

**WINCHESTER  
DESERVES  
BETTER**

---

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 17th July 2015**

## **The Sack of Winchester**

---

### **Memories of the Sack of Bath, which so appalled the nation some 50 years ago that it sparked new laws, echoed in the Guildhall in Winchester on Wednesday night.**

About Bath it was said that, "it was always a mystery why councillors, elected to look after the heritage of the city, were so reckless in their task. Developers never pretended other than they were out to make a profit; it was those who sanctioned it who were the guilty men" (Bath Chronicle 19th July 2012). A similar fate met Silver Hill in Winchester at the same time, but the attitude today of those charged with planning decisions in the two cities could hardly be more different.

Winchester City Councillors voted by 41 votes to 10 not to take action to terminate an eleven year-old Development Agreement with TH Real Estate, which had been deemed unlawful earlier this year in the High Court. The opportunity was offered to them to elect the option to terminate, without penalty, on the basis that the developer had missed a deadline. They could have seized the opportunity to start afresh and to comply with their constitutional and legal duties, with a competitive tendering process in order to secure a new scheme for the city centre: the best scheme on the best terms available.

They have, however, facilitated a scheme that has vacillated between viability and non-viability over the past few years more times than a cat visits its food bowl. Only in January 2015 did the High Court hear evidence that it was not viable and needed radical alteration, wiping out all the social elements such as the bus station and affordable housing. In the space of a couple of months, following the adverse Judicial Review Judgment, we were back to hearing that it was once more viable – with the non-commercial bits back in again. And on Wednesday night, the City Councillors bought it.

So enamoured were they by the prospect of bulldozing the entire five-acre Silver Hill site (with the exception of Woolstapler's Hall), and replacing it with dismal, monolithic structures that will dominate and destroy the city's historic surroundings, that they chose to plough ahead with the ruthless "comprehensive development". Apparently, "only total destruction would allow the Phoenix of an architectural Utopia to re-emerge from the flames", to quote Adam Fergusson of the Bath Preservation Trust, which exists to lend support to the protection provided by Bath's UNESCO World Heritage Site status. Sadly Winchester has only a handful of councillors, and some thousands of its residents, prepared to stand up for the integrity of its heritage.

One compelling reason for the decision being taken was that we have waited some 18 years for the much-needed regeneration of the site. However, it should be pointed out that a major reason for the delay was the taking on by the Council of a single developer who failed to take the project forward and subsequently went into administration.

No account was taken of the fact that essential pre-commencement conditions in the contract have not yet been fulfilled, such as a Construction Evaluation Strategy and Framework. No structural engineer or M&E consultant has apparently even been

engaged. No detailed structural or foundation drawings exist. This is a high-risk flood plain, with ancient aquifers beneath the site, which lies upstream of Winchester Cathedral - so painstakingly saved over 100 years ago from imminent collapse by the diver, William Walker.

Then there is the Archaeology Evaluation Strategy and Research Framework, together with four other fundamental archaeological and groundwork reports to be completed. What could lie beneath this site? Will we discover pre-Roman and Roman remains below the Saxon and Mediaeval layers? How wonderful would it be if we discovered the Baths that were doubtless part of Venta Belgarum, as the Romans called their Civitas Capital? What joy if we could expose the priceless archaeology for all to see, as has been accomplished over the years in Bath?

Will future generations thank us for destroying Alfred the Great's ancient capital? Or will they deplore a decision, taken for expediency's sake and looking down the barrel of a shotgun at threatened legal action by the developer if the Council were to default on contractual obligations, to permit the despoliation of this historic cathedral city?

Sign the Petition to the Secretary of State to ask him to call in the whole sorry affair at <https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/save-winchester-the-ancient-capital-of-england>.

---ENDS---

Further background details can be found at:  
[www.WinchesterDeservesBetter.com](http://www.WinchesterDeservesBetter.com)

For further information please contact:  
Kim Gottlieb: 07831 232324 / kim@gotttemail.com



The Applestore in the new Southgate Centre in Bath



The proposed Friarsgate building in Winchester