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**RB2008 /1292 - Details of the erection of a four storey building at All Saints Building, Corporation Street, Rotherham for Iliad Group.**

We would refer to your planning consultation, dated the 19<sup>th</sup> August 2008, addressed to the Rotherham District Civic Society, and would like to respond with the following comments.

Whilst the Rotherham District Civic Society generally supports the aims and ambitions of the Rotherham Renaissance project we have a number of concerns in relation to this planning application. Our concerns are such that we have recently been in correspondence with the Regional Office of English Heritage to clarify their involvement in the pre-application process.

**Building Height:**

The Society note with concern that the new building is between 2.6m and 2.8m higher than the existing building. This would appear to contradict English Heritage's observations regarding the shadowing of the *West Window* of the Rotherham Minster. The two buildings recently erected by Iliad Group tend to obscure the views of the Minster from the west side of the town centre. Raising the height of this building further obscures these views.

**Building Materials:**

The Society welcomes the introduction of Rotherham Red sandstone at the ground floor level of the building, but would have preferred to see more extensive use made of this material.

The Society opposes the extensive use of aluminium on the facades and roof terrace of the building is appropriate in the context of its location adjacent to the Rotherham Minster.

Additionally, whilst the planning application provides no detail on the design of the glazed curtain walls at ground floor level, or of the door openings to the retail units, the adoption of aluminium profiles to the structural columns tends to suggest that the door openings will also be in this material. On the face of it this is in contradiction of the Council's Rotherham Shopfront Design Guide which states '*Avoid the use of acrylic sheeting, perspex, plastic, standard natural finish aluminium, and unpainted softwoods*'.

**Building Use:**

The Society is surprised, and very concerned, that the proposed new building appears to provide two, or possibly three, large retail units in place of the multiplicity of small shops that previously occupied the site. The Society would, therefore, question upon what market research basis the decision has been taken, and whether it is consistent with a clear and detailed strategy to provide a vibrant mix of small local traders and multiples in the town centre of the future.

A serious consequence of limiting the use to so few retail units, and also of incorporating car parking space / vehicular access in the development is that to all intents and purposes the Church Street and Corporation Street elevations become 'dead frontages'. This would seem to fall far short of the aspirations set out in the Public Realm Strategy commissioned by the Council from Gillespies. This document states '*Of particular importance is the contribution that a building frontage makes to the public realm, the permeability of a frontage and its ability to encourage activity and safety... and consideration of the visual impact of 'back of house' activity, service areas and features including air conditioning units or vents*'. The consultants also state that '*Active frontages that are interesting architecturally and provide a link between internal and external spaces play a key role in enriching the townscape*'.

**External Architectural Review:**

As lay people the Civic Society Executive Committee are not overly impressed by the design of the building. The Society is aware that English Heritage is being consulted on the design. Possibly equally important, however, as an arbiter of architectural standards, is the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment. All Saints Buildings lies within the 'Design Code Area for the River Corridor' prepared as part of the Design Code Pilot Programme promoted by CABI. Can you, therefore, confirm that CABI is being consulted upon the present planning application?

Whatever final form the development may take, the Society hope that this now proceeds as quickly as possible. Rotherham Borough Council, the Rotherham Town Team, and the Iliad Group should be ashamed of the fact that it is now over three years since the future of the All Saints traders was first brought into question, and 13 months since they were evicted from the building. By the time the new building is completed and occupied this prime site will probably have been out of retail use for over two years.

The Council has been quick to extol the benefits of the 20 year £2 billion Renaissance; the present viability of the town centre is, however, paramount. This is not helped by the laissez faire approach of the Planning Service to out of town development, and in particular the subdivision of units at Retail World, and the proposed further expansion in tandem with the planned community stadium.

Yours sincerely,