

## CABINET – 2 JUNE 2020

### QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS RECEIVED FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

#### 1. Dr James Bettley - Tindal Square Public Realm Improvement Scheme

I should like to comment on the proposed Tindal Square Public Realm Improvement Scheme (agenda item 7.3).

My name is James Bettley and I am an architectural historian. I wrote the new edition of the Pevsner Architectural Guide to Essex, published in 2007. In 2016 I wrote an article for the *Essex Journal* on the post-war development of Chelmsford and in particular the construction of High Chelmer; this has been used for one of the interpretation boards recently erected by the City Council along Tindal Street.

The Shire Hall is arguably the most distinguished building in Chelmsford and is one of the most important secular buildings in the county. It and the Cathedral form the historic centre of the city and, within the built-up area, constitute its greatest heritage asset.

The setting of both buildings leaves much to be desired, but the proposed Tindal Square Improvement Scheme would be a significant step on the way to improving the situation and would reconnect the Shire Hall with the High Street, both visually and physically. The street in front of the Shire Hall is not heavily used by traffic but it nonetheless presents a visual and psychological barrier for pedestrians and may prevent visitors from exploring what lies on the north side of it. If the street is pedestrianised people will be encouraged to approach the Shire Hall and will then be drawn on to the Cathedral.

The pedestrianisation of the High Street has been a success in every way apart from the actual surface, which is aesthetically disastrous in its uniformity. The transformation of Half Moon Square has served to show up just how unattractive the rest of the paving is. If something similar can be done for Tindal Square this will create a setting that is worthy of the Shire Hall and provide a focal point that is otherwise lacking in the centre of Chelmsford.

I understand there is also a possibility of restoring the Sevastopol cannon to its place in front of the Shire Hall. This would provide an additional point of interest to Tindal Square and would give this historic object greater prominence than it currently receives, and I would be very much in favour of the idea.

The Council's proposals for Tindal Square would be a tremendous improvement in themselves and could also make a significant contribution to the future of the Shire Hall. I very much hope that Cabinet will approve the scheme.

2. Malcom Noble on behalf of the Civic Society – Tindal Square Public Realm Improvement Scheme. (Statement to be presented in person at the meeting.)

*'The plan for the new building produced by the County Surveyor is such a one as promises to answer every public purpose'.*

John Johnson (1732 – 1814) County Surveyor.

John Johnson's original concept placed Shire Hall at Chelmsford's historic core. The scheme now before Cabinet re-connects the Cathedral and Shire Hall to the High Street. John Lewis on arrival in Chelmsford expected a positive response from the City. The City Council has spent £2.3 m on upgrading Half Moon Square and Bell Meadow. ECC spent nearly £1 m on repairs and cleaning of the Shire Hall frontage.

The Chelmsford Civic Society has been engaged in the debates over Shire Hall and Tindal Square since 2011. I served on the reference group established by ECC. The Society remains committed to the principles set out then: continued ownership of Shire Hall by ECC; achieving demonstrable value for money and delivering a sustainable financial model, a continuation of public access and a sense of community ownership.

In early, 2016 Councillor Dick Madden and I submitted a 'Shire Hall Plan' to both ECC and the City Council. This set out a strategy for future use and a scheme for the operation of the building. Linking Shire Hall to the High Street was seen as integral to the plan. I have subsequently, entered discussion on these matters with ECC's preferred bidder.

I do therefore come to the following conclusions:

- On behalf of Chelmsford Civic Society, I wish to indicate support for the Tindal Square Improvement Scheme and option 1;
- I see this as establishing a City Square that will transform the historic core;
- I consider also that it will help to address the likely effects of the virus on City Centre footfall;
- Further, I should request Cabinet to engage the Civic Society in its discussions with ECC, on detailed plans for the scheme and Shire. Hall.