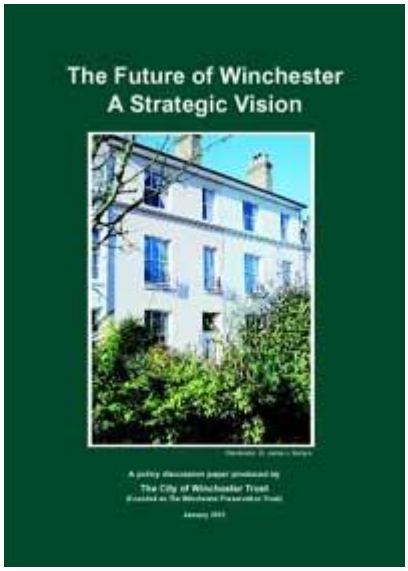
FUTURE OF WINCHESTER: A STRATEGIC VISION



The Future of Winchester is a policy discussion paper, produced by the City of Winchester Trust in January 2001. You can read the individual sections on the Web, see below.

Conclusion

The 'Good City' should be the foundation of policy
The 'Good City' needs to be designed
The City Council should employ first-class talent to achieve it
The Trust's role is to work with the City Council

Press coverage

The Southern Evening Echo reviewed the Vision paper in 2001

FUTURE OF WINCHESTER: STRATEGIC VISION

Introduction

The Need for a Vision

In order to think clearly about the future of Winchester we need a concept of the sort of City we want. Only then can we sensibly look for answers to the problems confronting us. We requirethis vision' of what Winchester should aim to become in order to guide the inevitable process of change towards the goal of making a better City. Since privately funded projects have their own agenda, which are unlikely to match the needs and expectations of the City, it is critical for the City Authorities to plan the design of the City employing people of first-class ability who understand the concept. King Alfred said: *I desire to leave men who come after me a remembrance*

of good works. That should be in the front of the mind of all who have a duty of care for our City.

Having a vision of a better future is an acceptance that maintaining the *status quo* is not an option. Winchester's character is based on a history of change. To resist change now is both uncharacteristic and futile. Creating a vision of what it could become is the way to preserve Winchester's character. Without such a vision opportunities will be lost.

Current thinking is that the best model for the future is the traditional city of streets, squares, and parks. They are the public spaces of the city where citizens meet, and they form the city's permanent framework. Cities like Bath did not occur by accident. They came into being as part of an enlightened, design-conscious strategy. This is why the Trust heartily supports Lord Rogers and the Urban Task Force in their call for design-led planning. The design of the City depends on this essential framework of public spaces, which decides the context for individual projects. The design must also take into account the character of individual districts and develop the potential that exists in each.



Winchester, School of Art, architecture plb

Winchester has been extraordinarily successful, and lucky, to have avoided the worst excesses of change, and has managed to keep its historic qualities while adding some good modern buildings. But the City's most important attribute in determining its future is its small, compact, geographically defined form. The principles discussed in this paper seek to retain this characteristic. However, the unusual circumstances that present Winchester with this opportunity will not last long. The high value it has acquired as a place in which to live and work, and the

investment that this is attracting, offers a unique opportunity for implementing the vision. But, in the face of Government policy for the South-east, if these forces are left unguided there is the risk of great damage. Nevertheless, if the challenge is taken up without delay, the future need not be compromised.

We acknowledge the significance of the *Future of Winchester Study*, but it stops short of defining the direction it recommends. The Trust's objective here is to put forward a vision that makes judgments and states preferences. This paper is planned to be the first in a series, and is intended to provide the general reader with a concise introduction to the essential concepts and ideas. Future papers will go into more detail of specific topics.

The Need for Higher Density

In the South-east we are facing the prospect of demands from the Government for the building of more and more homes. This is a reflection of the economic success of the region, of the reduction in the size of households, and in people's demand for more living and working space in their homes. At the same time, increasingn affluence is enabling people to make more journeys by car. If we go on as we are, there will be little or no real countryside left, noise and air pollution will become ever worse, and urban roads will be subject to yet more congestion. Even if we are successful in protecting the historic heart of Winchester, it is not realistic to imagine we can save the whole City from the effects of such an outcome.



London, Horselydown Square
Wickham, van Eyck

We have to change the way we build our towns. Recent residential building in Britain has been predominantly suburban. Suburbia (Housing built at relatively low density,

with each house in its own plot of land, served by access roads that are often dead-ends) has served us well, and many people will wish to continue to live there, but its density is too low for the demands of the future. Furthermore, low densities imply that shops, schools, pubs and other services are, for the most part, located out of reach of walking and cycling, resulting in journeys by car to get to them.

Advantages of Streets and Squares

The Trust also endorses the report of the Urban Task Force under Lord Rogers in its conclusion that most new housing must be built at a higher density than we have seen in much of the Twentieth Century. If one were to try increasing the housing density in the suburban model the result would be tiny plots of land and neighbours overlooking each other at front and rear. Another approach, the tower block, has been tried and rejected. However there is an alternative: the traditional town street. Town houses of three to four storeys plus basement, even when provided with generous gardens, give much higher densities than suburbia. The higher density means that there are enough people within walking or cycling range to support local services, thus reducing the number of journeys by car, and encouraging the development of communities. When neighbours are about in the street vandalism and crime are reduced, and neighbourliness is encouraged.

There is one requirement above all others for satisfactory living in the residential street: it must be designed for the pedestrian and the cyclist rather than the car, so that people can walk safely in it, and so that children can play and get to school on foot. In the residential street the car has to give way and proceed at a walking pace.

The benefits of increased density and reduced car use are however enormous. Not only the saving of much countryside, the reduction in noise and air pollution, less traffic congestion, but also support for local shops, pubs and services, and the development of local communities. It is worth noting that the traditional English market town has also been built of streets, market squares, parks and gardens. Increased density of housing, done well, can provide residential communities that many people will prefer to suburbia. We call this the `Good City'. This is the model that we should use. This paper discusses how these ideas can be applied to Winchester.

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The Vision: The `Good City'

In the past cities were seen as the focus of cultural and social values - 'Civilisation'.
Aristotle said: *Men came together in cities in order to live. They remain together in order to live the good life.*

Our challenge is to recapture his vision and build a City that is so good that most people will find it preferable to suburban sprawl.

The Compact City

Suburbia, being low density, takes up more countryside than we can afford, and causes most journeys to be made by car. This generates traffic that clogs our roads and pollutes the air. However, people want more spacious homes in which to live and work. The answer is to build a compact city of streets and squares giving a higher density, and making walking and cycling more attractive, which, in turn, helps support local shops and services. The `Good City' encourages sustainability and good neighbourliness.

Public spaces are the essential framework



London, The TateGallery,
Sterling and Wilford
Drawing: Keith Leaman

The `Good City' is much more than the sum of its buildings. Its public spaces - streets, squares, parks - and its public buildings, are the social and cultural arena of the City. They must be designed for their role in public life, and be attractive and friendly places in which people can gather. With increasing density, the design of this essential framework of the City is critical to the success of urban living; it can no longer be left solely to commercial interests, but is a primary responsibility of the City Council.

Streets for people not cars

If urban living is to be seen as preferable to suburbia it is essential that streets in central and residential areas be designed for people rather than cars. Traffic must give way to pedestrians and cyclists, and must proceed at a walking pace.

Rediscover and revitalise Britain's urban heritage

Winchester, like most British towns, has happened without much conscious design. However, the Georgians and the Victorians built some fine urban streets and squares, for example, in Bath, Edinburgh, Cheltenham, Harrogate and Brighton. These offer instances of dense city living combined with a generous provision of green space. And in Winchester, we have examples for instance in Eastgate Street, Southgate Street, St Peter Street, St James's Terrace, Clifton Terrace, West End Terrace and Oram's Arbour, and at a smaller scale, St John's Almshouses. Buildings enclosing an inner courtyard with gardens and trees, can achieve high-quality living, and may also be appropriate.

Provide for a broad social and cultural spectrum

The City derives its dynamic from a diverse mix of people and their activities. Different types of building-use do not have to be un-neighbourly, and should be integrated. We need to encourage an inclusive approach to the provision of lower-cost housing.

Quality is necessary in all aspects

Quality, which is essential in the `Good City', is not the same as style. Style is a matter of choice and is used to express a personal or public image. Quality of design, architecture, workmanship and materials is identifiable by relationship to established exemplars.

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The Vision: The City Core

The City core is the focus of city living, contains much of its heritage, and must be treated with particular care.
The desire to live in Winchester, and the expectation people have of more floor space, needs to be solved by increasing density, not land area. This increase in density can only be achieved successfully if skill and understanding are used to apply the principles of the `Good City'. Priority should be given to providing new dwelling space in the central area, rather than in the outer areas.

Winchester would benefit from more city-like characteristics, in areas not too sensitive historically.
Winchester has the potential to achieve a permanent urban structure composed of high-density mixed-use buildings, and public spaces. The core needs to have those features appropriate to the cultural and social heart of the City, of which the most important are:

- Pedestrians should have priority over all other users.
- Spaces and ground surfaces should be designed for people, not vehicles.
- New buildings could well be 4 - 5 floors where polite to neighbours.
- The core should have visually identifiable characteristics.

- Ground floors should be retail or residential as required, with doors to the street.
- Floors above retail and office space should be residential.
- Buildings with large floor areas should be surrounded by others of a scale more appropriate to the street.
- Roof spaces, where visually acceptable, can provide valuable outdoor living space.
- The boundary of the core should be the location of '**park and walk**'.

Winchester needs good new buildings



Dublin, Temple Bar
Group 91
Drawing: Keith Leaman

Appropriate modern architecture offers real opportunities to build for a better quality of life. Appropriateness has more to do with scale and relationships than anything else, and does not mean conformity or imitation. The juxtaposition of buildings of varying scales and styles is part of the attraction of Winchester. Variety skilfully handled gives a sense of place and identity. Pastiche, the superficial or inappropriate use of historical styles, is to be avoided.

Historic buildings must be preserved for their own sake

Most earlier buildings should be saved, partly because they are of special interest and cannot be replaced, and partly because they provide a sense of continuity and set standards. The old offers opportunities for enrichment of the new. This includes humble buildings, walls, pavings, etc., because the details and spaces between them are also important in providing setting and context.

Trees and open spaces in the City are crucial

Public and private gardens, open spaces and green wedges are vital to the City, and must be protected. Plots of land that result from the re-development at large private gardens are often unsatisfactory. Change of this nature requires a reassessment of the way to accommodate the trees and gardens in the new development (see below: Demand for infill). The views from the City centre to green downland, and the roofscape and tree cover seen from the hills, are unique parts of Winchester's character and depend on the City's relationship to the surrounding country. Tree-lined routes into the City are a characteristic feature of Winchester; other entrance routes should be enhanced in this way.

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The Vision: The City Boundary

The setting of Winchester in its countryside is unique, especially the hills and green wedges, which must be protected and enhanced.

These characteristics fix the position of the boundary between urban development and the surrounding country in most locations. The recently published Winchester City and its Setting is an essential reference for changes relating to that boundary. Above all, we must find a way of meeting the imposition of further housing development so that it becomes a proud addition to our heritage, rather than a creeping blight, which destroys both the quality of the City boundary and the countryside, without any compensating visual gain.

Winchester City core can only support a limited expansion of population without its character changing, as has happened to Basingstoke

The capacity of the City needs to be calculated, and such growth as can be accepted should preferably be within the existing boundary, the City core taking a higher proportion where appropriate. Development beyond the existing boundary may be possible, but only if designed in accordance with criteria which support the principles of the compact city, and which enhance its relationship to the countryside. Any redefinition of the City boundary must be determined by the following principles:

- A stringent City-wide design strategy.
- New development to use high-quality, dense, urban forms in designed settings, for example; tree-lined streets, squares and crescents in styles appropriate to Winchester.
- The use of urban elements which clearly define `town from country', and which give a sense of arrival and departure.

We must resist the temptation to use the City's boundary as a backyard into which to dump development that is difficult to accommodate within the City

Even uses which might be perceived as `less acceptable' must be included within the designed boundary of the City, and be subject to proper urban design. Existing urban playing fields should be retained, and not relocated to the boundary.

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The Vision: Between Core and Boundary

Demand for infill

There is continual demand for infill development in the outer areas of the City, for example, when large gardens are subdivided. It may seem an easy solution to the demand for more housing, but in fact it is not. All too often a large house is left with an inadequate, badly shaped garden, and suburban, car-based housing is built around it.

The solution where conditions allow is to assemble land from neighbouring plots and to build a properly designed urban development of residential streets and squares, albeit at somewhat lower height than in the City core. Buildings round a courtyard may also be appropriate. The City Council should be proactive in identifying opportunities and in specifying this policy to developers.

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The Vision: Work, Leisure and the Arts

Offices and industry are vital to the dynamic of the City, but must be kept in balance

Shops and offices, with residential accommodation above, are the norm elsewhere in Europe, and once were here. The recent return to this arrangement should be encouraged. The tendency for commerce to exploit the City should be balanced by a contribution from commerce towards the ideal of the `Good City'.

Lively shopping is important to the City's character and prosperity

Winchester's compact shopping area is integral to its historic core, which makes it a great asset. It can be extended in a way that will continue to appeal by the use of features such as pentices, arcades, squares and covered markets, without trying to compete with larger towns. The market is popular and draws custom to other outlets. It should be capitalised on and extended.

The City must welcome visitors of all kinds

but not at the expense of its character, particularly as it is this very character which attracts them. Tourists should be encouraged to pay their way, especially by staying overnight.

Leisure and Sport are also vital to the life of the City

However, Winchester cannot hope to, nor should it aim to provide the facilities of a large town. The citizens have many advantages that others do not enjoy. We should not put at risk what we have by over-ambition.

The Arts enrich the life of the City, and should be supported

In addition, public art - sculpture, fountains, murals, etc. - should be integral to the design of public spaces.

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The Vision: Traffic and Transport

A rational, integrated system, which relates to the City as a whole, is important

It must aim to achieve the following:

Elimination of through traffic from the City Progressive reduction of non-essential traffic in the City core.

Pedestrian priority in the central core and in residential streets; all other users give way Park and Walk - Central public car parking limited to the edge of the core.

Park and Ride - Peripheral public parking and transfer facilities for heavy delivery vehicles, located at the City boundary.

Private parking provision for buildings: zero in central core, increasing towards the boundary.

The provision of improved cycle routes outside the core.

Reliable and frequent bus services to all areas High levels of security for all parking.

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Appendix: Background

The City of Winchester Trust was founded in the 1950s (as The Winchester Preservation Trust) to defend the City against destruction, insensitive planning policies and inappropriate new architecture. Changes over the last half-century require a reassessment of the Trust's understanding and response to the future of the City. While planning will always aim to negotiate change for the benefit and improvement of the City, there are considerable differences between policies then and now which derive from very different attitudes and understandings about our physical environment and the values placed on its different aspects.

Four issues provide a focus to compare the differences between the 1950s and the present.

- The concept of what makes a good city.
- The values placed on the heritage of the past and confidence in the future.
- attitudes to cultural and architectural quality.
- The possibilities for achieving change.

In the 1950s, the traditional city was considered a failure; the new ideal was a garden city of towers in a landscape, the city of le Corbusier. Now the traditional city of streets and squares is again seen as the best model for the future. Then the past was to be swept away to make room for the new. Now the real need is to understand the best of the past and reinterpret what is relevant, so as to create an enriched future.

Then, quality was ephemeral and throwaway, culture was elitist, exclusive and perceived to be about art, opera and theatre, and architecture was tumbling into a chasm between a lost craft tradition and a clumsy modernity. Now, quality is expected, though not always achieved, and culture permeates every aspect of life from food to art. Architecture, the best of it, has rediscovered quality in well-crafted technology and once again plays a role in making the city. But the worst and the mediocre are still very evident and very likely to predominate if not resisted.

Since those days the pendulum has swung so far in favour of the past that the Winchester Preservation Trust has renamed itself the City of Winchester Trust, in order to remove any impression that preservation is its only aim. In the past the Trust focused mainly on responding to proposals as they arose. Growing pressure for large-scale redevelopment and the unhappy example of the Brooks has prompted the need to set out a policy that demands the highest standards, and encourages the City authorities to take seriously their responsibility for guiding development with real vision and understanding.

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Appendix: The Question of Responsibility

This vision of the future of Winchester is a carefully considered view using as our guide the understanding and experience gained through the study of history. History cannot tell us what to do next; this requires judgment and there is no escaping that responsibility. Judgments about the future form of Winchester have to be made, and they have to be made now.

This responsibility demands that world-class skill and experience are brought to bear in the formation of both the design and the reality. Making a `Good City' that provides for future needs, and is even better than the City of the past, involves much greater complexity than ever before, and places a critical responsibility on the City Fathers to seek the best advice possible. The Trust's responsibility is to do whatever it can to help achieve this.

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Enthusiastic support has been received from:

Prof. Sir Colin Stansfield-Smith CBE RIBA

" Winchester should welcome this paper. It articulates in a simple and straightforward way all the most attractive and relevant ideas of the Richard Rogers Task Force report. Winchester is a privileged, beautiful City with special attributes which are in danger of being made ordinary; we need something better.

The City of Winchester Trust is right to remind the City Council not only of its responsibilities but of the many opportunities which exist. Given good leadership the people of Winchester will want to avoid pollution, congestion and downgraded suburbs, and have the intelligence to identify the opportunities and seek quality in all its forms.

Winchester cannot just live in the past and indulge its heritage in spite of a culture that continuously persuades it only to look back. It must, instead, realise the need and benefit of looking forward and planning the vision that this paper represents."

David Rock PPRIBA CSD Hon. AIA

" Winchester is a fine City and has the potential to become even better but also to decline; it cannot stand still.

Strong policies are needed which by the clarity of their aims give everyone the chance to lend their support. This discussion paper is an appropriate and timely start. It is clear-sighted, easy to read and understand, and reflects the best of current - and past thinking, for there are certain absolutes in such matters. It is necessarily broad-brush in its aims, as befits a launch document and I should be surprised if anyone could fault what it says.

The other important need in developing the vision is to establish the best process for commissioning the reality. Without it the potential could be lost. This demands knowledge, experience, the avoidance of expediency, and the will to succeed. Above all the aim must be to achieve the quality which befits the City of Winchester. I am happy to support this paper and commend it to all."

Robin Nicholson CBE RIBA

"Winchester has survived but the world is changing rapidly. I commend the City of Winchester Trust's Strategic Vision to its citizens and the City. This is a special moment nationally, with a growing consensus that the well-designed sustainable city must be nurtured in order to contain the seemingly endless spread of the suburbs. It may even be possible to increase the density at the periphery, as though it were a modern city wall with gateways.

However, for the vision to have power, there now needs to be active consultation with the people of Winchester and positive political leadership in developing this into a working urban strategy. "

David Mackay RIBA COAC, Partner MBM Architects, Barcelona, *Member of the British Government's Advisory Panel for Urban renewal*.

"Most European cities are aware that the instruments used to effect the process of urban change have proved inadequate. The fundamental issue about the need for a fresh understanding of the city is to put aside, however valuable, most of the philosophy on cities, including those of Ebenezer Howard, Louis Mumford and Colin Buchanan's report. The functional city died long ago.

Fragments of the city need to be seen as architectural projects, and designed in the same way that architects design buildings. The task consists of designing the form of public spaces, streets, squares, gardens, parks, the placement of public buildings and the position and heights of adjoining façades. In this way we avoid both a rigid master plan and market-orientated developer proposals, in favour of a series of project-plans which accommodate the complexity of the situation."

Michael Wilford CBE RIBA AIARB FRSA

" Winchester is a City of national importance and significance. Like many historic centres, its heritage is under threat from development pressures in response to new commercial and social needs. Such pressure is not new. Cities have historically rebuilt and regenerated themselves over time in response to developing requirements. The most successful have done so with vision and skill and have ensured that the inherited quality and character is enhanced rather than destroyed.

Winchester faces critical decisions. The response of its leaders to the current challenges and opportunities will condition its future for the next century. I hope they can rise to the occasion with an appropriate vision and seek out the best talent available to assist them in realising it."

Ben Webster, The Civic Trust

"This document presents a bold and challenging vision for the City Of Winchester. It is fluently written in an engaging style. Most importantly it exudes a passionate commitment to Winchester. The Civic Trust wholeheartedly endorses this vision and hopes that it will underpin a fruitful partnership between the City of Winchester Trust, the City Council and the local