

Statement from Bath Preservation Trust to Cabinet re the Colonnades 8 May 2013

First of all, since the papers in front of you say that Bath Preservation Trust supports these proposals, I should like to say that we think that this is a potentially exciting step towards bringing the wonderful Colonnades back into useful public life. We also welcome the retention of the Guildhall as the Council HQ. We appreciate having been consulted at this stage and we would like to continue to be so.

However to suggest support at this stage is not quite accurate as we do of course reserve our position on any specific planning applications from these proposals. The heritage complexity of this site does require careful consideration and at the very least, we would like to see the many layers of architectural history fully and accurately recorded, and each element's significance fully respected, in the detail of any planning applications brought forward. I should also add that the trust is not commenting on the soundness of the business case as I am not sure the public report gives sufficient information to do so.

At this point, therefore we would just like to make a few observations.

First, there are significant heritage implications across the site, but in particular the treatment of Newmarket Row, described as Phase 3, would need to be handled extremely sensitively. The Trust would need to look at design solutions before coming to an opinion of whether the proposed alteration was acceptable in heritage terms. There are issues of scale here, and the Row contains Baldwin's original 1770 riverside façade for the markets.

Secondly, while the opening up of the medieval gates and lanes is a very attractive proposition, it should not be at the expense of their medieval character. Slippery Lane is so-called for a good reason and modern Health and Safety requirements should not be an excuse to lose the cobbles and the enclosed feel to these spaces.

Thirdly and in relation to Bath markets, I thought I would read you a quotation from Robert Southey, Bristolian and Poet Laureate, which dates from 1808:

The Bath market's "excellent order and abundance surpasses anything in London, and is [as] surprising a sight as any in the place"

It would be great to return to that position! However, we would wish to be sure that plans for a more permanent market spilling outside the boundaries of the Guildhall did not detract from the settings of the Guildhall itself and even more importantly the Abbey.

Fourthly, we note that the end use diagram shows part of the Victoria Art Gallery turned into a restaurant. Would just put down a marker that there are many people closely involved with the Victoria Art Gallery and have funded it, who would have views on this plan, and any such assertion therefore should not be presented without a clear future strategy for the Gallery itself.

Finally, we would like to have seen the marvellous Bath City Archives somehow wrapped into this project. This nationally designated Archive, with staff who win awards for their great work looking after it, is currently housed in the basements of the Guildhall in wholly inadequate space in proportion to the potential public and research interest.