

## CHESTERFIELD AND DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY

### Comments on Planning Application CHE/21/464/OUT

#### Proposed redevelopment of site of Chesterfield Hotel

- 1 The Civic Society committee has considered this application and the documents submitted in connection with it. We wish to support the proposal as it is described in outline but would like to make a number of points on matters of detail, mostly in connection with the 'Design and Access Statement' prepared by Maber Associates Ltd.
- 2 On p. 5 of their paper Maber describe the hotel as 'currently undergoing demolition'. Progress towards this desirable end seems to have stalled since the remaining contents were removed several months ago. The Civic Society committee would like to see the building demolished as soon as possible. Even if the land was only used in the interim as a temporary car-park the impression given to those arriving in Chesterfield by train would be an improvement on what greets them at present.
- 3 The statement on p. 6 that the site 'has strong transportation links and major approaches from three sides' is meaningless. It is close to the town's railway station and is skirted on one side by a road leading to the station which continues as a secondary distributor route from the town to the north-east and junction 30 of the M1. It is nowhere near the main bus-stops in the town centre.
- 4 The statement on the same page that the site 'sits in the context of Grade I and Grade II heritage assets with key views from the station to the Parish Church spire' is equally meaningless. It adjoins the Grade II listed Midland Railway building of c.1870 now known as North Midland House, and from it can be seen the Grade I listed parish church of St Mary and All Saints. It is also possible to see in the distance some other listed buildings.
- 5 Also on p. 6 is the first of several references to the 'HS2 masterplan' (or 'HS2 station masterplan'). We consider the use of this phrase seriously misleading. The Borough Council has repeatedly stressed that the proposed redevelopment of the station approach (the 'Station Masterplan') can be funded independently of the north-eastern arm of HS2 and will go ahead whether or not the railway is built. Reasonable people may differ as to the likelihood (or desirability) of the line being built, or when. The important point, which in our view must not be lost sight of, is that the urgently needed redevelopment of the station approach is not directly connected with HS2, either financially or in design or engineering terms. No changes are planned to the station buildings or to the four running lines through the station. Maber should be asked not to use phrases that suggest the two are connected in future documents prepared for the Borough Council.
- 6 There is further evidence in the first paragraph on p. 7 of a lack of understanding of the history and topography of Chesterfield. It would be

interesting to know what Maber thinks the phrase ‘town’s historic core’ means and where it is to be found. The (new) Market Place laid out in the 1190s has never been called a ‘market square’ (if only because it is roughly triangular) and the present route on foot from the station up what remains of Corporation Street, through the churchyard, across Rykneld Square and along Burlington Street has never been the ‘main pedestrian thoroughfare’ to the Market Place (or anywhere else). This is a modern route created by the building of Corporation Street in 1870 and the re-ordering of the churchyard at different dates in the 19th and 20th centuries. Even Burlington Street only dates from the 1830s. Historically the Market Place was served principally by the main west–east route through the medieval built-up area (West Bars–Church Lane–Spa Lane), supplemented by roads leading from the main south–north route (Lordsmill Street–St Mary’s Gate–Tapton Lane), which itself ran into the earlier market place on the north side of the parish church.

- 7 The nonsense continues in the second paragraph on p. 7. The statement that ‘Chesterfield has a very visible and rich character within this historic core that directly links to the site from corporation street (sic) and continues through to market square, as well as those within the immediate vicinity of the site’ is both meaningless and illiterate (‘those’ has no antecedent). The statement is said to be illustrated by the pictures on p. 9, two of which show buildings on Knifsmithgate and Burlington Street, several hundred yards away from the Chesterfield Hotel. The captions to these two pictures are hopelessly inaccurate.
- 8 The further references on p. 13 to the ‘HS2 Railway Station redevelopment’ and ‘the HS2 complex’ should in our view be avoided in further statements concerning the redevelopment of the station approach or adjoining sites.
- 9 The statement on p. 14 concerning the lack of archaeological potential of the site is accurate, although it would have been helpful if a word had not been omitted from the second sentence and the remaining words printed in the right order. It would have been even more helpful (and simpler) to have said that until 1870 the land occupied by Corporation Street and the buildings on either side of the road was used mainly for grazing, apart from the area included in the garden at the back of Pump House, the property at the junction of Lordsmill Street and Tapton Lane which was demolished to make way for Corporation Street.
- 10 Once again, we deprecate the connection made on p. 17 between the redevelopment of the station approach and the building of the north-eastern arm of HS2. The drawing on this page wrongly labels the lower section of Corporation Street (near North Midland House) ‘Crow Lane’.
- 11 On p. 19 and later there are references to the need to preserve a view of the parish church spire from the station approach. This we support (and so agree that the eastern half of the Chesterfield Hotel site should be rebuilt to a height of no more than three storeys) but this is a not a case of ‘framing’ the church spire, merely leaving it visible from the station approach (and the platforms). The ‘frame’ shown in the picture on p. 26 encloses a great deal of sky and several other buildings as well as the tower and spire of the parish church.

- 12 In this connection, we wish to refer to the lengthy letter of 13 July 2021 from Historic England, cautioning the local authority against granting the application as it stands. Stripped of planning verbiage, this four-page letter can be reduced to an objection to the possible obstruction of a view of the parish church from the station. We fail to see how the proposed rebuilding of the hotel site can achieve this, since it involves the demolition of a large **four-storey** building and its replacement by a **three-storey** building. The view of the church from the station will, if anything, be improved by this change, since three-storey buildings are generally less tall than four-storey buildings.
- 13 The Historic England submission is also (like Maber's report) marred by an ignorance of the topography of medieval Chesterfield. It is difficult to say what, if anything, the phrase 'purposeful placement' means but it ignores the fact that the church (like other early minster churches) was built within the protective curtilage of a Roman fort. Forts were usually built on high ground to make them more easily defensible; the one at Chesterfield commanded good views of the Rother valley up and down the road between Derby and Rotherham. The word 'historic' as used twice in this paragraph means nothing except possibly 'old' (of which it is not a synonym), and the comment about streets following the sloping terrain is banal. All streets until modern times ran on the surface of the ground, not above or below. If a town is established on the top of the hill, the roads approaching it will be on a slope. There is more verbiage in the statement that 'The townscape is characterised by a fine grain'; we have no idea what either a fine-grained (or for that matter a coarse-grained) townscape is supposed to look like. There is in fact little 'variety of building heights' near the church: most of the buildings are of two or three storeys. Finally, the suggestion that the church spire 'leans in three directions' will come as a surprise to those who mastered geometry to GCSE level.
- 14 Returning to Maber's report, the suggestion on p. 24 that the Chesterfield Hotel is of 'some historical interest' is questionable but redundant since its demolition has been authorised. The statement that it is 'one of the last remaining buildings conforming to the historical street pattern prior to the incision of the A61 cutting' is by contrast simply wrong. Most of the buildings erected in the 1870s on Corporation Street north of the Inner Relief Road footbridge are still standing, including the listed Stephenson Memorial Hall; those to the south of the bridge, apart from the hotel and North Midland House, were demolished when the Inner Relief Road was built. The phrase 'Engineer's Offices at Goods Yard, British Rail Station' is anachronistic; the building has for many years been occupied by a firm of insurance agents, and both the goods yard and British Rail are long since departed. Corporation Street is not part of the 'historical street pattern' of Chesterfield, if that phrase is meant to refer to the medieval built-up area. The only road in this part of the borough in the Middle Ages was Bishops Mill Lane, which led from the old market place to the watermill belonging to the dean of Lincoln's manor of Chesterfield. Apart from the short length now called Station Back Lane, the whole of Bishops Mill Lane disappeared during nineteenth-century redevelopment.

- 15 Most if not all the historical errors in the Design and Access Statement could have been avoided had its authors used the readily available book, *Chesterfield Streets and Houses*, preferably alongside a manual on how to write clear, accurate English and the services of a competent proof-reader.
- 16 Unconnected with Maber's Design and Access Statement we are bemused by the Coal Authority's suggestion that there may be unrecorded shallow coal workings on the site of the Chesterfield Hotel. This may be a case of a public body erring on the side of caution but we can state authoritatively that there is no historical evidence for coal mining, either in the Middle Ages or later, so close to the medieval built-up area. As we have already explained, the land in question was used for grazing until it was built up following the opening of the railway through Chesterfield in 1840.
- 17 We are irritated, rather than bemused, by the report supplied by Messrs Eastwood & Partners on coal mining on the site. This says nothing that would not be obvious to anyone capable of glancing at successive editions of the 1:2500 scale Ordnance Survey map and the BGS map of the area, and is padded out with another document from the Coal Authority. The report seems to us an avoidable waste of public money.
- 18 We are considerably more annoyed by the letter from an officer of Derbyshire County Council with the curious job title of 'Executive Director Place'. This seems to be a case of highway engineers at County Hall operating in a fantasy world in which residents of Chesterfield are to be forced to cycle everywhere because it is good for them. Frequent references to the proposed Chesterfield Cycle Network and to websites promoting cycling reinforce this impression. Those at County Hall who suffer from this delusion need to be told, once and for all, as firmly as possible, that most people who live or work in Chesterfield, or travel into or out of the town for shopping or leisure, do not wish to cycle, and they certainly do not want to be told how they should travel. They wish to continue using the mode of transport of their choice, whether that be to walk, to drive in their own car, take a bus or taxi, or even cycle. Rather than construct elaborate plans telling people how they should get to the new building, it would be simpler to recall how people used to get to the Chesterfield Hotel and assume that this pattern will continue. Civic Society committee members cannot remember traffic jams ever building up around the hotel because of excessive numbers arriving by car, or anyone having a heart attack because they had chosen not to cycle there. We believe that the recommendations made in this letter are completely divorced from reality.

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Chesterfield and District Civic Society  
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