

Making Macclesfield **SUSTAINABLE**

A submission on the
Wilson Bowden planning application
for the redevelopment of
Macclesfield Town Centre
and a contribution towards the evolving
Macclesfield Town Strategy

from
Macc2020



13th June 2012





Making Macclesfield **SUSTAINABLE**

Transition Towns – What are they?

The Transition Town movement is about ‘transitioning’ away from:

- high levels of energy consumption
- high carbon emissions and
- unsustainable environmental impacts

and ‘transitioning’ towards:

Energy & resource efficiency within sustainable limits – essential due to climate change and inevitable because of diminishing supplies of fossil fuels (particularly oil).

People who associate themselves with the transition movement believe:

- Climate change and peak oil production require urgent action
- It is better to plan for a life with less energy than to be taken by surprise
- Society and industry are not suitably prepared for inevitable energy shocks
- We have to act together and we have to act now
- Infinite growth with finite resources is impossible

Macc2020, Macclesfield’s Transition Town movement, wants to make our community more resilient – an aspiration that can happen if we all act together within environmental capacity constraints. Our initiative is gathering pace and we are constantly garnering more support. We believe our message about the urgent need for greater sustainability in the way we live our lives deserve a hearing.

Macc2020’s submission in relation to:

- (a) **WILSON BOWDEN’S PLANNING APPLICATION TO REDEVELOP MACCLESFIELD TOWN CENTRE**
- (b) **MACCLESFIELD TOWN STRATEGY**

Macc 2020 urge Cheshire East Council to refuse the Wilson Bowdon (WB) planning application (ref. 12/ 1212M) and not to compromise the Green Belt setting of the town with housing estates when the town centre redevelopment could and should be incorporating many new housing units. We contend that:

- The WB plan is out of keeping in terms of scale, mass and design with a historic Cheshire market town
- The WB plan does not accord with national, regional or local plan policies and will not be viable for or attract independent retailers
- The WB plan makes no concession to air quality, environmental capacity or topography; it does not offer any public transport; it will not be environmentally sustainable
- The WB plan contains a retail offer that is too ambitious and too bland; it has nothing unique to offer and Maxonians would have to live with the aftermath if it fails.
- The WB plan demonstrates no understanding of the need for ‘living’ town centres and does almost nothing to help solve the demand for more housing units
- The WB plan is not what Maxonians want or need and not what the Economic Master Plan identified was right for the town
- There is a strong case for a proper synergy between the need to re-build/ re-energise the town centre and the need for housing

THE WRONG TYPE OF DEVELOPMENT IS PROPOSED IN THE WRONG PLACES - WE NEED INNOVATION & SUSTAINABILITY



Making Macclesfield SUSTAINABLE

Introduction

This submission on the Wilson Bowden (WB) planning application and on Cheshire East's emerging Macclesfield Town Strategy follows on from the response made by Macc2020 to the consultation on WB plans for the town centre redevelopment in 2011 (see www.macc2020.org).

To summarise, that earlier submission took issue with the proposals of a year ago (which have changed little since) for focusing on delivering available land, rather than a plan to enhance the whole town centre. It pointed out that there was no intention to re-build such unattractive buildings as the former TJ Hughes store, the Tesco store or Craven House.

It criticised the lack of any attempt to match the vernacular architecture, the massing and volume of the new buildings and the impacts they would have on the remaining older buildings and it pointed out the mismatch between the amount of retail space that had been identified by the White Young Green Study and what was actually being proposed.

Another key issue was the tiny token amount of residential property and the point was made that if more residential units were designed into the commercial and retail units, then much better use would be made of energy.

Other criticisms included the lack of planning to incorporate high quality public transport and an expressed fear that, as only multiple retailers would be able to afford the high rents on the units; small existing retailers in the town would be squeezed out. This, it was felt, was the opposite of the way thinking and planning should be going for reinvigorating the town centre.

That earlier submission also suggested a way forward for achieving a far more imaginative and tailored outcome and that was for the local authority to set up a joint venture Town Centre Management and Regeneration Company.

None of the comments or suggestions in that submission appears to have had any impact on the planning application that has been made.

The Wilson Bowdon Plan for Macclesfield Town Centre

According to their planning application form, the Wilson Bowdon proposal is for:

“Demolition of buildings on the site to enable the development of a comprehensive mixed use scheme to include A1-2 retail up to 21,370 sq. m (to include a Department Store – up to 6,320 sq. m); A3-5 uses up to 21,325 sq. m; B1 up to 235 sq. m., eight screen cinema up to 3,255 sq. m; ancillary service areas up to 3,485 sq. m; two car parks providing up to 810 spaces; additional street parking for up to 63 cars; new town square (Mulberry Square) with provision for evening parking; associated highway works” and the “Development area includes parts of Exchange Street to north, Park Lane to south, Mill Street to east and Water Street to west”.

The existing use of the development area is: *“Three surface level public car parks; bulky goods retail; storage; professional services; five residential properties”.*

The net additional gross internal floorspace proposed is estimated at 48,390 sq. m. spread over a total site area of 5.1 ha.

Macclesfield Town Strategy

Cheshire East Council are currently drawing up their Local Plan for the period up to 2030. As part of this, ‘Snapshot Reports’ were produced for each of the town centres in the local authority area. Currently work is underway on Town Strategies. Steering groups of local people have been appointed which have been told how many houses have to be accommodated (based on high housing aspirations). The result has been proposals to build housing on greenfields and Green Belt on the outskirts of the towns. But, with a brownfield first approach and the release of employment land, the use of greenfield land could be minimised. Macclesfield, with its town centre redevelopment pending, has a unique opportunity to deliver housing in the town centre, especially above retail units.



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National planning requirement for genuinely sustainable development

Macc2020 represents a growing constituency of people who seek greater sustainability (environmentally, socially and economically). We do not believe the present town centre redevelopment plans represent any of those three pillars of sustainability.

‘Securing the Future’, the UK Sustainable Development Strategy is flagged up at the start of the National Planning Policy Framework, along with its five guiding principles. They are:

- Living within the planet’s environmental limits
- Ensuring a strong, healthy and just society
- Achieving a sustainable economy
- Promoting good governance and
- Using sound science responsibly (NPPF, March 2012, para. 5, page 2)

These principles are to overlie everything else, aligned with the three dimensions of sustainable development, described thus:

- *An economic role – contributing to building a strong, responsive and competitive economy by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth and innovation and by identifying and coordinating development requirements*
- *A social role – supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities by providing the supply of housing required to meet the needs of present and future generations and by creating a high quality built environment with accessible local services that reflect the community’s needs...*
- *An environmental role – contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment and, as part of this, helping to improve biodiversity, use natural resources prudently, minimise waste and pollution and mitigate and adapt to climate change including moving to a low carbon economy (NPPF, para. 7).*

Macc2020 contend that the WB town centre redevelopment plans do **not** match up to the requirements of the NPPF’s ‘**economic role**’. This is because the plans are **not responsive** to what the town and its people need. They are **not the right type** of development as no attempt has been made **to co-ordinate** the new build with the old and it certainly is **not the right time** to construct yet another faceless behemoth to retailing which looks so similar to so many others. With no special individualistic attributes, we fail to see why the WB version of a new town centre would become a major attractor. Therefore we are **not** convinced it would contribute to a **strong economy**.

Nor do the plans meet the ‘**social role**’ as they would **not** provide **a supply of housing** which would **meet the needs of present and future generations**. There is a risk of missing a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to bring more living accommodation into the town centre which would be **accessible [to] local services** and would be very sustainable. Macc2020 would argue that it is essential to plan for significant housing as part of the town centre redevelopment if the centre is not to suffer from the out of hours malaise that so many others do.

Nor do the plans step up to the mark for the ‘**environmental role**’ - most particularly in as far as they do **not** pay due cognisance to the **historic environment**. They would **not use natural resources prudently** because they would be utilising minerals and aggregates in the buildings and support infrastructure that would be for commercial use only when best practice would be to use them for mixed use purposes. And because joint use (ie. including living accommodation) would not be a factor in the development it would also **not minimise waste and pollution and adapt to climate change**. More of the extra housing that is required would have to be built outside the town centre. That would promote more journeys back and forth, many of them carbon-polluting.

PLANS FOR A NEW TOWN CENTRE SHOULD BE BEING COALESCED WITH PLANS TO MEET HOUSING NEEDS TO ACHIEVE MAXIMUM SUSTAINABILITY



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Regional planning policy

At the time of writing, Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs) have not been withdrawn and therefore must be complied with.

The 'North West of England Plan Regional Spatial Strategy to 2021' has the following over-arching spatial principles:

- Promote sustainable communities
- Promote sustainable economic development
- Make the best use of existing resources and infrastructure
- Manage travel demand, reduce the need to travel and increase accessibility
- Marry opportunity and need
- Promote environmental quality
- Mainstreaming rural issues
- Reduce emissions/ adapt to climate change (NW RSS, Policy DP1, p.22)

All are worthy principles.

The RSS policy on Retail Development lists 26 towns, including Macclesfield, where:

"Comparison retailing facilities should be enhanced and encouraged".

Crucially it adds:

"Retail development that supports entrepreneurship, particularly increasing the number of independent retailers, should be supported"
(Policy W5, p.51). (Our underlining).

Macclesfield is also highlighted as a one of 11 'foci for comparison retailers' in the Manchester City Region key map (p. 126/ 127), the former Macclesfield and Congleton Boroughs being considered to be in the Manchester City Region.

[RSS explains:

"For the avoidance of doubt, comparison retailing is the provision of items not purchased on a frequent basis (eg. clothing, footwear, household goods)"] (Para. 6.21).

THE PLANS WOULD NOT INCREASE THE NUMBER OF INDEPENDENT RETAILERS

Local Planning Policy

The extant Development Plan for Cheshire East comprises the RSS and saved policies from the old borough plans. All the Macclesfield Town Centre policies from the Macclesfield Borough Local plan with the exception of one relating to the bus station have been saved. These include:

"MTC2: The Borough Council will encourage the redevelopment of land to the north and south of Exchange Street principally for Class A1 retail uses. Any scheme must meet the following criteria:

1. *Respect the scale of existing development and in particular the setting of the Heritage Centre*
2. *Achieve a high quality of urban design reflecting the character and scale of the town centre"*

"MTC19 (& para. 10.33): Housing will be encouraged in the town centre by:

1. *Retaining existing housing areas as shown on the proposals map*
2. *The use of upper floors*
3. *Permitted housing where a satisfactory housing environment can be created*

New housing in the town centre will bring life back to the streets outside shopping hours. It will also provide relatively cheap housing accommodation".

Supporting text includes the following:

"10.2... Certain sites in the town centre also offer opportunities for housing as part of redevelopment

10.5... The Local Plan encourages further housing in the town centre in appropriate locations. Housing in the town centre is particularly suitable for the disabled".

And, quoting the Environmental Appraisal, (10.9):

"Macclesfield Town Centre policies attain a high sustainability level. Sustainable policies include shopping, housing and employment related policies which due to the concentration of uses in the town centre create energy savings through enabling multi-purpose journeys and short journey lengths".

THE PLANS DO NOT REFLECT THE SCALE OR CHARACTER OF THE TOWN CENTRE OR PROVIDE HOUSING ON UPPER FLOORS

(ref: 'Living Over' the Store by Howard Davis, published by Routledge, January 2012)



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WILSON BOWDEN DOCUMENTS

..SUSTAINABILITY STATEMENT

Planning Policy Context

The Planning Policy Context part of the Sustainability Statement was clearly altered in a lazy and rushed fashion at the last moment prior to publication. A final bullet point about the National Planning Policy Framework appears under 'National Planning Policy' but earlier bullets quoting Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 1, the supplement to PPS1 on Climate Change and PPS22 were not removed. (Para. 3.1, p8/9). (N.B. All PPSs and PPGs - Planning Policy Guidance - became immediately obsolete with the publication of the NPPF on March 27th).

Very strangely, the 'Local Planning Policy' context only flags up some of the generic policies and fails to quote any of the Macclesfield Town Centre policies at all, despite the fact that 26 of the original 27 were saved. (See our comments on 'Local Planning Policy' on previous page). It would be fair to assume that the consultants who prepared the sustainability statement on behalf of Wilson Bowden were concerned that the redevelopment plans did not comply with them and omission was the most diplomatic course of action. It is difficult to come to any other conclusion when an entire section of the Macclesfield Local Plan that relates specifically to the area in question is completely ignored.

On the other hand, extensive mention is made of the fact that the scheme does not lie within a flood plain. One reference would suffice.

Climate Change adaptation, mitigation, energy

Grey water harvesting is proffered for the housing units but, in view of the limited number involved, this amounts to a very token offering.

The report also claims that the architecture of the proposed buildings is intended to reduce unsustainable demands through the following: appropriate glazed portions, variable speed drives on fans, daylighting, adequate implementation of on-site renewables, thermal massing, connection to existing District Heating (DH) system and/ or utilisation of Combined Heat and Power (CHP) plant and cycle storage.

We challenge this claim. The architecture does not minimise energy demands as it is predominantly east west facing with the majority of the glazed facades facing into the sheltered streetscape permitting limited heat gain. With a climate such as Britain's, this will invariably result in a net heat loss. The multi-floor units are also unlikely to benefit greatly from any potential daylighting strategies, especially considering their deep plans with no atrium features apparent.

The report argues against the use of on-site renewables in view of the configuration of the roofscape and the arrangement of the buildings - factors that should have been part of the initial design process. The roofscape itself would have been a relatively simple thing to alter early on so that any slopes faced due south and were pitched at 35°. Considering the immense area that these roofs represent, it is an intensive missed opportunity.

Instead WB opt for Air Source Heat Pump (ASHP) technology which, having the least Coefficient of Performance (CoP) compared with Ground Source Heat Pumps (GSHPs), also conveniently is the simplest and cheapest to implement, being much the same to install as conventional air conditioning. However, we would point out that a borehole test for GSHP is not difficult to achieve and ASHP is only viable when installed in airtight situations. If a retailer operates an 'open door' policy to attract business, the environmental benefits are negligible.

The overall energy usage figures highlight the need to minimise the development's demands on an already stretched distribution system. The development will use 2,385 MWh p.a., yet attention is focused on the energy needs of the houses although the residential quotient is just 3.5% of this total. Again the report argues against the implementation of CHP on the grounds that its likely use will be below the 5,000 hours p.a. set by Action Energy's Good Practice Guide. With an increased residential component as argued in this objection, this demand could be increased to make the system viable. Besides, additional systems are available namely sub-surface coil and aquifer although the latter will likely be the most expensive short-term solution.



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Retail has a high cooling demand and so a GSHP system would be considerably more beneficial. This is especially apparent if linked with ground thermal storage as implemented.
(see: <http://www.icax.co.uk/>)

Biomass is argued to be contentious in view of the NO_x gases released but, compared to conventional oil fired burners and the road traffic increased by the scheme, this will be negligible. Biomass has been safely implemented in school buildings as in for example the nearby Kingsmead primary school
(see: <http://www.kingsmead.cheshire.sch.uk/>)

As regards landscaping and more importantly biodiversity, the report maintains: “*landscape and ecological assets preserved and enhanced*” (para. 5.5). This could not be said for the loss of the Food4Macc heritage walk green element with its large number of trees. These are not compensated for with sporadic planting of stand-alone trees within the urban fabric of the new development. All claims regarding the biodiversity of such gestures should be discounted on the grounds that the larger and more integrated habitat will be lost.

Finally the report argues for local materials, but the visualisations clearly depict the use of lighter brick-work more akin to London stock than Cheshire.

THE SUSTAINABILITY STATEMENT IS POORLY ARGUED AND DOES NOT STAND SCRUTINY. A SCHEME OF THIS SCALE WITH CO₂ EMISSIONS OF NEARLY 1M TONNES SHOULD UTILISE THE BEST RE-NEWABLE ENERGY, NOT THE CHEAPEST

Planning Statement

The Planning Statement indicates that the new development would include 10 residential units comprising 8 x 2-bed and 2 x 4-bed dwellings (para. 1.8). This is at odds with the environmental statement which says that 10 x 2-bed townhouses would be provided (para. 4.32). Which is correct? However, regardless of which is accurate, the point has to be made that the 10 new housing units would only represent a net gain of five as five would be demolished as part of the scheme.

ONLY 5 NET NEW DWELLINGS WOULD BE PROVIDED AS THE SCHEME STANDS

.. PLANNING POLICY ISSUES

The Planning Statement submitted by Wilson Bowden quotes exhaustively from the new National Planning Policy Framework, the RSS and the Macclesfield Borough Local Plan. Indeed it replicates huge sections of each. It seems unnecessary and somewhat repetitive to do the same in this response but we would make the point that quoting from these important planning documents is not the same thing as delivering genuine sustainable development that does not damage the built and natural environment, is well designed, harmonises with the historic fabric of the town and maximises energy efficiency.

Environmental Statement

The Environmental Statement, like the Planning Statement, also quotes the NPPF, although not so exhaustively (para. 6.4). And it quotes fragments of the Macclesfield Town Centre policies from the extant Macclesfield Borough Local Plan – on an extremely selective basis (paras. 6.12 - 6.16). It does not, for instance, feature the aspects which we highlight on the previous page under ‘Local Planning Policy’. It would appear to be a case of a ‘feast or famine’ approach to planning policies – quote everything regardless or very little at all. However, it does flag up the requirement in the NPPF for sustainable transport modes to be maximised (para. 6.4), something which we would argue is not apparent in the WB scheme.

There is a reference to ensuring that the height of the Heritage Centre is respected (para. 4.3.6) but not the design or the setting. The redevelopment of the town centre offers the opportunity to repair mistakes that have occurred in the past insofar as the Heritage Centre setting is concerned but these are not being taken despite instructions in the NPPF to: “*respond to local character and history and reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials*” (para. 58) .

THE NPPF CALLS FOR SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT MODES TO BE MAXIMISED AND LOCAL HISTORY TO BE REFLECTED IN DESIGN; THESE REQUIREMENTS ARE NOT BEING MET



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WILSON BOWDEN DOCUMENTS

Environmental Statement: Air Quality

Chapter 8 of the Environmental Statement (E.S.) is about air quality. It merely admits to the existence of an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) on the A523 London Road, clocking the fact that the proposed new development would be “approximately 250m. north of the Macclesfield AQMA” but makes no further comment (paras. 8.5.5 – 8.5.8).

Paragraph 8.5.7 refers to a “further assessment for London Road, Macclesfield” which it says was due to be published by CEC in late 2011. It is not known whether or not such a report exists and, if it does, where it is lodged. (It does not appear to be amongst the planning application documents).

However, the key point to make here is that a stretch of London Road virtually adjoining where the new multi-storey car park would be housed is already registered as an area with serious air pollution issues.

The large new car park at the southern end of the redevelopment site off the lower end of Churchill Way would accommodate 731 cars and be expected to handle many times more than that per day. How would this impact on the AQMA? Surely it would result in an extension of it - and a worsening of it? It would appear that this issue has not been properly thought through or subjected to analysis - but it urgently needs to be.

There is no up-to-date traffic model available to assist with the calculations that need to be carried out in respect of air quality. (See beginning of next section). The Transport Assessment claims that air quality is “fully covered” in the environmental assessment (para. 3.12.1) but this is not the case.

THE NEW MULTI-STOREY CAR PARK WOULD ADJOIN, EXACERBATE AND ALMOST CERTAINLY EXTEND A POOR AIR QUALITY AREA ZONE

..AIR QUALITY/TRANSPORT ISSUES

Transport assessment

The WB Transport Assessment and Travel Plan Framework Document says: “At the time this report was drafted the results of the final calibrated model runs had not been completed” (para. 3.9.2). A supplementary report is promised, but where is it? This is clearly not a satisfactory state of affairs. Should the planning application not have been held up to await this information? How can a proper decision be made without it?

Even without the latest traffic modelling data, we note that Table 6.3 in the E.S. concludes that the effect of building the new town centre development would be ‘moderate adverse’ on Churchill Way. We also note the assumption that people who currently use the Exchange Street car park would transfer seamlessly to the multi storey without taking into account the fact that the multi storey would be positioned at the base of a hill. What impact would this have on the ageing population? No survey appears to have been carried out of the users of the Exchange Street car park, particularly those who currently wheel their food shopping trolleys out of Tesco and Marks & Spencer to their cars. Is it not more likely that those people, rather than transferring to sustainable transport modes, will abandon the town centre for out of town shopping, thus creating more CO2 emissions?

Much is made, in the Transport Assessment and other documents, of research carried out into bus services. This concludes that existing bus services “have adequate capacity” to cope with the new development (para. 3.4.5). As a result, all that is additionally offered is a new bus lay-by (and coach stop). However, since that research was conducted, CEC have begun a Public Transport consultation and are proposing serious cuts to bus services. There are also several references in several reports to the railway station being only 500m from the town centre. None mention the topography.

FINAL TRAFFIC MODELLING FIGURES HAVE NOT YET BEEN RELEASED AND BUS RESEARCH DOES NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT CURRENT CUTS BY CEC



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WILSON BOWDEN DOCUMENTS

Design & Access Statement

The design and layout of the Wilson Bowden (WB) scheme is the antithesis of what is appropriate for the ancient town of Macclesfield. It is deeply disappointing in view of the length of time WB have been engaging with the town centre redevelopment.

Macclesfield Town is distinguished by its small scale brick buildings and its vistas outwards to the Peak District and the Green Belt. Any town centre redevelopment scheme should reflect the scale, style and development pattern of this market town. The WB scheme does not do any of these things. It flies in the face of the explicit requirements of the NPPF which says, under 'Requiring good design':

"The Government attaches great importance to the design of the built environment. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, is indivisible from good planning and should contribute positively to making places better for people. It is important to plan positively for the achievement of high quality and inclusive design for all development, including individual buildings, public and private spaces and wider development schemes

Local and neighbourhood plans should develop robust and comprehensive policies that set out the quality of development that will be expected for the area. Such policies should be based on stated objectives for the future of the area and an understanding and evaluation of its defining characteristics. Planning policies and decisions should aim to ensure that developments:

- *will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development*
- *establish a strong sense of place using streetscapes and buildings to create attractive places to live, work and visit*
- *optimise the potential of the site to accommodate development, create and sustain an appropriate mix of uses (inc. incorporation of green and other public space as part of developments) and support local facilities and transport networks*
- *respond to local character and history and reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials"* (Para. 58)

... DESIGN ISSUES

Macc2020 dispute the claims in the WB design and access statement that the development would "create a distinctive new Town Centre" and that the scheme would "enhance the rich historic and architectural form of the town" (Introduction, p.3). The design simply replicates so many other modern town centres and would have no special attraction.

In the proposed 'Mulberry Square', the relatively featureless new buildings would not, by any measure, "respect and reflect the architectural character of the listed Heritage Centre" (p.10). And the Debenhams store at the junction of Park Lane and Samuel Street, with its massive solid slab of masonry - interspersed by just a few tall, narrow windows - appears to be a slight adaptation of the similarly unaesthetic Debenhams in the failing Stockport town centre that has just had modest Portas initiative funds awarded.

The new 'Silk Street', comprising a glass-walled canyon, could be anywhere at all. The visualisation bears a remarkable resemblance to the recently rebuilt pedestrianised part of Altrincham town centre which currently boasts any number of empty units. Although WB appear to have made some simple concessions to the points raised in the workshop held in the Heritage Centre in December, namely the adoption of the name 'Silk Street', they have discounted the use of Silk screen relevant graphics representing the looming process in favour of a more lacklustre typeface for the 'Silk Street' name. Design comments appear to have been ignored and the heritage walk element seems largely corporate rather than representing anything particular to Macclesfield.

There are similar bland, failing town centres all over the UK, afflicted by their sameness and their lack of competitiveness with out-of-town shopping developments that offer much longer opening hours and free parking and by the growth in Internet shopping and home deliveries. This type of bland, off-the peg town centre scheme incorporating the ubiquitous multi-storey car park has had its day. It would be a big mistake to grant permission for yet another.

**THE NEED IS FOR A BESPOKE DESIGN
FEATURING INDIVIDUALISTIC SHOPS
WITH HOUSING ABOVE AS ENDORSED BY
GOVERNMENT-SUPPORTED INITIATIVES
SUCH AS 'LIVING OVER THE SHOP' (LOTS)**



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CB RICHARD ELLIS REPORT

In 2010 CB Richard Ellis, along with other consultants, produced a Town Centre Macclesfield Economic Masterplan for Cheshire East Council.

Amongst other findings, it concluded:

- The town is under significant pressure from competing towns in South Manchester
- The town lacks a coordinated and significant leisure offer
- In terms of the social/ economic profile the town is a successful one
- The town is strategically well located with good linkages to highways and rail but it suffers with the rise in land between the rail station and the town centre
- The town centre has an attractive historic heart but [internal] linkages are poor
- Wilson Bowden's scheme presented a positive opportunity but layout/ scale needs addressing

It also concluded that any development too far to the south could have a detrimental impact on the Market Square, Grosvenor Square and Chestergate areas if they were not properly linked into the site. It suggested that pressure should be put on the Council's preferred development partner to ensure that any linkages were strengthened along Roe Street to Mill Street and in the southern portion along Samuel Street to ensure that the town centre scheme started to create a true retail circuit.

The consultant team were keen to ensure the new public space was visible from Mill Street into the Grosvenor Centre and that parking was retained in central locations and not concentrated at the southern most portion of the town centre. It also felt that the Heritage Centre should be contained within its own realm and that leisure opportunities such as the cinema should be contained within the southern portion of the site in a new 'leisure quarter' or on Water Street. The bulk of the new retail development should be located close to Market Square and Grosvenor Square.

It is notable that virtually none of the CB Richard Ellis recommendations have been taken forward.

THE TOWN CENTRE ECONOMIC MASTER PLAN HAS BEEN IGNORED

MARKET TOWN BENCHMARKING

AMT Town Benchmarking's annual report on Macclesfield was published in January 2012. Data for these annual reports is assembled in a rigorous fashion to ensure uniformity, fairness and accuracy. There are 12 performance indicators. According to the most recent one, Macclesfield is:

- About average for its offering of: shops, financial & professional services, drinking establishments, hot food takeaways, non-residential institutions, leisure offering and unique establishments. Higher than average % of offices and research & development offer.
- Slightly below average for comparison offer, slightly above average for convenience offer
- About average for having 'key attractors' such as Boots and Clarks
- Average in its number of vacant units
- Average in number of market days per week but below average in number of market traders it attracts (32% compared to 43% NW average)
- Below average in the value of its retail property, based on £ per sq. ft. (£35 compared to the £41 average in the NW)
- Very well above average in terms of footfall
- Average in terms of overall car parking, below average for short stay spaces and above average for long stay spaces and very well served for disabled spaces and on street parking. However, there were many empty car parking spaces on market days
- Lower than average in terms of retail outlet nos. (82% compared to a NW average of 91%) but very much up on commercial/ professional business nos. (14% compared to 5% average). Business confidence good but the prosperity of the town was rated at only 9% compared to NW average of 44% and the mix of retail offer rated at 18% (compared to 49% NW average). Lack of affordable housing was a big negative.
- Higher than average for % of businesses that suffered crime over 12 months (54% to 44%)
- Mainly average in town users survey but very poor on physical appearance (14% to 38%)
- Higher than average for the no. of local shoppers (58%/ 33%) but very few tourists (8% to 31%)

THE TOWN CENTRE NEEDS MAKING MORE ATTRACTIVE TO VISITORS



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Macclesfield Town Strategy

At the same time the Macclesfield Town Centre Regeneration scheme is being appraised through the planning system, work is underway on the evolution of the Macclesfield Town Strategy – a document intended to feed into the Cheshire East Local Plan.

Macc 2020 have been awarded a seat on the Town Strategy steering group and, at the time this paper was compiled, one workshop had already taken place. It was notable that, during that workshop, the town centre redevelopment process was totally disconnected from the need to find housing sites.

Without being given any planning training, steering group members from varied backgrounds were expected to select potential sites for housing development from a given limited choice of possible locations outside the town centre (and to do so during a discussion lasting less than an hour). This approach appears to be illogical, especially in view of the unique opportunity which the regeneration of the town centre offers.

Macclesfield needs to have a vibrant and lively town centre. It would have if more people lived in it. Their presence would also help to ensure that town centre businesses had more trade than would otherwise be the case.

The WB proposal offer fails completely to tackle the need for a 'living' town centre where as many people as possible reside. In terms of sustainability, providing housing units in town centres is regarded as best practice. Such an approach would reduce the need to provide for more in-commuting and would keep individual carbon footprints to a minimum.

We believe the Town Strategy/ Vision process and the redevelopment of the town centre should become one and the same exercise.

AMALGAMATE THE MACCLESFIELD TOWN STRATEGY/ VISION PROCESS WITH CONSIDERATION OF THE TOWN CENTRE REDEVELOPMENT AND PRODUCE A 21ST CENTURY SOLUTION

At the town strategy workshop in May most of the discussion around new housing focused on numbers of (but not justification for) dwellings that would be required over the timespan of the Core Strategy (ie. up to 2030). Some discussion about the type of housing units that might be appropriate was had, but this was marginal to the consideration of how many houses would be needed and where they could be delivered. This is curious, since the opening presentation noted that there would be a 50% increase in the numbers of over-65-year-olds in Macclesfield during the life of the strategy. Older people have different needs to younger folk, and proximity to services is one of the more important: town centre housing is not just a nice-to-have, it is essential if our housing provision is to deliver a good quality of life to everyone.

In transition terms, as fuel costs curtail commuting it is probable that many more of us will work from home - at least for part of the week. If we are going to live in our places of work, the outdoor environment needs to be of high quality and well maintained. We also require high quality public transport as well as good provision for cyclists. The Town Strategy discussions should have included these strands of thinking, but were sadly deficient in that respect. We hope these topics will be on the agenda at the next workshop focusing on infrastructure.

There is far more to strategic planning than identification of notional sites. There should be a sequential approach to land use (ie. brownfield first) and allocated employment land that is not needed should be released for mixed uses including housing.

The next stage of the process needs to concentrate on building quality, not just quantity, and density. Macc 2020 wants to see high quality environmental standards provided as a norm in new homes and low carbon energy provision, district heating, thermally efficient fabric and storage, on-site energy from solar photovoltaic and hot water systems as well as ground source heating pumps. In addition, we call for much improved rainwater management.

FUTURE BUILDINGS MUST BE TO A HIGH ENVIRONMENTAL STANDARD AS MUST THE PUBLIC REALM & PUBLIC TRANSPORT - WE NEED A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT