

Response to City Centre Action Plan consultation from Friends of Town Quay Park (FTQP)

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the City Centre Action Plan. This response has been developed by the Committee of Friends of Town Quay Park after compiling responses from 35 FTQP members to an in-depth questionnaire. This was sent to all FTQP members advising them of the City Centre Action Plan, giving the link to the plan, and asking a range of open questions about the impact of the proposals specifically on Town Quay Park at the lower end of the High Street. This response therefore relates to the section on the Old Town Quarter starting on page 107. We have paid particular attention to policies 28 and 29 which have the most significant impact on open space in this area.

However before giving these comments we have a number of general points. We welcome in particular a number of specific statements in the CCAP:

Page 41/2 4.89 and Policy 10 Recognition of the importance of open space and commitment in Policy 10 to protecting and enhancing existing open space including Town Quay Park (listed in Appendix 4)

Page 54 Policy 14 committing to respect the heritage of buildings and spaces and enhance their settings

Page 146 6.10. i and ii stating a commitment by the Council to work with local people to support the type of change we would like to see in the city centre and for local interest groups to contribute views and commitment on specific issues. FTQP are very keen to work with the Council to protect and develop the heritage and usage of Town Quay Park

Page 156 Infrastructure b) Open space/public realm **6.26** which states that the Council will protect existing designated open space and

Page 160 Section on Royal Pier/Waterfront that there will be retention of an equivalent amount of open space at Mayflower Park and that there will be good pedestrian links across Town Quay Road

There was a unanimous view that there should be **no development** on the Open Space at Town Quay Park – both east and west of French Street. The only caveat being that some respondents would support sensitive development of the historic structures in and around the park, notably Canute's Palace, Quilters Vault and the Watergate. We urge officers to take full account of the recently produced Lower High Street conservation statement produced for the council by Dr Andy Russel. This very comprehensive document describes in fine detail the history and status of the unique heritage of the immediate vicinity and indicates that repair and restitution is entirely feasible.

P 166 Table indicates use classes permitted for lower High Street and we specifically asked our members about this. There was unanimous agreement that there should be **no** residential (A1), Financial or professional services (A2), drinking establishments (A4) hot food takeaways (A5) on the park. There is considerable support for a small café or even an ice cream parlour (A2) and development of the open space to create more community use was strongly supported. There is no support for and indeed resistance to the suggestion that a variety of commercial uses, apart from food and drink, will be sought **para 5.111.**

We asked members what they would like to see taking place at Town Quay Park and they suggested the following which seem to support the intention stated in **para 5.9.3** to sensitively manage historical assets:

- Opening the vaults for tourism and making much more of the heritage of this site including formal remembrance of the city's history and even a possible historic sculpture trail inspired by

the medieval town, significant events and people and the history of the port – it will be possible to start to develop this idea as part of the Tudor Revels, funding by Heritage Lottery, taking place in September/December 2012

- Developing the gardens and possibly having a medieval garden or parterre, a sensory garden and plants which attract wildlife. Continue to recognise the importance of the Huguenots in the city in the 16th and 17th century – already celebrated with a small Huguenot garden within the park,
- Weekend markets or farmers market
- A space for cultural activities including poetry, music, theatre, art, concerts and to celebrate festivals (FTQP May Day picnic is already an established annual event)
- A space for social and healthy activities such as Tai Chi, boules, bridge,
- A small refreshment kiosk or ice cream parlour

Reasons for not supporting development included loss of open space with a sea view, impact on neighbours (noise, privacy), overdevelopment of the sea frontage, impact on listed buildings and ancient monuments, detriment to the street scene, concerns about size and scale of development in an area which has seen major development and attendant population increase in recent years and concerns about traffic, car parking and highway infrastructure. FTQP has recently been consulted about the upgrade to Town Quay/Platform Road and were assured there would be little or no impact on the park.

Other specific comments on why development would not be supported are:

- The park is our breathing space.
- Development has been overdone already,
- Rosso nightclub is a problem and creates noise.
- Development may limit sight of and access to vaults. We should be proud of our heritage
- Town Quay Park offers a local park, important when the Boat Shows are on, not only for the locals but also for the tourists who congregate there or use it as a thoroughfare to get to Mayflower Park as it is easily seen from the street from there. This space is good to take family on a nice day and get away from the flats
- This is already a densely populated area with little open space within walking distance. The park provides an important peaceful oasis in a busy area, where many older people live in sheltered housing, and is also surrounded by flats without gardens, so is well used in summer by residents who want a quiet place to sit outdoors. Losing the park would have a negative impact on their well being.

- The park also provides much needed open space for wildlife in the city such as bees, birds, butterflies, and bats, and it is important to maintain these valuable ecosystem services.
- The development plan proposed by SCC doesn't seem to leave much space for non-financially rewarding activities. Town Quay Park as well as Mayflower Park is used and enjoyed by a great scope of people who just enjoy the calm of the park and the sea. The only thing you can buy there is an ice cream from Mister Whippy for 50p, which makes it a great place for many families, couples or single individuals who just enjoy a place without having to buy anything.
- Referring to traffic issues the roads are inadequate for the present traffic levels. Any further development will increase traffic delays with associated increase in exhaust emissions and waste of fuel.
- The loss of quality of life and well-being of those living in the historic city, the loss of a relaxing, safe and intimate green space 'garden' in the historic city, the loss of connection to the historic waterfront - having access to significant medieval buildings and seaview in one place, the loss of the opportunity to do something positive and impactful with this historic space for future generations.
- Creeping loss of heritage and amenities to satisfy commercial interests.
- The unobstructed views of both the Wool House and Canute's Palace demonstrate the scale of mediaeval buildings in the old town and deserve be preserved

Page 114 Policy 29 is not entirely clear to us as it seems to be in conflict with **Appendix 4 (page 181)** which states that Town Quay Park is a specific site which will be a protected and enhanced open space. If it is protected how can there be any development or statement about “enabling” development. We seek clarity on this point. If by development this means purely improving the vaults/existing structures and bringing some back into use as appropriate visitor attractions this may be supported. This would, of course negate any need to provide alternative open space (**point 4 and para 5.112**). Our members’ response to the question of whether an alternative park or open space in a different location (such as Albion Place car park) would be suitable produced a strong reaction. The overwhelming view is that as Town Quay Park is a unique combination of garden, heritage buildings with a view of the water (one of the rare places easily accessible to view the water in the city) and occupies an irreplaceable space at the end of the QE2 Mile therefore re-provision is unrealistic and not feasible. Possible locations such as the fruit and vegetable market or between Oxford Street and the Old Town had been considered by some but the sense of “our back garden” was felt to be irreplaceable. One member commented that there are no obvious places without demolishing existing developments! We posed a question about whether phased development would help to alleviate concerns and got a strongly negative response although one member responded that limited development at the periphery of the site may be acceptable **IF** the aim is to preserve the heritage buildings.

Page 113 Policy 28 We welcome the proposal to create further open space at Albion Place and Castle Way but only if this is not seen as a substitute for any loss of open space elsewhere. We do question

however, whether having open space adjacent to a bus super stop would prove appropriate or indeed attractive.

These are some of the comments about what makes Town Quay park unique (and irreplaceable):

- Its simplicity, beautiful views, historic ruins, close to sea, back garden for many, irreplaceable heritage and history,
- Tiny haven from major developments - people coming together to get away from stress and expense of living in rest of city
- It is a quiet place for relaxation, next to important historic sites that allows the families and individuals living around it and people passing by to have a place to rest and enjoy the quay.
- Within the old walls and historic part of town a pretty place to be - look at how the Europeans use open space
- This space is incredibly important to the overall health and wellbeing of local residents and provides an oasis for residents and visitors, alike. The built heritage within the park is unique within the City and it is difficult to see how any major development of the site could be sympathetic to these structures. The park is one of the very few open spaces remaining in this part of the city and the loss of it would be irreplaceable.

There was a unanimous view that more could be done by the Council to endorse the value of Town Quay Park and its position at the end of the QE2 mile. FTQP would be happy to work with the Council on this. Sponsorship and grants could pay to do the work required to the vaults to preserve them and to keep them open to the public. The community would work with the council, parks team and historical experts to create a focus for the open space that offers the community the space, an attraction for tourists and a legacy for future generations.

Specific suggestions were:

- More signage and information about the history of the site and the importance of Southampton as an historic city. Make the park more prominent with signage at the park itself and on local maps, involve the community in planting and developing the park encouraging volunteer help, support community activities in the park financially, publicise the park as an amenity in old town information guides etc (frequent comments that city doesn't blow its own trumpet enough!)
- Better landscaping of the gardens – although much grateful recognition was made about what the parks department's gardeners are doing with limited resources to maintain the park.
- Enhance its use for cultural activities.
- Organise family activities there and for plays around the history of the town quay
- Backing for an open air theatre would be a brilliant use for some times in the summer.

- Toddlers play area. More picnic seating. Refreshment kiosk. Occasional low key musical events
- The use of the vaults as part of Art Vaults and as part of music in the city were both imaginative ideas which deserve to be repeated.
- Start point for historical walks. Keep the park and use it more for guided tours as point of reference for historic sites around, so tourist could also enjoy it.
- To see the park develop more as a community garden with planting to attract wildlife and become a place where residents and local organisations such as the school, Fairbridge and others worked together on community events that bring different parts of the community together. The park could be more integrated with the wider heritage of the area - for example could have heritage plants and trees, a medieval herb garden or Tudor knot garden, or a sensory garden. This would also attract visitors.

There are obviously very ambitious development plans for Mayflower Park, Royal Pier and Watermark West Quay. With such major developments in the city the importance of protecting green open spaces such as TQP, Queen's Park and Mayflower Park increases.

The aim of developing 5,450 homes in the city centre would bring in many thousand more residents who will need recreational space for their health and wellbeing and places to escape the hustle and bustle of city.

Mayflower Park appears to be seen as a site for large events including the Boat Show and is therefore not always open to residents and visitors seeking a quiet space. Queen's Park is linked to the Oxford Street conservation area and is directly adjacent to a major trunk road. Town Quay Park is a modest space set back from the main roads which is bordered by some unique historic structures which are testament to the city's fine heritage.

The overwhelming view of FTQP is that, as according to Policy 29, the site should be protected as open space. We do not understand the term 'heritage-led development' and assert that the only development should be to improve and sustain the historic structures (as set out in the Lower High Street Conservation statement) with no loss of any of the overall open space. This could include use by the public for events, refreshments etc. There is no support for any other residential or commercial development on the site.

Friends of Town Quay Park

23.3.12