

It's Our City

9th April 2006

Centros Miller
Albemarle House
1 Albemarle Street
London W1S 4TB

Received
16th May 2006

Dear Centros Miller,

Open Letter to All City, County Councillors and Centros Miller

Lancaster local interest group, "It's Our City", was formed in response to the selection of Centros Miller as preferred developers for the Canal Corridor North site in the City.

Following the publication of a site master plan, "It's Our City" has identified four key areas of concern which we now believe need to be comprehensively and publicly addressed. These are: traffic, physical design, economics and the consultation process.

In this, our first formal response to the proposed development, "It's Our City" wishes to publicly raise the following concerns and questions about the proposed Canal Corridor North Development. We are seeking a response from both city and county councillors and developers Centros Miller.

22nd MAY 2006

SEE CENTROS MILLER'S RESPONSES HIGHLIGHTED IN BLUE BELOW

1. TRAFFIC

"It's Our City" is gravely concerned that the proposed development will exacerbate traffic congestion in Lancaster. With respect to the proposed development:

1.1. What is the projected increase in the number of cars and delivery vehicles and how will this affect existing congestion?

We cannot project the number of vehicle movements until the mix and content of the scheme is confirmed. We are still at the masterplanning stage and a full Transport Impact Assessment (TIA) study will be undertaken by our transport consultants during the next six months of detailed design preparation for the planning application. Our consultants have already undertaken much survey work in order to update the County Council's computer model of Lancaster's highway network and this is being used to test a number of scenarios. This work will be revealed in our third round of consultation at the end of May.

1.2. What are the details of the proposed link to the M6 and the impact on Caton Rd and Bulk Rd?

Centros Miller is not involved with the proposed M6 link project. The work described above will include any impact on Caton Road and Bulk Road.

1.3. What assurances can be given that Ullswater Rd will not become even more of a rat run due to the proposed closure of Edward St and is there any evidence?
Our transport consultants have surveyed the various 'rat runs' and included these within their work so far. While we are well aware of this issue, we can give no assurances at this stage since there is so much more detailed work to be undertaken.

1.4. What are the results of consultation with the County Council regarding increased traffic levels?
We are working with the officers of the County Council and any proposed transport solutions for the development will have to be agreed by them.

We also believe that plans to replace existing car parks with a multi-storey car park may not be appropriate.

1.5. What justification is there for building a multi-storey rather than a 'Park and Ride', given existing congestion and pollution levels?
The provision of Park & Ride is not part of the City Council's development brief for this site, though we understand that both city and county councils are continuing to consider the provision of Park & Ride separately. A full study of the parking needs for the Canal Corridor North site, including the relationship with and function of other city centre parking, will be part of our planning application.

1.6. How many spaces will there be in the proposed multi-storey car park and how high above ground will it be?
The proposed number of spaces has yet to be determined but will be based on the need and the access. Due to the contours of the site, we believe that most of the proposed multi-level car park will be below ground level and that it will not rise above the proposed housing on Alfred Street.

2. PHYSICAL DESIGN

Plans for the site are progressing swiftly. Centros Miller has produced a 'master plan' of the site which includes an artist's impression. "It's Our City" believes it is time to engage in a full discussion relating to the physical aspects of the proposed development. In particular:

2.1. We would like to see details of the proposed architectural plans, designs and materials for the new buildings and structures on the site. This includes the dimensions of any new buildings and structures and their effect on the current skyline and views of the city.

All will be revealed in time. At present we are still only at the masterplanning stage – deciding the access, thoroughfares, mix of uses, locations and relative sizes of the proposed buildings. More will be revealed in the forthcoming third round of consultation, but the details of the designs can only be shown much later as we have not yet begun the detailed design work.

2.2. Are any bars to be built on site?
No. We feel that Lancaster already has a sufficient number of bars and pubs. However, there will be cafés and restaurants to complement the cultural activities on the site.

2.3. We would like to know why the 'public green space' is so small in comparison to the size of the development area as a whole.

The green space is only one of a number of public spaces in the masterplan. This is a city centre scheme and we feel that the development should reflect that.

2.4. We are concerned that the current proposals do not include an imaginative approach to the inclusion of public space. Will the public spaces within the development be anything other than shopping thoroughfares on the current plans?

The proposed masterplan is for a mixed-use development and retail will be only one of the elements. There will also be residential, cultural, office, leisure and small workshop uses. The proposed public spaces will have different characters, as they will be located at the nodes where pedestrian routes across the site intersect. Most likely, the space around the canal side will have distinctly leisure feel; the green space near to Alfred Street will be a small park; the space near the department store will relate more to shopping; the space near the theatres will reflect the needs of those cultural activities; the space around Stonewell and the bottom of Moor Lane may have a more civic or leisure feel to it; and the space next to the Grand will relate to the theatre and the Musician's Co-operative. But none of this has been decided yet as the detailed design work is yet to begin.

The public are free to walk the highways and byways of Lancaster. We do not want to see the whole area of the development become a privately owned and privately controlled shopping centre.

[See below.](#)

2.5. What is the commitment to future public right of access, public accountability and ownership in the proposed development?

The proposed development will definitely not be an enclosed shopping centre that shuts its doors at night. On the contrary, our masterplan proposal envisages a development that will consist of a variety of separate buildings that face onto open pedestrian streets and public open spaces. Therefore it will effectively be an extension of the existing city centre, open for the public to use and enjoy at all times. It will, however, be in private control on a long lease with the City Council owning the freehold. This is similar to many city centre developments across the country. Being under private control will ensure that high levels of cleaning, maintenance and security can be provided.

We note that the current master plan includes the building of a new bridge over the canal from the Bath Mill area to the development. There is also the proposal to demolish a section of Stonewell to make way for a bridge from the development area to a point in the midst of the St Nicholas shopping arcade.

No, there is no bridge proposed over the canal into the Bath Mill area, though it was suggested as a possibility in the initial rounds of consultation. The proposed pedestrian bridge over Stonewell is an essential element needed to properly integrate the development with the city centre. It will provide level access from the middle of the site through to the city centre. But there will also be a crossing at street level across Stonewell.

2.6. Are the bridges necessary to the development? What is the advantage of the proposed walkway over the current pelican crossing at Stonewell?

[See above.](#)

2.7. What is the reasoning behind building a bridge from this proposed busy area directly into the quiet residential area of Bath Mill?

See above – there is no bridge planned, so there is no reasoning behind it.

Another concern is that a large section of the proposed development site is post industrial.

2.8. What will be done about the possible existence and exposure or release of buried contaminants during the construction process and in the future?

A full Environmental Impact Assessment study (EIA) will be undertaken by our environment consultants as part of the preparation for the planning application during the detailed design stage to come. This will identify any potential contaminants and recommend any further site investigations and how such contaminants will be dealt with if they are present.

3. ECONOMICS

3.1. There are already many empty shops in Lancaster. We do not wish to see this situation made worse.

In fact the prime shopping area – Penny Street – actually has a very low vacancy rate due to the demand for prime retail space from retailers. The retail elements of the proposed development will be designed to extend the city's prime shopping area and provide the added retail magnet of a department store. Many of the conclusions drawn from the recent private survey published on this subject are quite illogical or have made huge leaps of negative imagination about our proposed development. The effect of any development can only be quantified once its content has been determined. An expert assessment of this will be undertaken by our retail property consultants as part of the planning application once the detailed design work goes ahead. For further explanation, see below.

3.2. Centros Miller has claimed that the development will not have an adverse effect on existing retailers. What evidence is there to support this assertion?

From an initial examination of available market research, we believe that Lancaster's shopping catchment – the area from which shoppers are drawn to the city – is restricted by the city's presently very limited retail offer. Many of Lancaster's urban population – up to 60% – are known to regularly visit other centres (particularly Preston) to fulfil their shopping needs. We believe that many people from the more rural areas around Lancaster do not shop in the city, preferring to travel to Preston, Manchester and even Carlisle.

Lancaster is, we believe, the largest city in the country that does not have a department store and the introduction of a department store will significantly enhance the city's retail attraction to shoppers as well as its attraction to retailers. This enhanced retail offer will, we believe, fulfil much more of Lancaster's shoppers' needs and limit their desire to travel to other locations. It will also fulfil more of the needs of the rural population, particularly to the north (because of Preston dominating the area to the south), and will significantly reduce the number of long distance trips they make to other centres.

Lancaster's catchment will therefore expand as it will draw more shoppers from areas that should naturally come to Lancaster if it had the right level of retail attraction. Our estimate is that if Lancaster expands its retail offer in this

way, it will retain about an extra £30 million of retail expenditure from its catchment area. That money is currently being spent elsewhere and by keeping it in Lancaster, retailers across the city will benefit.

There is of course the alternative scenario of no retail expansion if this development does not go ahead. In our view, there is a huge risk to existing business in the city if Lancaster fails to respond to major retail developments about to happen in Preston and other Lancashire towns. The huge development proposed for Preston could literally suck business and jobs out of Lancaster if nothing is done.

However, all of the above will be tested as part of the preparation for the planning application. As with the other studies mentioned above, a full Retail Impact Assessment (RIA) will be undertaken by Centros Miller's expert consultants in this field.

3.3. Centros also claim that the development will bring in new shoppers to the city. Who are these shoppers? From where are they coming? Again, what is the evidence for this assertion?

See above.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

To date, Centros Miller's consultation has been inadequate for a development which will radically alter the very heart of Lancaster for decades to come. "It's Our City" believes that there must be public participation about how this site should be used.

We agree entirely with the latter point but we do not understand how anyone can come to the conclusion that our consultation to date has been inadequate. There have been two rounds of consultation during the past six months and a third round has been arranged for the end of May. We have invited local residents, key stakeholders, civic groups, business groups and the public to let us have their views. We have sought as much publicity as possible, have provided a project website for up-to-date information, and provided feedback conduits via email, telephone hotline and Freepost – as well as face-to-face through the many meetings we have organised. We have also surveyed the public in the city centre as well as surveying the residents living in the areas closest to the site.

Starting with a blank sheet, first we listened to what everyone's concerns were, then we presented our initial masterplan concepts, and at the end of this month we will be putting more meat on the bones of the masterplan and presenting the work our consultants have done to date on the transport issues. All this, it should be noted, represents only the consultation we are undertaking on the masterplan.

Once the detailed design work gets underway, there will be further, more extensive consultation running over many months. Amongst many activities similar to those above, this phase will include a public exhibition and an extensive leaflet drop to households seeking feedback from everyone. Our objective is to engage everyone possible and use the feedback gained to refine the plans so that we deliver the best possible development for Lancaster.

4.1. What assurances will the City Council give that full and unbiased consultation and public participation will be conducted on a city-wide scale?

See above, but we cannot speak for the City Council. However, full reports of all our consultation work will be submitted to the council as supplementary documents to the planning application.

It's Our City looks forward to a swift and comprehensive public response from Councillors and Centros Miller to the issues raised. Responses should be sent to: itsourcity@yahoo.co.uk.

Yours Faithfully
It's Our City

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We trust that our responses highlighted in blue above provide the swift and comprehensive response that It's Our City is seeking. We will, of course, continue to listen and respond to all concerns where possible, but we hope that people will understand that not everything can be addressed at this masterplanning stage. Once we move on to the detailed design stage, then the content and detail of the proposed development will evolve and be distilled so that our full retail, transport and environmental studies can be undertaken. These will establish all the facts relating to these major issues and provide verification of our proposed solutions. These will be public documents and we will then be happy to explain the technicalities and answer any questions about these issues at that time.

Steve Bryson
On behalf of Centros Miller
22nd May 2006