

## Salisbury Central Area Framework (“CAF”) Consultation – February 2020

I am writing on behalf of the Trustees of The Salisbury Cathedral Close Preservation Society. The Society is a registered charity whose aims are to promote knowledge of the area of Salisbury near the Cathedral, in particular the Cathedral Close (The Close), its history and architecture and to secure the preservation, protection and improvement of its features of historic and public interest.

### **Describing the unique features of The Close in the CAF accurately and how those features should be preserved**

In previous consultations, The Society was very pleased to note two features cited as key characteristics of The Close – *Contemplation* and *Quiet* – and strongly supported their inclusion in the final version of the CAF. The word *Quiet* has gone, and *enriching* has been added in the Summary of The CAF but, bizarrely, not in full CAF document. Visiting The Close can be enriching. However, this is **not** a substitution for and has no relationship to the crucial importance of The Close as a tranquil/quiet place, which sits well with *contemplation*, which **has** been left in as a distinguishing feature.

The Society urges that *quiet* must be re-instated or, alternatively, *tranquil*. This is a key feature of The Close which needs preserving. This is borne out if one reads the hundreds of TripAdvisor reviews of The Close where the words quiet, calm, serene and tranquil arise many times, as do reference to lovely green open spaces.

The Society notes that an accurate description of The Close throughout the consultations so far has been *visiting*. *Visiting* has disappeared in favour of “*tourism*”, defined in the New Oxford Dictionary as “the **commercial** organisation and operation of holidays and visits to places of interest.” Whilst the Cathedral is the City’s most popular tourist attraction, and The Close does contain other visitor attractions, it is an extensive residential area as well as housing two schools and an ecumenical college, so the focus for The Close as a whole should **not** solely be on tourism. Express focus simply on maximising tourism would destroy the special nature of The Close.

The Close **is** much visited. School children, people working in The Close and providers of services to residents and others in The Close visit every day. Many local people come into The Close to have a peaceful lunch hour, run around The Close, walk or cycle through on their way to work, walk their dogs or bring visitors to walk around. The emphasis on tourism should be deleted and *visiting* should be re-instated. The CAF puts emphasis on “health and wellbeing” being a motivation for enhancing the natural environment within the central area. The extensive and peaceful green space that is The Close should be kept that way for to benefit all local residents who visit. The green space that is The Close provides an important setting for the Grade 1 listed Cathedral, the listing for which states that “the setting is probably one of the finest in England”.

The descriptions of *quiet* and *visiting* are far more in line with the true characteristics of The Close and are consistent with the current Salisbury Conservation Appraisal and Management Plan 2014 (‘The Plan’) which identifies, as core features of The Close, ‘tranquil character’, ‘the tranquil and spatial quality’ – a green area of over 80 acres - and ‘the **absence** of **commercial** enterprises within the walls’. It also says ”The historic core of the conservation

area consists of two principal areas each with a **distinct character**; the **quiet formality** of The Close, and the busy commercial and residential area set within the medieval grid of streets” This distinct character of The Close must be preserved. This is particularly important as more intensity of development, activities and changes of use could damage the settings of the many listed buildings in The Close. The unique characteristics of The Close should be protected from commercial intrusions, other than those low-key activities which are provided by some of the attractions open to the public. Such activities are, in many cases, and must continue to be, controlled by planning conditions. For example, certain commercial activities at Arundells, one of the visitor attractions in The Close, are constrained by limits on the number and type of events; timing of those events and they are subject to a Noise Management Plan.

Past expert assessments of Salisbury Cathedral have concluded that among Gothic cathedrals its three **outstanding features** are:-

- the lack of additions and structural changes over time
- the spire and
- **its setting in its Close.**

Local authorities have a statutory obligation to have special regard to the desirability of preserving listed buildings “**and their settings**” in making planning decisions.

Setting goes well beyond the collection of individual buildings. It makes The Close a Heritage Asset in its entirety. The CAF needs to address the importance of the setting of The Close as a whole, Guidance published by Historic England - “The Setting of Heritage Assets” published in 2017 – mentions many important factors to look at when assessing the setting of listed buildings, including views; landscape; historic materials and surfaces; green space; noise and other nuisances; tranquillity; lighting effects and “light spills” and changes of land use.

### **Comments/queries on the new text in the CAF relating to The Close**

1 What does the bullet point in the Summary of the CAF mean – “Public realm strategy to embrace Cathedral movement strategy”. What is this, please?

2 The Summary of the CAF says that the CAF recommends it should “Seek to identify suitable points of access to the river for the public within the Cathedral Close”. The CAF talks of developing the working relationship with the Cathedral Close owners with a view to allowing free access to the river for visitors. Within The Close, the Avon is almost exclusively in gardens of private houses or attractions such as the museums and Arundells, so such a concept is inappropriate. It would be wrong to expect security conscious properties to allow river access. Given the proposals for the public green corridor through the city and the Maltings Masterplan, which will give river access, this wording should not find its way into the CAF. Indeed, these changes in recommendations have been inserted without consultation with property owners and residents and, at a recent community briefing, two members of the Cathedral Chapter were unaware of this river access recommendation.

3 The CAF now talks of an objective for The Close being to provide “events, the arts and other **enlivening activities.**” These should be appropriate activities, given the need to prevent the

shattering of the peace of The Close and not turning it into a recreation ground or theme park. Again, activities should respect the settings of the exceptional group of listed buildings in The Close.

4 There is, in “Infrastructure requirements or opportunities” in the CAF regarding The Close, a point “Seek means of (sympathetically) reconnecting the Cathedral to the wider area across the river, to the meadows and to the east.” What is this intended to address? What were the connections that have gone which the CAF seeks to re-instate? If it is some sort of bridge that is intended, the same issue applies as for public access to the river. The land along the Avon in The Close is all in gardens of properties within the curtilage and setting of listed buildings, some Grade 1. To do such a thing would be completely inappropriate. The Society urge that this recommendation to be deleted.

5 In the “Design recommendations” in relation to the Cathedral , there is a reference to using the Plan as a baseline. The Society would fully support this though would suggest it is given its full name, so that readers of the CAF could find it more easily if they wished to look into this further.. It stresses the key factors that make The Close so unique as set out above. It also stresses the importance of The Close as a green space in the city.

### **Creating people-friendly streets**

In the current iteration of the CAF, there is a plan of the roads in the city where the focus would be for people-friendly streets – the emphasis on safe and comfortable walking and cycling and away from vehicles. The Society found the map indistinct, but it appears to extend beyond the High Street and into The Close.

The Society stresses that the North (High St) Gate provides the only vehicle entrance to The Close, which is a residential area with several hundred inhabitants as well as a major ecclesiastical, educational and visitor attraction. This is the **only** adequate access for the emergency services to The Close. Therefore, the section of the High Street between its intersection with Crane Street and New Street and the North Gate is not feasible for pedestrianisation, for example, nor the areas marked on the plan in The Close – namely the roadway to the parking kiosk and the North Walk. The North Walk is the main access for residents’ vehicles and parking in the North Walk and Bishop’s Walk, as well as access to, and parking at, The Cathedral School and Sarum College.

In the section of the CAF addressing improving open space and the environment, it says “A long term aim is to be able to walk from Old Sarum to the Cathedral with no (or minimal) road crossings”. Again, it would not be feasible to pedestrianise the above crossing to achieve that aim.

### **Removal of street furniture and reduction of inappropriate signage/advertising**

The CAF talks of a desire to remove uncoordinated street furniture and signage which undermine the special historic environment of the High Street, for example, and other parts of the city. The Society strongly supports this approach. Nowhere is this more important than in The Close, where there has been a proliferations of unsightly flags, banners, inappropriate advertising and amateurish (and potentially hazardous) A-boards appearing on the roadways. There do not appear to be any consistent rules for these so they can be a real jumble. This is

particularly troubling as at least two of the properties concerned have had to apply for planning permission to erect or change their formal signage yet seemingly put out A-boards/large banners and flags without restraints. This is also rather strange since the Society has confirmation from Wiltshire Council that The Close is “an area of special control of advertisements”. The Society would welcome the production of a consistent policy on street furniture/signage for Salisbury, especially in historic/conservation areas/settings of listed buildings.

## **Churchfields**

The CAF now mentions an objective to support housing delivery and to investigate residential use on the Council depot site/east side of Churchfields overlooking the water meadows. This is now more consistent with the thrust of the Wiltshire Core Strategy in respect of Churchfields and might reduce the number of large vehicles coming through the city. There is also an objective to manage future investment so that heavy traffic generating businesses are located away from the area. The Society would support any reduction of the heavy traffic from Churchfields that, because of low railway bridges, has to rumble through the city. This heavily polluting traffic creates an unsafe environment and impinges heavily on the pedestrian environment, notably but not only at the New St./High St. crossroads. While that continues, everything else the CAF proposes for the city centre, wellbeing and people-friendly streets is put at risk/devalued.

In both previous observations on the CAF we have urged for there to be a proper consideration of an alternative route for lorries out of Churchfields to the Netherhampton Road. The Society will continue to press for this in future planning discussions.

The Society notes that the CAF rather kicks the can down the road, by indicated that the problems with Churchfields will be determined through the review of the Local Plan, rather than the CAF or the Salisbury Neighbourhood Plan, both of which are being worked on. That is just putting off grappling with this difficult issue.

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