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14<sup>th</sup> May 2015

Dear Sirs

Please find below our comments regarding the Birmingham Smithfield visioning document.

We are disappointed to see the wholesale markets moving out of the city centre, and would have preferred a more imaginatively designed proposal that incorporated the markets, perhaps moving them beneath a new development or following the historic precedent of a series of market buildings within the historic street pattern. The latter of these would have allowed the wholesale markets to be accessed off the street, allowing greater access by the public and putting the markets back at the heart of the city. This could have the potential to create a food quarter, which would be an asset to Birmingham people, but also a visitor attraction similar to the likes of Borough Market in London.

Despite our concerns about the removal of the wholesale markets, we also have comments about the proposals that have been put forward. These are:

We wholly support the closure of Upper Dean Street to traffic and the general proposals to create a largely pedestrianised public realm, with only public transport proposed to be able to gain access across the site. We very much support the creation and recreation of simple and straightforward pedestrian links across the area and into neighbouring areas, helping to further break the restrictions of the vehicle dominated city planning of the 1960s and the impenetrable block that is the current wholesale markets. The Smithfield area needs to link to the wider Southside areas of the gay village and Chinatown, as well as to Digbeth and the Irish Quarter and the city core, including public transport hubs of New Street and Moor Stations and Birmingham Coach Station. We support the extension of the Midland Metro through the area from the planned Digbeth line at Meriden Street, perhaps including for a connection back to the line at Navigation Street via Hurst Street and Hill Street to form a loop. Plans for the Metro could also look to form the start of a longer line to the Southwest of Birmingham.

The development should seek a departure from traditional delineated roads and pavements and include for large areas of pedestrianised and shared surface streets and squares. This will encourage walking and cycling and discourage unnecessary vehicle movements, plus create a more pleasing and welcoming street environment. Dedicated cycle routes should be designed to cross the area to connect the existing Rea Valley Route with public transport hubs and into Digbeth, including to the Digbeth Branch Canal at Fazeley Street.

We welcome the provision of public spaces within the masterplan, as it is obvious that there is a distinct lack at the moment. The spaces should aim to include significant amounts of native trees and planting to help soften the spaces, create a relaxing and attractive environment, and help reduce air pollution, rather than all being hard landscaped. Given the family oriented aims of the Smithfield area and the identified lack of green space in the city centre, we feel that the incorporation of parkland into the scheme is essential. Successful models of green space being



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integrated into dense urban areas can be found in Georgian squares such as London's Bloomsbury area, but also in Birmingham's own St. Paul's Square. Several small garden squares could be designed into the Smithfield area, with high density buildings surrounding them, offering convenient access by residents, natural surveillance over them, and creating a sense of ownership from the residents.

Public spaces should also be maintained as genuine public space and be owned by the council. This should also infer the rights of people to use those spaces, including rights of way. Many recently redeveloped areas of the city, including the Bullring and Brindleyplace are private spaces and offer no legal public right of way or other rights to use the space. This should not be repeated in this development.

We would call on the council to set minimum standards for energy efficiency and sustainability of new buildings, insisting on commercial buildings being a BREEAM rating of Excellent or Outstanding only. Residential buildings should be of a comparable standard following the abolition of CfSH. In addition we urge the council to mandate that all buildings be connected to an expanded city centre district heating network. Extra CHP/Tri-Generation units should be added within some new buildings if additional capacity to supply the district heating network is required.

We would support a mix of housing, ensuring that developments are mixed with units for sale and rent in the private, affordable, key worker and social markets, with units 'pepper potted' throughout rather than siloed into distinct blocks or accessed via separate entrances.

We are pleased to see that provision for small independent businesses is mentioned in the plans, however we would like to see firm commitments to provide significant dedicated space for small independent businesses within the development, enabling the Smithfield area to showcase the 'best of Birmingham'. These spaces should be suited to small traders who's business offer relates strongly to the markets, and in particular provide units for start up businesses that may be starting from scratch or progressing from a market stall. The markets have traditionally been able to offer affordable fresh food and other goods, so we feel strongly that the Smithfield area should continue to offer this vital service to Birmingham's citizens, which should include a distinct aim not to over gentrify the area, in order to maintain the affordable retail that is lacking elsewhere in the city centre. The Smithfield area should provide a compliment the rest of the chain store and higher price offers of the Bullring, the Mailbox, Grand Central and the city core, and not seek to emulate them.

With regards to the retail markets, we strongly support any plans to retain and enhance these within the Smithfield area, and feel this could provide a very valuable resource to Birmingham's citizens, but also potentially be a visitor attraction in itself. We agree that a 'market square' should be central to the area and be positioned in the historic markets area adjacent to St. Martin's Church and along Edgbaston Street. This area should accommodate the retail markets, and serious consideration should be given to providing a high quality covering to this area to make it's use practical and pleasant whatever the weather, rather than the poor quality covering of the current outdoor market. Indoor markets should be positioned around the edges of this market square and provide for a wide range of types. In addition, market space should not be reduced in size or rents raised above inflation as part of the redevelopment, as previously happened when the



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indoor and outdoor markets were last relocated. Indeed, we feel that market space and size should be increased beyond what is currently provided.

The market square should also be available for other market uses when the retail outdoor market is not in operation (i.e. Sundays and Mondays), such as offering space for flea markets, farmers markets, etc. Currently the wholesale markets are used on Sundays for a very popular and successful car boot sale, and it would be good to relocate this to the market square, although perhaps taking the form of a flea market on the market stalls rather than directly from car boots. In order to create additional market space, the main street extending from the market square South should be a wide street with provision for market stalls along its length, creating a street market where traders could vary, allowing start up stalls for a couple of days a week for new stall holders wishing to 'test out' a new business. Such street markets are common in other parts of the U.K and Europe, such as Amsterdam's Albert Cuypstraat, Paris's flea markets, and London markets such as Brick Lane. These markets all prove equally popular with both local people and visitors.

Currently the retail market stalls, in both the indoor and outdoor markets, traders buy much of their produce from the adjacent wholesale markets, many simply wheeling their purchases on pallet trucks to their stalls. Given the removal of the wholesale markets from the city centre, traders will have to travel much further to Witton to buy their goods. In order to prevent the need for individual trips with vans by the traders (causing extra costs to traders and significant congestion around the Smithfield area), a bulk delivery service should be put in place to allow traders to load their purchased goods onto large electric delivery vehicles to take their goods directly to the retail markets in the city centre. As all the traders will be transporting these goods at the same time of day, then this should be practical and cost effective. It will also minimise disruption and congestion in the Smithfield area whilst traders arrive with stock and set up stall for the day.

On the subject of market trader's stock, the Smithfield development should also include adequate storage units for stock to be stored overnight.

We hope these comments are helpful and will inform the development of the more detailed planning policy and wider plans for the area.

Yours sincerely

Ben Mabbett  
Planning Campaigner  
On behalf of Birmingham Friends of the Earth