

Article from Bristol Civic Society Newsletter

www.bristolcivicsociety.org.uk

St Mary Le Port and Castle Park.

The Society played a leading role in the Plant a Tree in '73 campaign. This saw hundreds of trees planted in our streets. I suggest that few actions by the Society have had such obvious benefits. Trees civilise the streets, in some cases by partially concealing new buildings! Now, 40 years on, the contribution that street trees make to air quality and their mitigation of climate change factors such as increasing urban temperatures is greatly appreciated.

The St Mary Le Port site is ringed with mature plane trees, all of which were due to be felled in the 2006 outline development plans. Saving these trees was one reason for putting together an 'Alternative approach' for the site, which was outlined in the January 2010 Newsletter. An updated and full version is on the Society's website. (Give hyperlink)

Although no new plans have been made public by the developers it appears that they no longer intend to fell the Wine Street trees in order to 'narrow' this street, which is very welcome. However the High Street trees are still threatened.

Also, as was made clear at the February 8th BCS meeting at the Colston Hall it is still intended to build on part of Castle Park, mainly the valuable central green space, fronting Wine Street.

Public opposition to loss of any Castle Park land was made very

clear in 2006. Since then the Council's Parks & Green Spaces Strategy has adopted standards for park quantity and accessibility. This has now been used to justify disposal of surplus open space elsewhere.

The city centre is already well below the adopted standards. Also, as a city centre park Castle Park serves many office and shop workers, shoppers and visitors, as well as a steadily growing number of local residents.

There is thus no justification for disposing of park land here - so why is it even being considered?

There appear two reasons. First, the urban planning mantra of creating continuous 'active frontages' for pedestrians - in this case on Wine Street to its junction with Union Street.

This means building on part of the park. So instead of the present view into green space from Wine St one would be looking at another row of shops. This would be the ground floor of a multi storey building and would seriously damage the visual connection between Broadmead and the park.

The second and apparently main reason offered for building on this park land is that 'the development is not viable without it'.

The cost of acquiring a development site is obviously a major factor in viability. There are three owners involved here - two property companies owning the Bank of England and Norwich Union buildings, and the City Council, ground landlords of all the land. It is simple for the property companies - the bigger the development the more they get for their sites.

In contrast, the City Council faces a conflict of interest being landowner, planning authority and provider /manager of our parks. The wish to maximise land value appears to be encouraging Councillors to support plans that have damaging quality of life implications.

In 2006 it was maintained that Castle Park requires major alterations which could only be funded by a large contribution from a development that used park land. It is now clear that the park users do not want radical changes. They want the park put in good order, modestly improved and above all properly maintained. This was also the view of BCS Open Spaces Group in their response to the recent AGSP consultation. (Give hyperlink to website)

The normal 'developers contributions' towards local amenities provision should be used for such improvements. Also, Castle Park is not a 'local' park but a prime city centre asset which should be financially supported. .

The Alternative Approach plan is intended to show that a very significant redevelopment can be achieved without building on any park land or felling any street trees. This may not generate the big pay off for landowners to which they have been used, but should be viable in today's circumstances. And certainly more acceptable to the public.

Roger Mortimer

Alternative Approach

Aerial Block Plan - KEY

..... main pedestrian routes, including restored link from St Nic's Market through to park and beyond & new pedestrian route from Bristol Bridge to St Mary Le Port Square.

New continuous pedestrian colonnade to High St / Wine St frontages/trading forecourts.

LTSB existing offices remain in use,

NU building demolished

BoE bank building enlarged by 2 storeys & fully upgraded. Banking Hall becomes Market Hall. Residential above.

STMLP new square around St Mary Le Port historic remains
A,B,C,D,E New 4/5/6 storey buildings, residential over flexible commercial space. Buildings linked to create new public spaces. Varied roofline. Generous balconies to flats. All roofs either 'green' or PV / solar panels.

MC - new 'market cross' on tightened corner of High St / Wine St. Traffic restricted on these streets.

* Indicates green areas threatened by redevelopment

