



CASTLEFIELD

Preserving, Improving, Living –
in the heart of our city



Sir Richard Leese
Leader of the Council
Richard Elliott
Head of Policy, Partnerships & Research
Manchester City Council
PO Box 532
Manchester M60 2LA

3 May 2017

Dear Sir Richard Leese and Richard Elliott

Castlefield Neighbourhood Plan

I am writing as Secretary of Castlefield Forum to let you know, for information and as a matter of courtesy, of a decision the Forum has made in relation to the proposed Castlefield Neighbourhood Plan.

Over the last six months since the October decision by the Executive on the boundary for the Castlefield Neighbourhood Plan, we have had a number of detailed discussions within our Neighbourhood Plan Action Group, our Committee and the Forum itself about whether or not we wished to continue to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan for Castlefield and last Monday, 24 April, the Forum decided unanimously that it no longer wished to do so, at least for the time being.

The reasons for this decision are as follows:

- In the Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee & Executive meetings we attended during the 8 month period between submitting our proposed boundary and the Executive making its final decision, and in informal meetings Forum representatives had with you both and other Planning Officers, it became very clear to us that there was no enthusiasm for Neighbourhood Plans at Leader or Officer level in the Council, even though there was among our Ward (and some other) Councillors. It was clear that you saw little point at all in Neighbourhood Plans, considering they were unnecessary and that they complicated the planning process while at the same time raising unrealisable and unrealistic expectations. We are certain that if we were to proceed with our Neighbourhood Plan by applying to become the designated Neighbourhood Forum, Council officers would provide the professional support they are required to provide, and in fact have said they would provide, but this would not be quite the same thing as

working with a group of colleagues who share our aspirations and enthusiasm for what Neighbourhood Plans can achieve.

- The relatively small area agreed by the Executive for our Neighbourhood Plan (compared to the area we submitted), includes no current development sites at all except for 2 - 4 Chester Road and Plot G for both of which planning permissions have recently been granted. Our Neighbourhood Plan was intended by us to be a land-use plan to shape the future development of the area but the boundary the Council has given us simply means it can no longer do this. There will be nothing of any significance to shape, at least in the foreseeable future.
- Exclusion of the St John's Gardens area, Deansgate Quay and other communities from within the Neighbourhood Plan boundary would mean the Forum would be acting on behalf of both a Neighbourhood Plan area and a non-Neighbourhood Plan area and this might lead to complications and difficulties.
- With the National Trust (NT), we are currently working on a 'Spirit of Place' study of Castlefield. The purpose of such studies is to seek to capture the qualities that go to make a place special, unique and cherished and what draws people (residents and visitors) to them. So far the NT have carried out Spirit of Place studies only in rural areas or stately homes within their ownership and the study of Castlefield is the first one, other than Heaton Park, in an urban area. We are hopeful that once completed, publicised and of course shared with the Council, this study might carry as much weight as a Neighbourhood Plan in influencing the future of our area and would cover the whole of Castlefield and not just the much smaller Neighbourhood Plan area.

During our meeting with you, Sir Richard, you made the point that once the Northenden residents group who were hoping to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan had had their boundary decided, the Council hadn't heard anything at all from them, a fact which seemed to strengthen your view of Neighbourhood Plans as not only unnecessary but also possibly wasteful of scarce public resources. We are writing now because we have no wish to end up as the subject of a similar negative anecdote! We are not just 'fading away'. We have thought about what the Executive boundary decision offers and we consider it will not enable us to get anywhere near achieving what we hoped for and that there are other aims and projects where we could better place our limited community and voluntary energies. Of course circumstances and indeed Forum personnel can change over time which is why we are 'parking' the Neighbourhood Plan idea 'for the time being' rather than for ever, but we nevertheless thought we should let you know.

With kind regards



Ian Christie
Secretary Castlefield Forum
7 Rochdale House
15 Slate Wharf
Manchester M15 4SX

Tel 0161 8933 4690
Mob 07557 123 239

From: Richard Leese [mailto:r.leese@manchester.gov.uk]

Sent: 18 May 2017 15:33

To: Ian Christie

Cc: Richard Elliott; Cllr Amina Lone; Cllr Beth Knowles; Cllr Joan Davies; Cllr Kevin Peel; Cllr Lee-Ann Igbon; Cllr Nigel Murphy; j.shuttleworth@manchester.gov.uk; o.west@manchester.gov.uk; Tracy Kiely; Pat Bartoli; Dave Roscoe

Subject: Re: Castlefield Neighbourhood Plan

Dear Ian,

Thank you for your letter. You are right to say that in general neither Members (including myself) nor officers have enthusiasm for what we believe to be poor legislation around neighbourhood plans. That a number of appeals against Neighbourhood Plan driven refusals of planning permission have been allowed strengthens my view that even in spatial planning terms they are an inadequate tool and certainly play no part in the sort of wider view of community involvement in which your group excels. Having said that I not only respect the Forum's decision but also the reasons for it.

As I said when we met and again at the Executive Committee, the Council has the highest regard for the contribution the Castlefield Forum makes demonstrating the real sense of community that has built up in your area. Planning officers appreciate the contribution you have made to planning decisions even if they did not always accept your advice, and your local Councillors fully support what you do.

Not only would I not expect the Forum to fade away, I would not wish it to. The " Spirit of Place " study you are working on sounds absolutely fascinating and I look forward to discussing the work with you and other forum members when it is completed,

Best wishes,

Richard Leese