



ISSUES PAPER ON SNEINTON MARKET CONSERVATION AREA

(The Civic Society has been consulted about a number of reviews of existing Conservation Areas. Although the Sneinton Market CA has yet to be reviewed, these are some of the points that our response would contain)

History

The Sneinton Market area owes its existence to the General Inclosures Act of 1845 which was necessitated by the appalling housing conditions prevailing in Nottingham, whose slums - created by such a density of population in such a small space - have often been described by social historians as the worst in the world at the time.

Under an “Act to encourage the Establishment of Public Baths and Wash-houses”, which had been proposed on 2 February 1844 but which was only passed on 26 August 1846, “about 120 acres were allocated to the Corporation in trust for the inhabitants, including the site of the present Victoria Park and cemetery, and the present Victoria Baths which occupy the same site as the first public baths to be built in Nottingham.” There was a covenant on the open space at Sneinton Market, which was always to be dedicated to open public use.

Description of the CA

The Sneinton Market CA embraces buildings on three sides of the Market space itself; buildings adjacent to this also affect the CA, and the presumption in PPG 15 is that nothing would be done which would affect the character of the CA.

Dominating the Market Place is the Victoria Leisure Centre (H Moses Wood 1850 / Marriott Ogle Tarbotton 1877 / Arthur Brown 1896 / T Wallis Gordon 1926 / David Jenkin 1973) with its landmark tower erected unlike its predecessor both to create a landmark at four road junctions and to be a beacon, reminding one of its presence, when surrounding buildings were lower in height; some distant sightings are still possible, and the presumption is that views of it (into the CA) and views out of it (for example to St Stephen’s church – whose tower (1837-9) is the work of Thomas Rickman, who named the orders of Gothic architecture - and St Alban’s [Ukrainian] church (1886-7 / 1898), the work of the great Victorian architect George Frederick Bodley) would not be affected by any subsequent building work; hence views of the VLC tower might feature in objections to any proposal that affected them. *Glimpses* are no substitute for *views*.

Listed buildings in the CA

The two nearby listed churches mentioned above, Green’s Mill (1807 / 1981-6) and the former (listed) Albion church (Oliver and Booker 1856 / 1904) are all visible from the conservation area, and these views should remain. Near the VLC stand four Grade II listed buildings, all the subject of regeneration in the last ten years: Victoria Park View flats (Bakewell & Bromley 1876), refurbished at the start of an intended Market Area regeneration, Bancroft’s building (1869 / 2003), the Ragged School (Edwards 1858-9) and the Bath Inn (c1820 / 1928). Contemporaneous with this has been the creation of retail units in the base of the former fruit and veg warehouse, with similar regeneration of the Market sheds.

Regeneration

Apart from the transformation of the Midland Bank (T B Whinney 1911) for Allan Joyce’s practice, little has in fact happened on the regeneration front and the Market shed have been eroded by demolition and fire. The pavement near the Midland Bank is populated by beds, and Bath Street itself

provides both a route into the city and an escape from Huntingdon Street / Lower Parliament Street towards the A612 and Lady Bay Bridge.

However the CA has recently been extended to accommodate the low rise 1926 neo-classical buildings (by T Wallis Gordon) on the perimeter of the bus garage, opposite the Pretty Windows pub *aka* Peggys Inn (Evans & Son 1905-6), which therefore affords this end of the Market area some protection. While a fight is unlikely to be made for the bus sheds behind as such, some tramlines remain *in situ* and are therefore of historic interest, it is known that Nottingham City Transport (and perhaps the other operators who use the complex) wish to move out of the city centre. What therefore of this site?

Possible uses of bus garage

There have been suggestions of a Waitrose or similar superstore, where there would be enough space to provide parking. Yet it has also been pointed out that the large and underused Co-op on Carlton Road is nearby, and could possibly be persuaded to make itself more attractive to a wider clientele, particularly if a proposed housing scheme for the adjacent empty site is carried out. Therefore, at least temporarily, it could well be worth – once the buses have gone – to use the sheds as a car park for the Ice Arena; it would be a simple matter to paint out spaces, install CCTV and employ a few staff to create a Secure Car Park, essential in today's society and a selling-point for all those car parks who can claim it. Should a congestion charge or workplace levy on car-parking be imposed in the city, this would have a daytime use too.

Victoria Leisure Centre

As for the VLC itself, it is clear that the tower (conceivably the work of A E Lambert, cp his very similar Victoria Station tower of slightly later date) and the 1896 masonry building immediately beneath it (including the remains of the Jewish Bath) and the 1876 girdered hall over the 1850 pool are the parts that initially cry out to be preserved, as public opinion has shown; the tower is a landmark, and the entrance beneath it could be modified to create a more welcoming aspect to Gedling Street and the Market space (perhaps one should start calling it Market Place). Some flexibility may be possible regarding other parts of the site provided that what is proposed continues to respect the retained parts of the existing building and the rest of the conservation area itself. If it were possible to extend into the cleared site in Brook Street to the rear of the existing building, then the site might be expanded to provide the facilities expected today. With the uncertainty of the present housing market, building on that site might not be the profitable option it once was, and an estimate puts land values in that area at about a million pounds an acre: not particularly high.

Market Buildings

The 1938 Market Sheds (conceivably a recasing under R M Finch of earlier work post- 1900) have been subject to erosion and damage. However they are flexible units which could accommodate both indoor and outdoor stallholders and they should be restored.

The parade of shops opposite the Ice Arena and Bunker's Hill is derelict, and should either be restored or else replaced by a development of similar scale: no taller.

Setting

A suggestion has been made that the current market space / carpark should become a public square, with trees and other features. If so, how much more important (and it is vital anyway) that the market sheds should not be replaced with tall buildings which would dominate and destroy the whole CA. The flats at the far end of the bus garage "frame" the CA from a suitable distance; nothing taller than what is there now should be contemplated for the CA which would compromise the nature of both the market space and the nearby Victoria Park. Indeed the whole Conservation Area is "framed" to the west by the Ice Arena and Bunkers Hill pub and to the north by Marco Island (former GPO sorting office of 1939) and the BT building in Bath Street / Brook Street (M H Bristow 1968-9).

Scale

A very strong characteristic of this conservation area is its *scale*. Within its area there are two featured buildings to the north (Park View Flats and the tower of the Victoria Leisure Centre) but otherwise buildings are of a height: along the east side of Bath Street, continuing across the west side of Sneinton Road, round to the King William IV pub and back along the east side of Manvers Street. The bus garage opposite, although not in the CA, maintains this scale, as do the classical-styled offices along Southwell Road (which are in the CA). The former Barclays Bank at the end of Manvers Street (Swann

& Wright 1907) acts as a punctuation mark here and does not obtrude; the same can be said of the Peggys Inn (Pretty Windows) which buffers up to the later market sheds behind it.

Hence our objections to large-scaled work on east side of Lower Parliament Street opposite the Bunkers Hill pub and the Ice Arena, at a point when one should be opening out the Market area, not closing it off. And also to the raising in height of the market sheds: there are roads between them, and taller units would turn these roads into “canyons”.

Connectivity with the City

Yet to make this area attractive and used by a wider clientèle, it is essential to restore connectivity with the city centre. The market provides a busy through route for pedestrians: there is a direct route down Hockley towards the Market Square area.

Yet to reach this one crosses two busy roads conveying the City’s north-south traffic. Without being unnecessarily ambitious but taking the example of Maid Marian Way, well thought-out landscaping and well-positioned pedestrian crossings (pelicans, not belisha beacons) would reconnect Sneinton Market to the City.

Character Assessment

It is essential that the area should have a proper Character Assessment done by the city council prior to any thinking about new buildings.

In 2001 the then Northern Architectural Adviser of the Victorian Society commended the Sneinton Market area for “having retained its grain.” English Heritage states that "defining the 'special interest' of an area is the main purpose of an appraisal. The distinctiveness of a place may well derive from more than its appearance. Such distinctiveness may draw on other senses and experiences, such as sounds, smells, local environmental conditions or historic associations.”

EH goes on to say: “The most important policy is the presumption against the loss of elements which have been identified in the character assessment as making a positive contribution to the special interest for which the area was designated.”

Therefore just because some buildings may be less attractive than others does not exclude them from being protected. The integrity of a CA is key and the more this is whittled away the more the historic character is undone. The essence is that the character has to build on the existing history and that includes buildings whether they are high Architecture or not. It is just not good enough to show lots of exciting street activity; it has to be grounded on what already exists. Hence one would for example question the replacement by a café of the monumental masons (former police station) at the end of Robin Hood Street. It uses that corner well, and in fact with its window display it is (despite its business) attractive. Surely the place for “sitting out” will be in the market area itself.

Maintenance

It is often forgotten that buildings and areas do not look after themselves. One would obviously cite the fire-damaged row of market sheds still completely unprotected (after several months) let alone restored. And problems with the baths themselves have been demonstrated, although again one could point out that purpose-built brand new leisure centres within the City and County contemporaneous with the 1973 refit of the Victoria Leisure Centre have themselves undergone major refurbishments in the past ten or fifteen years. Victoria, although its layout presents different challenges, has not had this major refurbishment.

Safety

The other Maintenance issue is with the area itself. It has been pointed out that however well-meant and imaginative the schemes for regeneration appear to be, they will fall at the first hurdle if investment cannot be attracted because of the behaviour of certain people who use the area. The disadvantaged congregate there because there exist in the area several centres for their use and benefit. Historically these centres have clustered in the area, hence those who need them will also gather in the area.

And their behaviour is not disciplined, because of the nature of their needs and because of the proximity of substances which they abuse. Discipline in the form of car-park wardens is clearly present on the site when it is being used as a paying car park. Discipline on the site, and the protection of the public as a

whole, must be addressed. Community wardens and other appropriate officers (conceivably security officers employed by different stakeholders or by the market management board itself) must therefore be assigned to the site, for the benefit of everyone who uses it. Until this issue is addressed the regeneration of the area will not happen, regardless of what buildings or spaces exist on the site.

Conclusion

There are many exciting possibilities for this area. Its northern part is served by one of the busiest bus routes in the city, and it has three main roads bounding its other sides. It provides a major resource for the people of Sneinton and St Ann's, and we have demonstrated that it has plenty more to offer the people of Nottingham as a whole. Imaginative schemes for the area abound, but the regeneration of the area begins by addressing three issues: public safety, maintenance and traffic management. Regeneration *begins* by addressing these issues: a proactive approach which will then make the area attractive, provided its character, its "handwriting" as Gillian Clarke calls it, is kept: within the context of regeneration it is still perfectly possible, and essential, for this conservation area to "retain its grain."

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