sensitive location in the Old Market Square Conservation Area.

Consequently the Civic Society would expect that the existing front range of the building would be retained with the new office space located behind; in this respect we are somewhat reassured by Peter Carroll who wrote in an email reply to the Society that *“the Council has every intention of retaining and refurbishing this part of the building.”*, although it is not a commitment.

Additionally the Civic Society is concerned that, on this occasion (unlike the London Road Petrol Filling Station site) the Council’s Design Guides are adhered to with respect to the height of buildings on Mount Street and Maid Marian Way and that proposed designs are brought before the Heritage Strategy Panel for consideration. In this case we are appreciative of Peter Carroll’s commitment that *“The City Council is fully aware of its planning guidance and the heritage issues involved”*.

However, already at least one website¹ contains far more details: that the development will be 120,000 sq. ft. and five to nine storeys high, along with a sample design (see Appendix A).

Extent of the site

The footprint of the planned development is not clear: there is currently the Central Library building and the small car park/loading bay behind it. However, there is an area beyond the boundary and up to Maid Marian Way (now paved) that is, it is believed, also owned by the City Council and was originally a development site identified in the Local Plan.

The sample design (Appendix A) does not show this being used which results in a tall building immediately behind the original façade. Utilising some or all of this additional area would clearly allow an equivalent amount of office space but with fewer storeys.

¹ <http://www.skyscrapercity.com/showthread.php?p=136617658>

Appendix A: Possible Design

