

FORUM IS PUBLISHED BY MANCHESTER CIVIC SOCIETY  
www.manchestercivic.org.uk - EDITION No.41 AUTUMN 2006

## Eddy Rhead on the fate of Trafford Town Hall

When Old Trafford lost out to Cardiff's Sophia Gardens as a venue for the 2009 Ashes it prompted Lancashire County Cricket Club to think hard. They announced that Old Trafford was perhaps not a suitable place for a 21st century cricket ground and that it would perhaps consider moving to a location that could accommodate a more modern facility.

Suggestions of a move to Sport City in east Manchester were mooted with even a site in Wigan considered. Many cricket fans were dismayed at the thought of the club leaving its home but it seems Trafford Council were even more determined to keep the cricket ground, and all its associated publicity and financial benefits.

The result was secret negotiations with the LCCC and property developers Peel, in the hope of securing a deal wherein the club would stay at Old Trafford. Trafford Council were hurriedly forced to announce the secret talks, and the result of these negotiations, when the press uncovered the deal - allegedly after being tipped off by a disgruntled Conservative councillor.

# JUST NOT CRICKET

Unknown to Trafford ratepayers, and members of the opposition within the Council,

the leading Conservative group had agreed to hand over the current site of Trafford Town

Hall, directly opposite to Old Trafford cricket ground, to the LCCC and to Peel Holdings.



Lancashire County Cricket Club

Town Hall would have to be demolished, was conveniently held back until after the local elections and, as has already been pointed out, only made when threatened with exposure in the press. The news was greeted with widespread condemnation, both from those who do not want to see one of the Borough's finest buildings demolished but also from those who think the Council have acted in an underhand way. Many of the voices of denunciation have come from within the Council chambers itself, mainly, as one would expect, from the opposition Labour group.

Forum considered if there was any conflict of interest involving councillors, the cricket club and Peel, but Cllr Jones dismissed the idea and she was confident that no individuals stood to gain from the plans. 'But,' Cllr Jones continued, 'no one knows how much this land is worth, we have no firm details. It is incumbent on the Council to make it absolutely clear that any development is in the best interests of the council taxpayers and that the auditors would require it be so - otherwise the decision would be challengeable.'

What Cllr Jones is quite clear about however, and did not hold back expressing,

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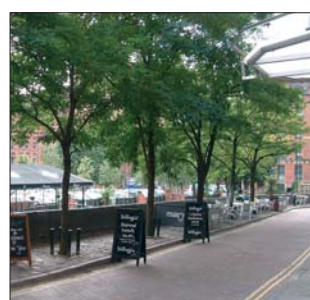
# THE VILLAGE BITES BACK



View of site looking from Princess Street



Corner Princess Street/Whitworth Street



Canal Street would be in shadow

## Typical Manchester this. And in many respects the way our dear old bag of democracy works in Britain.

There was a proposal and then a storm of rage from objectors, followed by a readjustment of the proposal, followed by more public discussion, a 'design morning' where alternative proposals were drawn up which attracted more than 100 people, and then as this magazine went to print, a full public meeting.

The area under the microscope is one of the last major vacant sites in the city centre. It lies at the junction of Princess Street and Whitworth Street, within a conservation area. The site's northern boundary is the Rochdale Canal and the area is currently used as a surface car park accessed via Brazil Street. The site is owned by West Properties. A scheme by lan

Simpson Architects originally envisaged an 11 storey hotel fronting the canal and a 9 storey commercial building wrapping round the Princess and Whitworth Street frontages enveloping a 24 storey residential tower.

A group calling itself the Whitworth St Conservation Area Residents Group contacted the Civic Society and described the scheme as an 'overshadowed wind tunnel' and deplored the lack of consultation. West Properties said, 'our focus has been to create a development which contributes positively to this unique site.'

In the end it looks as though a compromise will be reached. The last news Forum had was that the 24 storey tower had been reduced to 15 storeys and that West Properties had guaranteed that 70 per cent of the 1.12 acre site will be open space

with a new route running from Whitworth Street to the canal.

The Manchester Civic Society accept the need to develop the site but stresses that the charm and character of this important city centre site must be maintained. Further that any development should enhance the area in the long term. It again highlights the need for a coherent Tall Buildings Policy for the city.



View of site looking from Whitworth Street

What this Princess Street debate has shown though is that the city centre now has a community of people who are actively interested in their neighbourhood. It highlights again that developers can't simply ride roughshod over objections. People care and will demonstrate they care. As a Civic Society, which has always been prepared to put its head over the parapet, we find this very encouraging.

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