



Special issue in collaboration with



news **update**

Keeping members informed

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# BRING IN THE EXPERTS

## Society and Voice appeal to the Council to save Town Square

### London & Regional Developments *They can do Modern*



Award winning 55 Baker Street W1

### *They can do Traditional*



Offices & retail EC2

### **So why do we get Grotty?**



Town Square - a promise unfulfilled.

The Society has joined forces with Stratford Voice to appeal to the District Council to call in MADE, (Midlands Architecture and the Designed Environment) to discuss the proposals for Town Square with the developer and all stakeholders.

A letter signed by Dr Kevin Bond, Society chairman, and Martyn Luscombe, chairman of Voice, has been sent to Cllr Mike Gittus, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Planning. It asks for action to be taken before it is too late.

The Society has already objected in planning terms to the inappropriate size and bulk of the development, which includes a 910-seat cinema, but points out that there are other considerations which should be taken into account when considering a site of such importance to the town. The letter includes the following:

'We are not against improved cinema facilities in the town, provided they are of an appropriate scale and in an appropriate location. The aim of Town Square during the day should be to encourage footfall and add to the economic stability of the town's small businesses.

'A large capacity cinema will function mainly at night and, in an enclosed space, could lead to undesirable activities which could put great strain on neighbouring residents and on the police.'

The letter goes on to point out that Town Square is not an insignificant site. It is pivotal to the town centre and could be an important shopping thoroughfare, linking the historic High Street with Rother market, itself a symbol of Stratford's traditional function as a market town. The present application appears to propose doing minimum improvements to the site in order to

accommodate a cinema chain willing to assist the developer financially.

However, financial assistance does not appear to be at all necessary to this particular group. London & Regional is one of the largest private property companies in Europe with substantial business interests in more than seven countries. Two of its major developments are pictured, left, and according to its own publicity it has "a prime and secondary property asset base in the UK in the region of four billion euros."

The Society and Stratford Voice, who represent more than 1,000 Stratford residents, are therefore mystified that the company's UK developer, Mr Geoffrey Springer, has so far refused to consider any alternatives to his current proposals.

His company has a 175 years lease on the site, granted by the landowners, Stratford District Council, which own two thirds, and the Town Trust, which owns the other third. This, however, should not mean that Stratford can be held to ransom and denied the opportunity to have a say in the creation of a well-designed mixed development which would bring economic benefit to the town and its businesses, as well as prestige to London & Regional, who ten years ago promised a glossy make-over, yet delivered an unadorned concrete wasteland.

Kevin Bond and Martyn Luscombe suggest that MADE should be approached for an independent and expert opinion on alternatives to the

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# THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE

## Bring in the Experts continued

current L&R proposals.

MADE's charitable function is to "ensure that our cities, towns and villages become better places to live, work and play," and it has proof that poor quality environments discourage investment. It also has a group of independent architects and advisers who have a range of expertise which could be called upon to consider all aspects of a development of this importance.

'Professional help should not be dismissed when deciding on such an important site,' says Kevin Bond.

'The intent expressed in the Core Strategy Consultation Document of February 2010, specified that the following uses for Town Square should be sought:

- Retail comprising a minimum of 10,000 square meters to include a food store
- Replacement/redevelopment of car park with reduced or no parking
- Residential – comprising about 25 dwellings.

'It also appears that the current proposals are in breach of SDC's own endorsement of the Urban Design Framework agreed as SPG on 23rd July 2007.

'This is the second appeal we have made to the District Council. We wrote to the Leader, Councillor Chris Saint, in August but have unfortunately received no reply. We have also made our MP, Nadhim Zahawi, aware of our concerns.

'Both the Stratford Society and Stratford Voice have the welfare of Stratford, its residents and its businesses at heart. These are difficult economic times, but we would rather see Town Square closed until a well-designed, imaginative scheme is financially possible, than be fobbed off with a dismal, second-rate apology for a shopping centre.

'Town Square lies off the Historic Spine which has been accepted as one of the most important literary walks in the country. It contains all the town's Grade I and most of its Grade II\* listed buildings and any developments adjoining it should be considered with great care.

'Good, modern design could complement the existing heritage that we should all value, and would bring life and vitality to the centre of the town. We appeal to the Council to consult widely and to consider carefully before any irrevocable decisions are made.'

On Friday 16th September Cllr Mike Gittus responded to the appeal made by the Society and Stratford Voice. In it he emphasises that the District Council's officers have always had reservations about the size and bulk of the cinema and that the Council is awaiting amendments to the scheme.

His response is as follows:

'Firstly can I take the opportunity of thanking you for the enthusiastic way in which your organisations work to keep Stratford Town the special place it is, to live, work and visit.

'Thank you for your most recent correspondence concerning Town Square, I would comment as follows:

1. A pre-application presentation took place at the Town Hall, which I understand you attended.
2. There was an opportunity for you to comment and influence the nature and structure of the subsequent application at this early stage.
3. The application was submitted to Stratford District Council and published.
4. There was/is an opportunity for you to voice your views in the consultation process.
5. At anytime you can enter into discussion with the Applicant to attempt to influence their application.
6. Officers have always had reservations concerning the size and bulk of the cinema. We are presently awaiting an amendment on this issue and you will have a further opportunity to comment.
7. The application will be presented to the West Area Committee where there will be further opportunity for argument and debate.'

Members should be aware that the Society did indeed submit a written objection based on planning grounds and awaits the possible amendments

to the scheme. As to point 5, it is only possible to talk to the applicant if he is willing and at a meeting with the mayor Mr Springer was intransigent. He also failed to turn up to a meeting arranged with Chris Gregory, Project Director for BID, to discuss the concerns of local businesses.

Commenting on Cllr Gittus's points, Martyn Luscombe says, 'This response would be appropriate if we were talking about a minor planning application, but it totally fails to reflect the importance of this site and the Council's own very specific design guidance. We are looking for some leadership from the Council on this matter and we have provided a very sensible proposal to move things forward. We all have a shared interest in the success of this site and the best way of achieving that is by working together.'

## WHY MADE?

MADE would offer independent expertise not otherwise available to the Society nor to the Council. It is a not-for-profit group of architects and independent professionals who believe that the best results come from collaboration between professionals and residents and it would provide a platform where the best interests of the town could be discussed with the developer.

The Society continues to urge the Council to seek MADE's advice.



Photograph by Dick Prior

## How To Put On A Good Front

A year ago the Society took a party of District and County councillors to Hereford and Leominster to examine the shopfronts grant scheme which has operated successfully throughout Herefordshire since 1997.

As a result Stratford now awards similar grants to improve shop fronts and just how successful it can be is shown left, in the Jack Wills new High Street store. The windows and fascia blend perfectly with the upper stories and do not obscure the character and proportions of the whole building. It isn't pastiche, it isn't twee - and business appears to be booming!