

30th November 2018

Anglia Square open letter

Dear Councillor,

The Anglia Square planning application presents the most serious threat to the character and long-term economy of Norwich for many years. If approved, it would overwhelm the neighbouring area; intrude into the skyline, competing with the Cathedral spire; and begin to turn Norwich into yet another clone city, making it much less attractive for the entrepreneurs and professional staff who are vital to the economy and, demonstrably, are often looking for a special place to live and work.

We believe that a more imaginative, appropriate and aspirational design approach should be sought that would bring exemplar modern architecture to the city to complement the historic core and provide the quality homes and commercial development that Norwich needs in order to thrive.

As Historic England has pointed out, Norwich is a great historic city that provides a rich and stimulating theatre for contemporary life and fertile ground for creative and innovative businesses, attracting tourism and making it a wonderful place in which to live. This unique character should not be undermined by a short-term response to the understandable desire to develop what has long been an eyesore site. The proposed scheme, while providing a large number of residential units, fails to address the particular housing needs of the local area or build on the special economy of the neighbouring area that is based on independent shops and restaurants and a growing creative hub.

The application proposes cramming 1250 dwellings, a substantial number of shops, a 200-bed hotel and a 600-space car park onto just 4.5 hectares, producing a residential density well in excess of the recommended density for an urban area in London. This level of density with a 20-storey tower and the mass of the 12-storey linear blocks overshadowing the surrounding streets combined with the poor 'anywhere' architecture of the proposals is totally unsuited to historic central Norwich and will destroy part of the character that makes the City so attractive to incoming professionals and entrepreneurs, especially those in the creative industries that are so vital to the city's future.

Approval of the application would send a signal that Norwich is open to almost any development, however inappropriate.

Weston Homes has only considered one type of development and failed to explore other viable alternatives more suited to Norwich. We suggest that Norwich can change and grow without damaging the essential character that makes it so special.

We urge the City Council to reject this application and, just as importantly, to work proactively with the landowner and local people and organisations to develop proposals for the regeneration of Anglia Square that will mark Norwich out as a special place with high-quality contemporary architecture matching its rich historic setting. Such a development could provide the homes and facilities that local people need while attracting new businesses and residents by emphasising that the City combines the best of the old and the new to provide a high quality of life with a forward-looking economy.

We urge Norwich City Council to reject this application and demand better for the city and not foist on Norwich a development that meets the 'anything is better than nothing' opinion but that will be regretted in the years ahead.