

I am writing to you on behalf of the Canterbury Society in response to the Council's draft Heritage Strategy. We request that you take these comments into account when revising and enhancing the final document.

We are most disappointed by the lack of specific and clear actions within the draft Strategy. The 'Vision and Objectives' and so-called 'Action Plan' chapters are very generalised and woolly, with no clear idea of what might actually happen, or when.

It appears that, by proposing the mechanism of an 'annual action plan', the Council has neatly by-passed the responsibility to make any meaningful proposals within the document itself. All the objectives are described in very vague terms, using phraseology like '... we need to develop ...', '... we must collectively explore ...', '... we must identify ways to support ...' etc and with no idea whatsoever of a timescale for their implementation. We are thus left with a 'motherhood and apple pie' kind of strategy – something that everyone can agree to but something that is otherwise meaningless and non-committal.

To be of real value, an important strategy such as this must have clear objectives and proposals with specific targets and actions and target dates for their achievement.

For example, one action might be to a) review and update the existing guidance on shopfront design (by September 2019); b) distribute this, preferably by hand and in person, to shopkeepers and owners by November 2019; c) follow this up with free design workshops for those considering making changes to their shopfronts (annually from March 2020).

Another example might be: The Council will (say starting with the High Street, but later in phases expanding this to the whole city centre) appraise and survey the random clutter of bins, tables, chairs, bollards, signs and other street furniture (by Dec 2019). Produce guidance and rules for cafés, restaurants and others on what is acceptable and desirable (by Mar 2020). Meet with café and restaurant owners and managers (by May 2020).

We would recommend further actions to encourage building owners to take good care of historic buildings and not allow them to deteriorate ... and to retain and repair existing timber windows or, if absolutely necessary, to replace them in timber, rather than plastic. Joinery details and methods of repair are critically important not only in preserving the aesthetic qualities of historic buildings but also in ensuring their overall integrity.

The document as it currently stands lacks any proposals of this or a similar nature. As such it represents an abandonment of responsibility by the Council for putting forward any concrete ideas whatsoever.

We urge the Council to seriously reconsider the Heritage Strategy and to re-draft it so that it becomes a useful guide to tangible and positive changes going forward.

Keith Bothwell, on behalf of the Canterbury Society

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