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Matter 10: Core Policy 7

Question 10.1. Flexibility. *Is Core Policy 7 too prescriptive as to the form of development that will take place at Maltings/Central Car Park?*

- 10.1.1 Not living in the Salisbury area or knowing enough about the economy of the City or its history of development, I only expressed a desire to be further involved in the Examination on the matters of transport and in particular the main trunk routes. I did not tick the box to say I wanted to participate in the Examination of the retail matters, but since the questions of Matter 10 are asked, I would like to say a little more, based on my experience of living in another cathedral town.
- 10.1.2 In Winchester we have had a bad experience of local authority retail planning. A scheme, called the Brooks, was imposed on the town in the early 1980s, strongly against the expressed wishes of almost everybody involved in the so-called consultation (of 3 schemes proposed, the one that had almost no support from the public was the one selected). The Brooks is acknowledged by everybody now (including the City Council whose scheme it was) to have been a failure – in nearly 30 years it has never actually been fully occupied.
- 10.1.3 The Brief for the Brooks scheme in Winchester was similar to that for the Maltings, except in the detail of the latter not being a closed space (mall-like) development. It contained the standard ‘anchor-store’ stipulation (there have been two failures of anchor stores in the Brooks, including the recent shutting down of a BHS store, to be replaced by low-end discount clothing outlet). It also stipulated a large underground public car-park, the cost of which clearly compromised the standard of the rest of the development, as well as building in the traffic attractor for decades.
- 10.1.4 I think people feel the lesson in Winchester has been that Councils have no business dabbling in this sort of grandiose Big Planning development, since it is very rare to see any aptitude in it. It also seems contrary to the emerging spirit of the age, which should be about localism, variety and small scale – the way in fact in which great cathedral towns like Winchester and Salisbury have organically grown.
- 10.1.5 Big London developers and architectural practices seem never to grasp the vernacular except as a computerised stick-on embellishment. It is very rare that a single developer concept works for a traditional town centre – I can think of none except the *grand projet* at Southgate in Bath and, even with all the bath stone façades, I am fairly uneasy at the cold Mussolini scale of that.
- 10.1.6 I believe it is good news that Salisbury’s central car parks should be redeveloped (though really bad news that they build in huge quantities of traffic-generating car parking), but the development would be best left to an incremental process over a long time¹ and parcelled out to different developers (and different scales of development) and different architects, but subject to a clear design brief which respects the existing built environment and the lovely river assets of Salisbury.
- 10.1.7 At §6.27 in the strategy it says

¹ If for no other reason than that maybe in the future we will have relearned how to build things properly in city centres.

Much of Salisbury's growth strategy is therefore based on an ambitious transformation of the city centre to ensure that it remains competitive into the future while protecting the niche retailer and its intrinsic character. It follows that development elsewhere should not undermine or conflict with this Strategy and not threaten delivery of the Maltings and Central Car Park redevelopment nor damage the existing city centre.

- 10.1.8 This raises the same question asked in Winchester – how do you transform a centre and protect its local or niche character. Winchester is now a classic clone town – in the 38 years I have lived there it has lost almost all of its local retail businesses – there are two remaining non-chain businesses in the High Street and a very few in neighbouring streets. The few that survive do so comfortably within a café culture in those streets that are least affected by traffic; that are least accessible by car and that are most like shared-space streets.
- 10.1.9 The argument for retaining city centre car parking is always about fear that shoppers will go elsewhere. But the argument is not persuasive. Why is it not likely that the economy of Salisbury would benefit from a shopping environment that was not choked with traffic? You might get different retail uses in the centre if the access were not entirely car-based, but the overall economy could benefit enormously from an environment that was not determined by the needs of motorists. For one thing the town would be a much more pleasant place to stay and tourists who stay spend much more money than those who pop in en route from Windsor to Bath, via Stonehenge.
- 10.1.10 In any case if a town tries to compete with the sort of retail found in out-of-town hypermarkets it can never succeed – Salisbury could never have the car-borne accessibility of such places. So why not compete on the basis of qualities it could vaunt if it looked after them properly? Salisbury's selling point is old Salisbury with walkable streets and a sense of agora, not some frenetic household goods shopping centre surrounded by cars and perched on a smelly multi-storey car park.