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Registered Charity 517434

18 February 2024

The Very Rev'd John Dobson
Liberty Court House
Minster Rd
Ripon HG4 1QT

Dear Dean John

Open letter re Proposed Cathedral Development

As you are aware, the Society is opposed to any substantial new building on the site of Kirkgate Park - one of the traditional names for the area also known as Courthouse Gardens, Museum Gardens and Minster Gardens. It is clear from the considerable local opposition to the Cathedral's plans that we are not alone in our views.

We note that your series of 'consultations' has begun, but we are disappointed to see that the information put out on behalf of the Cathedral suggests that, far from rethinking the entire location of the building, there will be only minor adjustments, if any. The Society has already made its position clear in formal representations through the planning process; these are available for public scrutiny on the North Yorkshire Council planning portal. We remain open, of course, to substantive discussions, and you will recall that I wrote on behalf of the Society on 19 January, suggesting a meeting.

For almost six decades Ripon Civic Society has worked hard to safeguard the integrity of the city – its buildings and its open spaces. We have championed conservation, of course, but we have also encouraged good new building where it is appropriate. Our Awards have recognised many projects and individuals for their work in improving and safeguarding the city and the surrounding area – indeed, the Cathedral has been a recipient of several over the years.

We have been particularly concerned about the effect of a large new structure on the park, which would severely mar the open space and compromise the setting of the surrounding listed buildings – the Old Deanery, the Courthouse, the Old Courthouse and the Cathedral itself. We also believe that building here would have a probably deleterious effect on the archaeology of this important site. We believe that the area occupied currently by the toilets is the only part of the park on which a new, much scaled-down structure, might be appropriate. Any design would need to respect the limitations imposed by the tree cover, the archaeology and the surrounding historic structures.

To explain the underlying rationale that has formed our views, we have prepared the attached 'Appreciation' of Kirkgate Park, showing the historical significance of the site, the statutory protection afforded to it and to the surrounding buildings and trees, as well as the Park's value to the community. We hope that this publication will help inform substantial and unblinkered discussion of the way forward and, during the 'pause' in the formal planning process we shall share this document widely as the Society's contribution to the public debate in the sincere hope that it might help all parties in finding a way forward that will not damage the city.

Yours sincerely



David Winpenny

Co-Chair