From The Chairman,
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The Very Reverend the Dean of Ripon
Ripon Cathedral Offices
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5th March 2021

Dear Dean

Ripon Cathedral Renewed

The Society welcomes the enthusiasm and commitment of Chapter in pursuing a sustainable future for the Cathedral. Furthermore, the Society understands and appreciates the dilemmas facing Chapter created by the need to balance spiritual, operational, heritage and visitor demands upon the building and its setting.

An exhibition of proposals was presented in the Cathedral during the summer and autumn of 2020. Ripon Civic Society members were encouraged to visit the exhibition and share their thoughts and comments. For this reason the RCS Committee had chosen not to present a 'Society' view of the proposals. On reflection, as Chapter may be close to submitting applications, it is now thought time for the Society to comment on the proposals as then known.

It is recognised that there are several regulatory frameworks that the Cathedral will need to satisfy. The Society will be a consultee, but not a leading party in decision making. It is understood that the Cathedrals Fabric Commission for England and Historic England are closely involved in the development of the proposals.

Visitors to the exhibition were invited to respond to a set of questions. The Society's comments will follow these questions as appropriate.

Question 1 asks if the exhibition helped understanding of the reasons for the proposed extension. We appreciate the extensive period during which the exhibition was on display. Whilst the models were undoubtedly impressive, we were surprised that it was not possible to access the exhibition online. This would have been valuable for those unable to visit and would have been of assistance for those wishing to reflect upon the proposal and supporting texts before commenting. We would have thought that more information could have been provided on archaeology and ground conditions as well as explanation of how much of a constraint is presented by Minster Road.

Before proceeding further, it is important to remember that the Society, and also the Cathedral, is an original signatory to the preparation of a neighbourhood plan for Ripon. Society members were involved as individuals in the drafting of the plan during which time there was liaison with Cathedral representatives. The Ripon Neighbourhood Plan made in 2019 contains explicit policies for identification of a Cathedral Precinct and proposals for the regeneration of the city centre "east of Market Place". We make no apology in stating them here.

Policy C1 - City Centre Quarters (part)
Cathedral Precinct:

enhanced visitor facilities for Ripon Cathedral and facilitate the Cathedral's operational and music requirements and parochial role
reduce vehicular traffic within the precinct
integrate the Cathedral forecourt with Kirkgate and the Courthouse Gardens
enable visitor access throughout the Courthouse Museum
revitalise Minster House coach house
enhance and conserve the churchyard including the management of tree cover and the protection and restoration of boundary walls and other means of enclosure
improve the connectivity of the precinct with the Bondgate Green Urban Village

Policy C2 - East of Market Place Improvements
Proposals to improve legibility, permeability and accessibility between the Cathedral Precinct, Kirkgate Yards, central car parks, the bus station, shopping developments and Allhallowgate in the Cathedral Precinct, Market Place and Northern Quarters will be supported, particularly where they achieve the following:
realisation of development opportunities such as the Cathedral stone yard, vacant and landmark buildings, new shops and opportunities arising from improvement in the capacity of public car parks
improvement in the capacity of the public car parks, including the feasibility of introducing additional parking deck(s) between the Cathedral and St Marygate car parks, including co-ordination of management of on- and off-street parking
public realm and environmental improvement
improved quality of routes for pedestrians, cyclists, local service vehicles (including to the rear of Kirkgate, Market Place East and Court Terrace) and contributing to the reduction in vehicular traffic within the Cathedral Precinct itself
revitalisation of Kirkgate Yards Action Area
installation of accurate, integrated, legible and well-designed signage for the area (extending throughout the city centre)

There should be no doubt that the Society will encourage and support proposals that will enable the Cathedral to expand and fulfil its potential. This should concur with a positive response to Question 2 on the need for improved facilities.

Question 3 invites comment on which facilities need to be improved. This is the driver for the additional accommodation. We think that the strongest case can be made for inside toilets, better storage to open up parts of the Cathedral building and new facilities for the choir school.

The case for a café / refreshment area and improved shop, we consider, is more difficult to justify appearing more aspirational. The case is weakened by availability of the nearby Old Deanery Hotel for large visiting parties, conferences. Space for improved retail, we submit, should be considered as part of internal re-ordering and the prospects for online shopping pursued.

The need for the proposed meeting room does not stand up well to scrutiny. We note that there is no reference to vergers' accommodation, nor where education activities would be located.

This question concerns space. We contend that this misses key matters including heritage interpretation (especially digital), accessibility of the building, connectivity between functions (including parking) and climate control, energy and environmental performance.

Question 4 is problematic owing to the difficulty in discerning the 'other options considered' and their evaluation. It is understood that there has been an exhaustive search by Chapter over recent years to identify suitable location(s) for the provision of additional accommodation. Initial interest in the utilisation of the 'stone yard' for development linking the central public car parks with the Cathedral has fallen away owing, apparently, to the intrusion of Minster Road.

The significance of the Cathedral across all mediaeval periods appears to have resulted in resistance to any intervention in the structure. However, despite such concern attention has turned to the south churchyard with current proposals consolidating all accommodation requirements in a single building. Archaeological investigation has been carried out including the impact of a physical link through the south nave aisle wall. Unfortunately the Society does not

appear to have seen reference to ground conditions which, as Chapter will know, are a challenge to building in the city. (Indeed, we would encourage direct and explicit contact with the British Geological Survey who have considerable specialist knowledge of the city.)

It is apparent that Chapter has arrived at a decision to propose a single building. The Society is not convinced that this is irrefutable. Accordingly, and with some disappointment, the Society must disagree that the proposal is necessarily the best solution and does cause demonstrable harm.

Questions 5 and 6 overlap.
The proposed building is in two linked parts, the western of which projects completely beyond the west front of the Cathedral. All of the Cathedral precinct is within the Ripon Conservation Area of which the west front and forecourt, Minster House, Kirkgate, Court House and Old Deanery Hotel form a significant extent of public realm which contributes to the visual identity of the city.

The Society considers the architectural language of the proposed building is not appropriate but accepts that this can be a matter for later consideration.
As regards the proposed design of the building, the Society begs to contend that the location, size and scale is unacceptable because of its intrusion into the public realm, its obstruction of the open character of the public realm around the south west tower and its height and massing. It does not enhance the character of the Cathedral and the Ripon Conservation Area.

Q7 invites comments on any other matters.
Despite the Society's wish to encourage and support proposals and recognition of the substantial amount of work carried out to prepare and evaluate options for the Cathedral's accommodation requirements, the choice to meet these in a single building has not resulted in a convincing proposal. The Society is in little doubt that Chapter has considered available options but nevertheless wishes to encourage reflection of the advantages of alternative proposals and urges Chapter to re-evaluate the current approach. Despite the argument for a single building, perhaps by accepting the practicality of a more disaggregated strategy and exploring the availability of measures to enhance the public realm and diminish the intrusion of Minster Road north and west of the building, a less intrusive proposal may emerge.

As regards Minster Road, the Society finds this intrusive and an impediment to the creation of a comprehensive, pedestrian dominated public realm for the Cathedral precinct. We believe that there has been significant progress in traffic management thinking since the current forecourt scheme was implemented and we urge that investigations take place to mitigate vehicular impact and intrusion that will improve connectivity both within the precinct and with the Market Place Quarter.

The Society should like to mention the Cathedral's internal arrangements. Liturgical principles are beyond the Society's capabilities but we support ambitions including re-opening the north choir aisle and revealing of the wall paintings for the better interpretation of the Cathedral. In due course access to the north west tower could become a realistic ambition.

This letter sets out Ripon Civic Society's position on what is understood of the current proposals and is focussed on material available at the exhibition. It is to be hoped that our comments and suggestions are received in good faith and in recognition that the Society is willing to engage openly in further development of proposals to meet the Cathedral's accommodation requirements and its role in the wider Ripon area community.

Yours sincerely



Chair
Ripon Civic Society