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Richard Flinton
Chief Executive
North Yorkshire Council
County Hall
Racecourse Lane
Northallerton, DL7 8AD

12 August 2024

Dear Mr Flinton

MINSTER GARDENS, RIPON – TRANSFER OR SALE – AN OPEN LETTER

You will recall that Ripon Civic Society wrote to you on 26 April 2023 about the following assets, owned by North Yorkshire Council:

- Asset Register No: E0700016500228 Public Gardens, Minster Road
- Asset Register No: E0700016500229 Public Conveniences, Minster Road

We asked for information and clarification on the legal ramifications of the possible transfer or sale of Ripon's Minster Gardens (Asset Register No: E0700016500228) to Ripon Cathedral, which has applied for permission to build on part of the site. Your reply on 4 May 2023 said that 'No decision has been taken' and that 'Consideration of the future ownership of the assets is on hold pending the consideration of the planning application'.

Determination of the planning and listed buildings applications has now twice been deferred at the request of Ripon Cathedral, with a new terminal date of 3 December promulgated. This will be almost two years since the applications were first validated. The number of objections to the proposal – both by letter to North Yorkshire Council and by signature on petition – has continued to increase very markedly. Objections have been made not only by Ripon Civic Society but also by Ripon City Council because of the scale of the proposed development, the loss of a public open space and of significant trees and concerns about the negative impact that the development could have on the city's retail establishments. Other groups, including The Georgian Group, The Gardens Trust, The Woodland Trust, The Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and The Campaign to Protect Rural England have also objected. There have also been strong representations against the plans by officers, both from the former Harrogate Borough Council and your own unitary authority.

In the light of the evident strong support for retaining the Gardens, the Society believes that it is time for your authority to rethink its position. Rather than letting the planning application be the driver here, the Council could and should exercise its role as landowner and say to the Cathedral that it is no longer appropriate for development to be considered here. It is simply the wrong site. What is a public park should remain a public park.

Modifying your approach now would give a clear signal to the Cathedral that a radical rethink is needed and would also help to break the deadlock which now exists – a deadlock that has divided the city and caused much resentment amongst both those supporting and those objecting to the proposals. We wish to stress that the Society would not object to a limited redevelopment of the site occupied by the public conveniences (Asset Register No: E0700016500229) and the vehicular track, as a link to a new building on the cathedral-owned stoneyard; this would offer a way forward for the provision of the facilities that the Civic Society has always agreed are necessary for the Cathedral and for the preservation of the gardens for the people of Ripon.

- Attached is the Society's leaflet about the area, which sets out the ownership of Minster Gardens (under its alternative and older name of Kirkgate Park)

Yours sincerely



David Winpenny
Co-Chair
Ripon Civic Society