



Date: 29/11/2023

Statement in response to recent meeting to discuss concerns over the Canal Quarter

Key Message: Lancaster City Council agrees that a Canal Quarter transport plan and parking strategy is required before the development of key city centre car parks.

Lancaster City Council would like to extend its thanks to Lancaster BID and all the businesses, residents and organisations who recently attended the meeting at the Grand Theatre to discuss the future of parking in the city.

The meeting was called due to concerns over the perceived reduction in parking spaces due to the development of the car parks on St Leonardgate and Nelson Street as part of plans for the Canal Quarter.

The council was grateful for the opportunity to address the concerns raised at the meeting and also those that have been provided to us in writing and a further recent meeting with Lancaster BID.

We have responded to your main points in depth below – but our main responses are summarised as:

1. We will work together with our partners for a flourishing city centre as the Canal Quarter is built out
2. We intend to work further on the parking strategy for city council car parks - and work with Lancashire County Council to develop a Canal Quarter Transport Plan
3. We will also endeavour to bring the county council to the table to develop a wider city centre Transport Strategy and to find funding to implement the range of measures it highlights
4. We will look for examples elsewhere to aspire to providing good access, easing congestion, improving air quality and an excellent public realm as part of the wider strategy
5. We will look to address other issues raised by the BID in the meeting as below.

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1. First of all, it is important that recognise that the council, residents, members of Lancaster BID and local arts organisations are all working towards the same aim – a flourishing city centre and a thriving local economy.

With so many different competing opinions and interests, how this is achieved will always be open to interpretation.

Through the redevelopment of the Canal Quarter the council is aiming to enhance the city centre while providing much-needed new, social, council and affordable housing for the local community.

2. Within this we do, of course, recognise that there will be an impact on parking spaces and there is a need to ensure this is properly addressed because we need to ensure there is adequate parking available throughout the city.

The approved Canal Quarter Masterplan is not, as some might suggest, a final plan for how the area will be developed. Rather, it is a high-level document that sets out the type of development that is acceptable and there is still plenty of scope to agree the finer details.

In doing so, developing a transport plan for the Canal Quarter site is of the utmost importance and the council will be taking this forward with businesses and residents and this will address many of the concerns raised to date. In developing our plan we will work with a range of interest groups, and in addition to those representing residents, businesses and arts organisations, this will also include those representing pedestrians, disabled people, school children, and those who cycle to make visiting the city centre welcoming, attractive and accessible.

3. We hope that the transport plan for the Canal Quarter will be, or soon become, part of a wider city centre Transport Strategy which will look to enhance all forms of transport to and within the city centre including those who walk, cycle and wheel, as well as public transport users, and taxi users.

One of the most important parties in these discussions is, of course, Lancashire County Council as they are the highways and transport authority, and at the recent public meeting there was much comment about the need for the two authorities to work together more closely. We couldn't agree more and are proactively pursuing the county council to work with us and resurrect their strategic plans to improve transport in the city in response to the Canal Quarter and the chronic problems we experience with the road network in general.

This work is not only important to address congestion and how people get around, but also air quality, which we have a legal duty to address. Reducing carbon and particulate emissions and improving air quality will have a positive impact on the health of all who visit the city as well as the environment.

4. As part of this work we will be looking to other towns and cities for examples of best practice and where they have been able to make a positive difference. Of course, every town and city is different so the experiences of one will not necessarily marry directly to our own circumstances, but adopting examples of best practice is always something the council is keen to embrace.

It is also important to recognise that the Canal Quarter will not be redeveloped overnight. The timescale for doing so is around 10 years and each individual development will itself require planning permission, and be subject to public consultation and scrutiny.

5. Responses to some of the other points made in the meeting and to the council subsequently are as follows:

- Parking charges are too high and instead the council should provide it for free

Ensuring visitors to our city and town centres have somewhere to park is vital to the council's aim of growing the local economy.

Good quality facilities that reflect the needs of shoppers, workers and local businesses, with a mix of both short stay and long stay, are a mark of a thriving retail centre.

Income raised from parking allows us to invest in our facilities, important infrastructure and the public realm to make our district a more attractive place. Without the income we receive from parking charges none of these investments would be able to take place.

Charges also help to ensure a regular turnover of spaces, meaning that people can always find a space to park, thereby reducing congestion and helping to manage traffic more effectively.

- Disabled people will be disproportionately affected by any reduction in car parking spaces

We are committed to ensure that amenities are accessible to those with mobility difficulties. As part of our parking strategy we are reviewing disabled parking provision and will work towards ensuring that there sufficient suitable spaces and drop off points etc.

- Signage for the city's car parks is inadequate

Unless located on the city council's land, permission is required from Lancashire County Council to erect any additional signage. This is something we are happy to approach the county council to improve. We are also able to provide additional information on our tourist sites as many visitors will look for parking spaces before they arrive, or use their sat nav when they arrive.

- There is already a lack of parking spaces and many are at capacity

While our most popular car parks do fill up at peak times, giving the perception that we are at capacity, across the parking estate our data suggests that at all but a few times of the year (particularly Christmas) there are always spaces available. There is therefore capacity within the estate as a whole to accommodate any spaces lost due to the Canal Quarter development. Because of the phased nature of the development and 10 year timescale, we would expect the Castle car park to become available again and this will also ease matters.

Following the meeting at the Grand Theatre, officers and councillors met with representatives from the BID at the town hall for further discussions about the council's future objectives for the district. The vision for the Canal Quarter was acknowledged as positive with a recognition that there was no conflict between providing much needed housing in the district provided that sufficient parking was available overall.

In conclusion, we would once again like to thank everyone who has put forward their views. The imperative now is to ensure we are all working together for the future of the city and do so in a way which achieves the best outcomes for our residents, businesses and organisations.

Councillor Nick Wilkinson

Cabinet member with particular responsibility for Regeneration, Skills and Digital Innovation

Councillor Gina Dowding

Cabinet Member with particular responsibility for Climate Action

Councillor Jean Parr

Cabinet Member with particular responsibility for Planning and Placemaking