

# A Masterplan for Milsom Quarter – Bath

## A consultation response from CARA (Circus Area Residents Association)

The Circus Area Residents Association (CARA) is, in a general sense, supportive of the initiative by Bath and North East Somerset Council to create a purposeful vision for long-term structural / commercial improvements and public realm enhancements to that area of our city currently designated as the “Milsom Quarter” (MQ).

Essential to the success of the council’s masterplan, CARA would wish to highlight four key aspects which it believes are worthy of particular or additional attention to ensure that real and significant value is delivered to our city within the parameters of B&NES’s stated vision.

These particular, but no means exclusive, aspects are;

- a) That the heritage assets of our city are in no way diminished but rather enhanced by any latent proposals within the MQ Masterplan.
- b) That as far as it is possible, the MQ Masterplan retains an ongoing dynamic element providing the opportunity for adaptation should significant socio-economic changes become evident.
- c) That the optimum density mix of retail, hospitality and residential sectors and their respective intended locations are given greater scrutiny.
- d) That the impact of greater pedestrianization facilities, within a relatively compact geographical zone, is most carefully considered in terms of its impact on both the most immediate neighbouring areas and the wider more general areas of our city... potential traffic displacement being of particular concern.

To consider the above in more detail:

- a) It is noted that the current Masterplan confirms a vision of the retention of the character of the “Milsom Street Core” (Milsom Street and New Bond Street).

The above being the case, it is felt essential that the architectural topography of Milsom Street itself continues to present to pedestrians an uninterrupted view of its multi-leveled facades... an essential ingredient of its historic and current character.

Within the context of the above, aesthetically sensitive and appropriate street furniture for pedestrian use will need careful consideration, in terms of its design and indeed its quantity, so as not to mitigate against the heritage character of this important central thoroughfare.

Hence, the nature and quality of individual businesses allowed to locate in Milsom Street and New Bond Street, in particular, should be carefully kept under close scrutiny. (It should be remembered that Milsom Street, for example, once had within its environs one of the best quality food halls outside Knightsbridge.) Whilst it is recognised that the character of main shopping streets have inevitably changed over the years, if the Milsom Quarter and Milsom Street itself is to be successfully regenerated then it must differentiate itself significantly from other cities and retail propositions.

The ratio of retail to hospitality businesses should be continually encouraged towards a high density of quality retail outlets, albeit with closely located hospitality outlets for easy pedestrian access.... and those currently exist in both George Street and Milsom Place.

The quality of retail brands (not necessarily expensive brands!) such as Zara, Mango, Sephora and others should be pro-actively encouraged into particularly Milsom Street / New Bond Street / Old Bond Street.

At the same time as increasing retail 'foot-fall', with the introduction of key additional brands, improving and subsequently maintaining the design and aesthetics of this heritage retail thoroughfare of Milsom Street – Old Bond Street – New Bond Street is essential. (For example, one initiative worth consideration might be to introduce a far more restrictive colour palette for facades of businesses located in key heritage locations.)

In summary, in streets / locations intrinsic to the heritage character of Bath we need to 'raise the quality bar' and by so doing create real differentiation within the Milsom Quarter.

The relocation of the Fashion Museum, an extremely important heritage asset, within the Milsom Quarter is worthy of particular comment.

Whilst its now determined re-location into the Old Post Office site might be regarded as not the most imaginative solution available (a new contemporary-designed structure located on the Cattle Market and over-looking the river being perhaps a more adventuresome option), CARA recognises the commercial necessity of maximizing financial benefits from alternative uses of the Corn Exchange / Cattle Market site.

CARA would, however, urge that any possible alternative use for the Cattle Market / Corn Market site does not restrict use of the riverbank access at that point for the general public. Indeed, it is hoped that, linked to the Milsom Quarter project, a regeneration of the pedestrian access from the south side of Pulteney Bridge to the riverbank area of the Cattle Market be viewed as an ancillary project to the main Milsom Quarter scheme. It is not inconceivable that, at some time in the future, a river-taxi service could be introduced from the eastern perimeters of Bath (Batheaston and beyond) with a possible embarkation / disembarkation point at the Cattle Market embankment.

In order, however, to maximise the attraction for visitors of the relocation of the Fashion Museum to the Old Post Office, serious consideration should be given to the nature of the design of both internally located exhibition and public facility areas, but also to the current external 'carcass' of the building.

Options should perhaps be considered, under expert design advice, to 'open-up' the current building to internal views from passing pedestrian footfall. One option perhaps being to adapt the current space between the main entrance (left of the building) and the currently located Postal Museum (right of the building) into a glass-fronted atrium facing out onto the proposed new St. Michael's public square.

As a key part of Bath's heritage the Fashion Museum imaginatively and appropriately re-launched and renamed ("Fashion Institute -Bath" perhaps?) and not just dropped into a 'closed box' of the current Old Post Office building could become an exciting centerpiece of the Milsom Quarter project. To paraphrase Coco Chanel: Fashion that never reaches the street, is not fashion. 'Opening up' a number of the internal exhibition vistas to the passing street 'footfall' from a newly formatted St. Michael's Square would significantly enhance visitor interest.

b) It is assumed by CARA, that as all currently released Milsom Quarter project documentation is for public consultation purposes, that the current regeneration scheme, as presented, is not indicative of any as yet prescriptive solutions.

With high-levels of uncertainty in the nature of future socio-economic trends, particularly within both the retail and hospitality sectors caution is urged to ensure flexibility at all stages leading to eventual implementation. This is viewed as important to allow wherever possible the ability to maximise potential further retraction within either the retail or hospitality sectors... or indeed in perhaps both simultaneously.

In a number of respects, it is not felt that the residential development is prone to such potentially serious adjustments. As such, as a general observation, a larger element of new residential development targeted at a more appropriate and diverse demographic profile to that currently reflected in the Milsom Quarter masterplan might well be judged appropriate. Simply put, extending more the hospitality and retail sectors activities without a more significant increase in localised and immediate mixed residential development will represent a challenge for the long-term success of the Masterplan.

c) Further to the comments in the previous section b) of this note, it is felt that additional scrutiny of the overall optimum mix of retail, hospitality and residential development within the Milsom Quarter Masterplan should be considered.

As a concept and to support greater on-going transparency the separation of retail and hospitality as elements within what our Council often refers to collectively as “retail” would be helpful to better understand both current and future ‘high street’ trends within the city... particularly when publishing general data.

The density mix of retail / hospitality / residential has potentially significant implications for the quality and nature of the condition of the public realm for both existing and future residents based within the Milsom Quarter. The need for the correct quality and level of support, for particularly less mobile residents, within the future developing Milsom Quarter should be a continual focus of attention as the dynamics and nature of this important area develops.

Relative to the current Milsom Quarter Masterplan, possible opportunities to increase the residential mix compared to that of retail / hospitality should be encouraged, perhaps in locations such as the Broad Street car park location. Tiered residential apartments, around a central courtyard environment might be an option to be considered, rather than creating another unsuccessful trading pattern similar to that of the existing Milsom Place... where most retail and hospitality businesses have always struggled, not least as a result of the three limited access points inhibiting rather than attracting significant ‘footfall’. (The current access points to the Broad Street car park site, particularly from Milsom Street being hardly better than those of Milsom Place to attract retail or hospitality ‘footfall’.)

In the sector of hospitality , rather than retail per se, a more precise vision needs to be established in terms of the size and nature of the hospitality activity required within the re-generated Milsom Quarter.

George Street, for example, has become a 'hospitality hub' with already planned hospitality additions in George Street itself and Bartlett Street.

The impact of high concentrations of hospitality businesses on local residents is already creating considerable concerns and this must be a recognised consideration when offering even more additional trading premises to this already over-represented sector.

It might also be argued that more hospitality businesses impact, beyond a certain mass, on the business / financial credibility of existing hospitality outlets. Creating a development / regeneration environment which supports existing businesses within the Milsom Quarter Masterplan is key rather than creating too much additional competition which leads to ongoing 'churn' of closure of failed hospitality outlets, or at the very least lack of capital to support the re-investment to maintain the quality ethos of existing 'players'.

The danger of 'hospitality saturation' within the Milsom Quarter area, CARA would suggest, should be better recognised and hence addressed by providing improved support to elements of our existing hospitality sector.

We should avoid at all costs the risk of existing 'hospitality hubs', as a result of unlimited and excessive competition becoming a financially distressed sector of our local economy. We would therefore recommend a re-assessment of the mix of retail, hospitality and residential developments within the current Milsom Quarter Masterplan with less emphasis to be given to the hospitality sector to the benefit of more residential and retail development.

d) Within the Milsom Quarter Masterplan a high level of importance is given to greater pedestrianisation throughout the zone.

Whilst it is fully appreciated that the Masterplan in its totality should be viewed as a long-term aspiration, certain aspects of the Transport and Movement Strategy contained within the current edition do give cause for some concern.

Recognising that the current Milsom Quarter Masterplan document is an initial stage in what is likely to be a multi-stage consultation process, CARA would however recommend that the following key points are addressed, or at least 'recognised', in the next documentation release on this subject.

- The definitions of streets, within the Transport and Movement Strategy summary plan is inaccurate and consequently misleading in a number of instances.

Using the CARA catchment area as merely an example:

- The definition of the Circus, 'upper' Gay Street, Queen's Parade Place and the Royal Avenue as being "Primary two-way street[s]" is incorrect and we would recommend that these are amended to "Secondary two-way street[s]" and in the case of the Circus to "Secondary one-way street".
- The additional definition of 'upper' Gay Street (between George Street and the Circus) as a bus route is incorrect as buses do not utilise this section of Gay Street.
- The additional definition of the Circus, Queen's Parade Place and the Royal Avenue as a bus route is only accurate in terms of the open-top bus service and

perhaps this distinction should be made compared to services provided by more general bus operators.

On the basis that we understand that the “Transport and Movement Strategy Summary Plan” is meant to reflect the current status of the streets included and not any future aspirations, we would recommend that the above amendments are included in any future publicly released documentation.

- With the Milsom Quarter Masterplan being presented as a longer term initiative, it will obviously co-exist alongside other more immediate Council initiatives such as for example the “Liveable Neighbourhoods Strategy” and indeed others with varying maturity timescales.

We believe that it would be helpful to at least include a caveat in future publicly released documentation which indicates the need for flexibility within the Milsom Quarter Masterplan that would take into account any current or indeed future ‘influencing’ initiatives, that are concluded within an earlier ‘gestation’ period.

- The impact of greater pedestrianisation, already an important element together with greater active travel with the Council’s “Liveable Neighbourhoods Strategy” raises additional implications within the Milsom Quarter Masterplan.

Whilst aspirations for public realm improvements, and more effective use of the St. Michael’s neighbourhood by pedestrians is welcomed, a more detailed understanding of how the inevitable displacement of traffic from this specific area will be managed is certainly appropriate.

Without wishing to re-rehearse, at this stage of the Milsom Quarter Masterplan consultation, all the arguments for effective management of potential displaced traffic into close and not so close neighbouring areas... we would hope that such potential issues would begin to be addressed in any next edition of the Milsom Quarter Masterplan.

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