

## **Richard Griffiths Architects – Design Statement**

Lancaster is one of England's finest and best preserved historic county towns. The streets and network of public spaces around the market square make a town that is friendly to pedestrians, and full of life. The replanning of a whole quarter of the town is therefore of immense significance for the town, and it is vital to retain and enhance the qualities that make it special. At a time when towns throughout the country are being homogenised by the ubiquity of large chain stores and the monoculture of shopping it is even more important that local distinctiveness is nurtured and cherished.

The Lancaster Canal Corridor is an area of great charm, a charm that is veiled because of the current derelict condition of the site. The quality of the buildings and of the area is recognised in the designation of the area around the perimeter of Moor Lane, Stonewell and St Leonard's Gate as a Conservation Area including several listed buildings. Yet a number of other buildings in the Canal Corridor are attractive, and make a positive contribution to the character of the area, particularly the Brewery group and the warehouse buildings along the canal. Moreover the historic street pattern survives as a memory of the former residential area on the eastern part of the site.

We believe that the Canal Corridor can be transformed through conservation-led regeneration as a focus for development of the site, contributing to the wider regeneration of Lancaster as a whole. Conservation-led regeneration is characterised by the following:

- Retention and conversion of all the buildings that make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the area
- Retention of the main street pattern to allow new development to take place over time without major new infrastructural overheads
- Opening up the centre of the site to create pedestrian routes and places free of vehicles
- Promoting a rich mix of uses, including arts, leisure, retail, office and residential
- Greening the city and introducing new trees and planting where possible
- An avoidance of comprehensive redevelopment that destroys both fabric and memory
- A sustainable and incremental approach to development building on the qualities inherited from the past for the benefit of the future

The Canal Corridor has the potential to become a creative hub for the town with a rich variety of uses. The area already has two theatres and a music and dance centre to act as a nucleus for the arts, and the other buildings on the site could be converted to create a vibrant area of specialist shops, cafes, restaurants, office and workshops, with a new residential or retail area to the east. The historic street pattern would be retained, allowing incremental development as funds allow. New pedestrian routes from the centre of town would follow the existing network of roads and alley ways into the centre of the site, which would be opened up to create new tree-lined squares in front of the Brewery buildings and the Dukes Playhouse. The pedestrian route would then pass the converted Brewery buildings and workshops up steps to the canal path. The east part of the site would be re-established as a residential area with new houses and flats, with a new park beside the canal to the north. Further retail uses could also be accommodated to the north-east of the site.

The proposed Centros development offends most of the principles of conservation –led development:

- It would demolish a large number of buildings within the conservation area that make a positive contribution to its character and appearance, particularly the buildings on Stonewell and in Gee's Court
- It would demolish a large number of buildings outside the conservation area which also make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the area, particularly the Brewery buildings and the warehouses by the canal
- It would create a bridge across Stonewell that truncates views of the church
- It would create an area of large scale retail units, including stores for major chains, that will destroy the local distinctiveness of the site, and that are likely to detract from the quality and life of the city centre and its shopping
- It would create an area primarily of retail use, rather than the richer mix of uses that would be achieved by adaptive reuse of the existing buildings
- It would be a comprehensive development that would not be capable of being phased, implemented over time, or adapted to respond readily to changing market conditions
- The comprehensive development of most of the site requires an unsustainable and irresponsible waste of resources and of embodied energy.

Examples of successful conservation-led regeneration can be found at Oxford Castle and at the Regent's Quarter in King's Cross, London. At Oxford Castle the formerly closed and inaccessible site of Oxford prison has been transformed into a vibrant new quarter of the city, with bars, restaurants, residential units, a heritage centre, and a major new hotel. At the Regent's Quarter, three whole urban blocks containing a number of unlisted but fine 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial buildings have been restored and opened up by the creation of a new pedestrian route and spaces through the middle of the blocks. The area now houses a rich mix of social and leisure uses, as well as offices and residential apartments, around a set of intimate courtyards and attractive external spaces. Lancaster Canal Corridor has all the potential to become the focus for a similar regeneration of Lancaster, converting the heritage of attractive buildings to house a rich mix of uses and creating a fine new network of pedestrian spaces for the benefit of the residents of both Lancaster and Lancashire.