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Cc: Carol Middleton (carolmiddleton319@gmail.com); Cllr Beth Knowles (cldr.b.knowles@manchester.gov.uk); Cllr Joan Davies (cldr.j.davies@manchester.gov.uk); Cllr Kevin Peel (kev.peel@gmail.com); Sarah Ramsbottom (sarah.ramsbottom@castlefieldstates.com)

Subject: 2 - 4 Chester Road: Planning application 113870/FO/2016

Importance: High

Dear Councillor

I am writing again to you and all members of the Planning Committee about the planning application for 2 – 4 Chester Road which is to be considered on 9 February. We really appreciate your decision to make a site visit before reaching a decision and we look forward to meeting you on site at 11am this Thursday.

Castlefield Forum is a community group aiming to make Castlefield an even better place to live in, work in and visit than it is now. Castlefield canal basin has been given the status of an 'outstanding Conservation Area' by the Department of Environment (1980), declared the world's first 'Urban Heritage Park' (1982), included in the Government's shortlist of potential World Heritage Sites, and described as "one of the strongest landscapes in the UK" (1).

As you know, Conservation Areas are "areas of special architectural or historic interest, *the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.*" (2) (our emphasis). So local authorities have a *statutory duty* to pay special attention to "preserving or enhancing" their "character or appearance." We consider very strongly that proposals in this application do not respect the concept of a Conservation Area. However, we positively wish to see the site developed. To demonstrate this, a local architect & Forum member has produced images of an alternative approach which are contrasted with the applicant's images taken from the same viewpoints here:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/b7oz7qgmzqae1lf/AAAMn0-P2to6cBH3VhCnNCMa?dl=0>

We need to emphasise that our images are not intended to show a final or finished design for development on the site. Rather they are intended to suggest the type of development which in:

- height
- mass
- scale
- shape
- footprint
- colour
- impact on views in and out of the area
- impact on heritage assets
- relationship to the canal basin
- and contribution to the public realm

would "*preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the area*" in a way in which the applicant's proposals absolutely would not.

Our alternative footprint is almost identical to a footprint considered on page 23 of the applicant's *Design & Access Statement* which is very positive about it: "*The single block.....(takes) cognisance of.....the building line of Middle Warehouse, Castlegate and Chester Road.....sets the building away from the towpath, creating greater 'space' within the basin.....creates a strong edge to Chester Road....continues to follow the rhythm of the gap between Middle Warehouse and Castlegate.....(and) also offers the potential to provide active frontages to Chester Road.*" But the *Statement* then rejects the option, saying that "this approach... blocks all views in and out of the canal basin".

This simply isn't true. This footprint still provides views in and out of the basin between the new building and Castlegate and over the Bridgewater Viaduct. Also, while their chosen footprint provides *four views* between the canal basin and Chester Road, their rejected and our suggested footprint provides *three views*. Not exactly a big difference! Creating one extra view seems a high price to pay for completely failing to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the area.

Castlefield Estates have commissioned their own *Heritage Impact Assessment* which concludes that the proposals will "neither preserve nor enhance the character of one of Manchester's most important and significant Conservation Areas" and that "quite clearly the overall impact will be substantial and damaging".

We do not have access to Renaker's viability studies for their proposal, but we believe the profit on it would be very high, particularly since they bought the site for £700k. We believe a revised scheme similar to ours, delivering some 110 2-bed apartments of approx 700 sq ft, would enable the applicant to make a reasonable return on their investment while still protecting the character of the area.

The Officer's report implies that only two decisions can be made on this application: approve it as it is or refuse it as it is. But there is third option – to defer a decision pending further discussions with the applicant on all the issues raised by us and Castlefield Estates in our letters of objection, in the alternative Heritage Impact Assessment and by the images we have now provided you with. We are all custodians of our environment and whatever is built on this site will probably still be standing when we are all gone. We urge you to defer a decision so that discussions can take place.

I am copying this to Carol Middleton, Chair of Castlefield Forum, City Centre Ward Councillors Beth Knowles, Joan Davies & Kevin Peel and Sarah Ramsbottom, Castlefield Estates.

Yours sincerely

Ian Christie
on behalf of 137 members and supporters of Castlefield Forum

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(1) *Jonathan Schofield My Guide to Manchester. 2015*

(2) *Section 72, Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.*