
Letters

Silver Hill clouds

SIR: Once again, clouds loom over Silver Hill. We thought that the 2018 Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) took a big step forwards in the life of the city's most important regeneration project, and that it would lead to good things happening.

Sadly, our hopes have been dashed by an uninspired proposal just revealed by the city council. The proposal is full of fine words, but it rings hollow primarily because it really doesn't follow the SPD as the council claims. Gone is the idea of having several different developers pitch for parts of the site so as to avoid a uniform approach. Instead, by teaming up with just one developer the council risks a re-run of the Henderson debacle.

Whatever development/ planning brief the council issues, once it enters into a contract with a developer, who will be focussed on the financial return, it will, for all practical purposes, lose control over what gets built. It is inevitable that, as the developer seeks to change the brief to improve viability, the council will be so desperate to complete the deal that it will sacrifice civic interests (like public realm, opening up historic waterways and creating a world class museum).

In essence, the council is abdicating its responsibility for this site, with its potentially priceless archaeology, and is leaving everything to chance and to the highest bidder. Too much has yet to be resolved, including the still-awaited Movement Strategy. It makes no sense to dispose of the bus station before it is known how the buses and traffic will be accommodated around the city.

The key point is that the next step after the SPD was to devise a detailed masterplan under the direction of a civic-based body before the site is parcelled out to developers. The city council's best option now is to pass that responsibility to a Community Development Corporation or Trust, comprised of excellent local professionals and others who would ensure that any development would benefit the city rather than a developer. We hope that the council accepts these comments in good faith, as it is still the case that Winchester Deserves Better.

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