

SAVE

PRESS RELEASE

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SAVE SLAMS LANCASTER 'CHAOS' AND STEPS IN WITH ALTERNATIVE SCHEME

AS DEVELOPER BACKS OUT OF PUBLIC INQUIRY SAVE UNVEILS BLUEPRINT FOR LANCASTER REGENERATION



SAVE's scheme for the Canal Corridor site, drawn by Richard Griffiths Architects

In light of news that the developer behind one of England's most controversial town centre redevelopment schemes has pulled out of a forthcoming Public Inquiry, SAVE Britain's Heritage has revealed its own blueprint for the regeneration of the historic 'Canal Corridor' area of Lancaster.

The current scheme, by retail developer Centros, and backed by Lancaster City Council, hit the headlines when it became the first application in the north west of England to be called-in for Public Inquiry since 2001. Described by SAVE as 'astonishingly destructive' and heavily criticised by English Heritage and other bodies, the proposals involve the demolition of over 30 buildings, 18 of them within conservation areas, and the obliteration of a medieval street pattern.

In a bizarre turn of events Centros has now backed out of the Public Inquiry, leaving Lancaster City Council to fight it alone. SAVE's Secretary William Palin described the situation as 'chaotic and embarrassing. As I understand it there is no precedent for the applicant and developer failing to attend an Inquiry of this kind. The council which will now be faced with a huge legal bill for what will in all likelihood be an open and shut case, with the application refused.'

With the Centros application in apparent disarray, SAVE has commissioned acclaimed conservation architect Richard Griffiths to produce an alternative vision for the 8 hectare site. The drawings show how the existing network of streets and courtyards with their characterful mix of 18th and 19th century sandstone buildings could be retained and transformed to produce a vibrant and intimate area of shops, restaurants, arts uses, workspace and housing, with the possibility of a new area of retail and housing to the north of the site.

William Palin, SAVE's Secretary says 'In the current financial climate there is little appetite for large, brash, retail schemes and Centros's reluctance to push the scheme forward has confirmed this. If the council is serious about long-term regeneration then it should be advocating a conservation-led scheme which will create a real place and dovetail with the rest of this beautiful, historic city. The first stage in achieving this is to produce a masterplan that can be implemented in phases as funding becomes available. If the council has real aspirations for this part of the city it should be looking at examples such as Covent Garden or those guided by Richard Griffiths at Oxford Castle and King's Cross, London. Now is the perfect time for Lancaster City Council to engage with other architects and developers and produce a new vision to unlock the wonderful potential of this site.'

Richard Griffiths says 'The Lancaster Canal Corridor is an area of great charm, a charm that is veiled because of the current derelict condition of the site. We believe it 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. The Canal Corridor has the potential to become a creative hub for the town with a rich variety of uses.'

The SAVE scheme has been endorsed by local group IT'S OUR CITY which has been a fierce opponent of the Centros plans. Cal Giles, the group's Co-ordinator says 'IoC fully supports the conservation-led alternative presented here by SAVE and Richard Griffiths'.

For further information and images contact:

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For more details of the Richard Griffiths scheme plus accompanying text go to www.savebritainsherditae.org

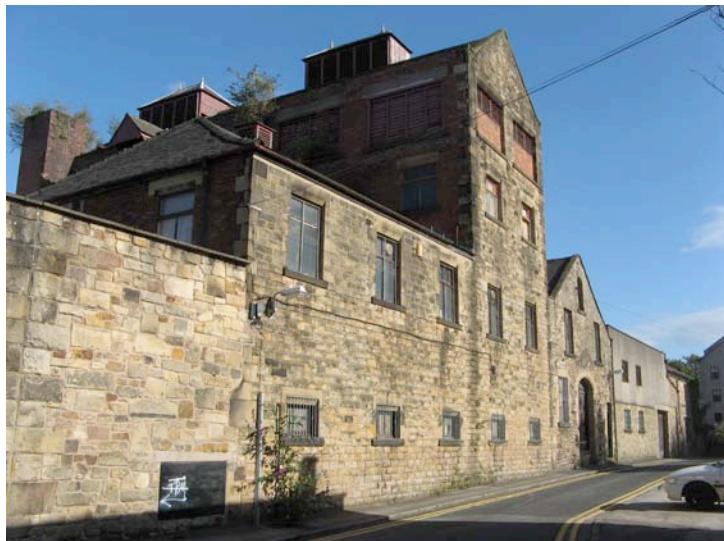
NOTES TO EDITORS

SAVE Britain's Heritage has been campaigning for historic buildings since its formation in 1975 by a group of architects, journalists and planners. It is a strong, independent voice in conservation, free to respond rapidly to emergencies and to speak out loud for the historic built environment.

Richard Griffiths Architects has established a reputation as one of the leading practices in the field of conservation, carrying out work of the highest quality in repair and creative adaptation of historic buildings to accommodate new uses. Sustainability lies at the heart of all work of the practice, so that the legacy of the past, with all its embodied energy and memory, can continue to serve the needs of present and future generations.

The practice has worked on two similar successful conservation-led regeneration schemes, Oxford Castle and 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 19th 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 practice has been successful in gaining funding for its projects from the Heritage and Millennium Lottery Funds, and its work has been recognised in awards by the RIBA, the Civic Trust and Europa Nostra.



Historic Mitchell's Brewery (above) and these 19th-century buildings on the Stonewell 'nose' are due to be flattened under the Centros scheme