RIPON CIVIC SOCIETY

RIPON CATHEDRAL PROPOSED ANNEXE

Application No. 22/04808/FULMAJ Revised Plans for the construction of annexe to provide support facilities for Ripon Cathedral, including a refectory, a Song School and toilets, involving the demolition of a toilet block, outbuildings and a stone wall plus the replacement of trees which will be lost and the enhancement of part of Minster Road. | Ripon Cathedral Minster Road Ripon North Yorkshire HG4 1QT

REVIEW OF ACCESS, CIRCULATION AND SAFEGUARDING BY RIPON CIVIC SOCIETY

A search of the revised documentation for the planning application (using keywords 'disabled' 'disability, 'mobility' 'wheelchair' and 'safeguarding') revealed the following:

'JUSTIFICATION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT

'All visitors and worshippers must use facilities in a public WC across Minster Road. Putting new facilities in a new building would help meet provision requirements of UK regulations (The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992, The Water Industries Act 1991 and The Environmental Protection Act 1990) that: "*Every building must be designed and constructed in such a way that sanitary facilities are provided for all occupants of, and visitors to, the building in a form that allows convenience of use and that there is no threat to the health and safety of occupants or visitors. This includes* ***disabled*** *people*"

'The new Song School will be a long-awaited boost to the on-site experience of the choristers and music department staff. It will not only provide the choirs with modern facilities for practice, music storage, robing and de-robing but also make the **safeguarding** of the young people far more compliant and easier to manage and oversee. It should also be noted that there are no facilities within the Cathedral for visiting choirs and musicians, something that could be provided by a new Song School, whose facilities could also be used, as they operate at different times. Recruitment, retention and **safeguarding** are all essential considerations for the sustainability of this cultural tradition which is a foundation of the spiritual and cultural life of the Cathedral, with a major cultural and social benefit for both singers and public

'Why not Thorpe Prebend

The full choir consists of: 30 boy choristers, 30 girl choristers, 12 teenage choral scholars, 6 lay clerks, 6 supernumerary lay clerks, giving a total of 84 singers. Currently they are unable to fit into the Song School and therefore need to rehearse either in the library or in buildings such as Thorpe Prebend House which is some distance away from the Cathedral. This also proves to be impractical when robed and in procession to the Cathedral and even worse in inclement weather. At present the Cathedral must split the choir into smaller groups to meet **safeguarding** standards. The new Song School is designed for safe keeping and secure facilities and segregation which existing facilities do not offer. The volume is based upon the number of chorister and lay clerks to be able to practice in a format consistent with professional standards.

'Why the particular size of facilities are needed?

4.1. The building has been designed to meet the constraints of the site.

Refectory – The refectory is sized to suit the client brief to accommodate a coach party and educational groups who would require 2sqm per cover, i.e. 140sqm. This is especially needed for the circulation necessary to house the more elderly demographic that visit the Cathedral and the numbers of **disabled** visitors the Cathedral would like to attract by its exemplary accessibility provided by the **disabled** toilet

'Promoting equal opportunities
8.26. The Chapter has carefully noted that the national narrative around accessibility has moved on profoundly from the **Disability** Discrimination Act of 1995; to the Equality Act of 2010. Even this later statute is now felt to be out of date and behind what society expects to achieve in a fully inclusive environment. There are major re-workings of BS 8300 'Design of buildings and their approaches to meet the needs of **disabled** people' underway and the Building Regulations (AD Part M) are likewise being re-written to reflect a social model for inclusivity. The built environment of the Cathedral's historic fabric discriminates and it is a duty to do everything possible to remove these ingrained and built-in barriers.

'DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

'There are five points of entry to the building from Level 00. The main point of entry for public access is on the west elevation via an open covered walkway. This is access from a stair to the north, a step to the south, and level access to the west. From here, you can access the public and semi public areas, also access Level 01. From here there is access to the function area, Refectory, with access from here to the store and external area. The store has level access to Minster Road. There us further access to the service areas for the building, externally via a fire escape, and to Level 00 via a secondary staircase. The main staircase near the main entrance is open and provides access to the Song School. There is also a lift to provide this access. From here, there is access to the Meting *(sic)* Room and external roof area. Furthermore, the staff rooms and secondary staircase, leading to the fire escape. The proposed access to the building is from the Cathedral car park near Sainsbury's. There is other access from Minster Road.

'From the Design and Access Statement of 2022, to which the 2024 is described as a 'supplement'
'Visitor WCs – Need to be as close as possible to the Cathedral. The nearest WCs are currently the Public WCs by the Court House, across the road, which is a problem, especially for the **disabled,** school parties and concert goers. The proposed building enlarges this facility, covers a considerable portion of the walk to the WCs, improves landscaping connections, and brings the facilities into a regularly cleaned and maintained environment.

'STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT'
Nothing in this document notes any meetings with people with disabilities.

RIPON CIVIC SOCIETY'S VIEWS

Access for Disabled People

Access to the new building is from the west. The main entrance is approached up a curved ramp or by steps. No other access (except to the store) provides step-free access. The approach from the west front of the cathedral will still necessitate crossing Minster Road. People in wheelchairs (and families with prams and buggies) will need to find an accessible crossing place. The plans indicate that there are dropped curbs and blister ramps at both sides of the road nearest to the north-west tower of the cathedral. There is an elevated table across the road further east, but it does not lead easily to the entrance; using it would require following the footpath along the cathedral's north side and, after crossing, back-tracking along the opposite pavement to access the approach ramp. The raised road seems to be provided for convenient access to the store, not for the convenience of other users.

If the door by the Consistory Court was made available for use by the public, that would allow easier access to the road table for wheelchairs, but there would still be the need to back-track.

Distances

The 2022 Design and Access Statement says '*Visitor WCs – Need to be as close as possible to the Cathedral*.' Based on measurements from the Consistory Court door of the cathedral (assuming this is to be in use, which is unclear from the documentation) to the existing toilet block, the new proposals have not improved the distances which all visitors need to cross to access the toilets. Ambulant visitors would need to walk 44 metres (women) – the same as at present – and 56 metres (men) – further. The proposed accessible route using the ramp is 56 metres. The current proposals therefore make matters slightly worse. If the Consistory Court door is not available for public use, and egress was from either the north door (not accessible to wheelchair users and difficult for people with limited mobility) or from the west front, these distances would be increased.

Circulation within the new building

The way for the public to access the refectory from the entrance hall, passing the foot of the stairs, appears narrow and unsatisfactory. Only one additional fire exit is shown, unless what is labelled as 'Secure Access' is also planned for this purpose; this is unclear.

Safeguarding

There are more references to safeguarding the trees in Kirkgate Park than to the safeguarding of the users of the building. Yet safeguarding the children who serve the Cathedral choristers must be a vital consideration of any planning. We consider the planned layout to be incompatible with that need. The choristers will use the staircase and entrance hall that is also to be used by members of the public; this is not good safeguarding practice. It could be overcome by providing separate access and stairs to the Song School and Robe Store. We also not that there are only two WCs for the choristers. On days when all the choristers (up to 60, we are told) and the adult members of the choir and music staff are together, this is inadequate. Nor would it be good safeguarding practice to allow children to use the public toilets.

Public Toilets

We note that in the new plans the toilets are planned to be unisex. It was proposed by the then government in 2023, and put out to consultation, that changes to building regulations and guidance would require that:

- *separate single-sex toilets facilities are provided for men and women and/or*
- *self-contained, private toilets are provided where space allows to ensure privacy and safety*
- *mixed sex shared facilities are not an option, except when lack of space allows only a single toilet*

Changing the rules for single sex and/or universal toilets to be required would have positive equality outcomes for those who may not currently feel safe while using toilet facilities.

It is likely that such rules will soon be brought into law. Even if there is delay in the law, such toilet arrangements are not considered to be safe for vulnerable children and adults.

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