

Oaklands Way Park Chichester City Centre

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Introduction

The obvious dissociation between Chichester City centre and the Festival Theatre complex is an obvious and long running problem for both the city and the theatre. Making a strong connection between these cultural magnates is a vital stepping stone to creating a better, more connected city. The link is currently made through the North Street Car Park a monolithic tarmac sea with no obvious route and compromised shared surfaces. Extending this connection to the Hospital and University are an obvious next step

Bringing forward an effective high quality link within the neighbourhood plan is an obvious win for all but the form and character of such a link risks both direct compromise and potential opportunities could be missed for the city if the form of this link is not robustly explored at an early phase of planning. In order to generate debate and an exploration of the potential futures for the Northgate Car Park this paper has been produced.

These plans suggest a form that might usefully guide development of the site and be expressed in the Neighbourhood Plan as;

Neighbourhood Plan Potential Policy

- Establish a strong, green pedestrian link between the City Centre and the Festival Theatre, University and Hospital
- Extend the ring road park strategy established by Jubilee Gardens along Oaklands Way



Anchoring the Anchor Institutions.

The North East Quadrant of the City is of vital importance to Chichester's population and employment base. The Anchor Institutions of the University, Hospital and Theatre are all located here and act as magnets to the city for creative and professional classes. The well being of these institutions is critical to the future of Chichester.

It is remarkable, and a potential threat to the health of these institutions, that they all share the same engrained problem, that of "approach" and "visual identity". We know that amenity and quality of environment are critical to attracting and retaining such anchor institutions staff but the character of approach and pedestrian links to Chichester's heart are of remarkably poor quality. The Hospital is linked only along congested roadside footpaths, the University along an informal gravel path of little visual merit and the theatre through a sea of undifferentiated car parking.

Utilizing a single bold landscape gesture, creating a modest linear park, could anchor these institutions into the city and reverse the decaying corporate identity of Chichester's environment. The proposed Oaklands Way Park creates a fitting setting to both the theatre and the vehicular route around the city. But extending this and assisting the University in collaborating with the Hospital and Racquet Club the Oakland Way Park concept could become a vital and green pedestrian link demonstrating the importance of the city's institutions and the quality of life and environment the city prioritizes.

This proposal for Oaklands Way Park is the first step in creating a vital and beautiful link recognizing the quality of life and environment that Chichester has to offer the members of its key institutions.



Link to the City Centre

Currently the Northgate Car Park is cut off from the city centre by the dual carriageway of Oaklands Way. The underpass that makes the connection is awkward to traverse and considered by some to be a potential security threat. Should Oaklands Way be reduced in width of the Northgate roundabout reconfigured it may prove possible to revert to an at grade crossing either close to the underpass location or along Franklin Place crossing at the location of the existing bus stops.

underpass image

Existing Character

The Oaklands Way and the Northgate Car Park area are one of the key introductions to the city, they set the city's tone brand identity for the community and visitors alike as such their treatment should be a functional, and visual, priority.

The character of Oaklands Way is set by a number of components;

- 1 the scale of the dual carriageway
- 2 the large scale of many of the adjacent trees
- 3 The nature and character of the boundaries which are comprised of a mix of shrubs and railings all badly in need of replacement or an enhanced management regime.

The character of the Northgate Carpark is set by;

- 1 the unremitting scale of the space
- 2 lack of planting to break up the space
- 3 lack of hierarchy of route definition to the Theatre
- 4 excess density of spaces suggestive of revenue volume rather than quality of service.
- 5 poor visual quality of entrance from the underpass.



Proposals

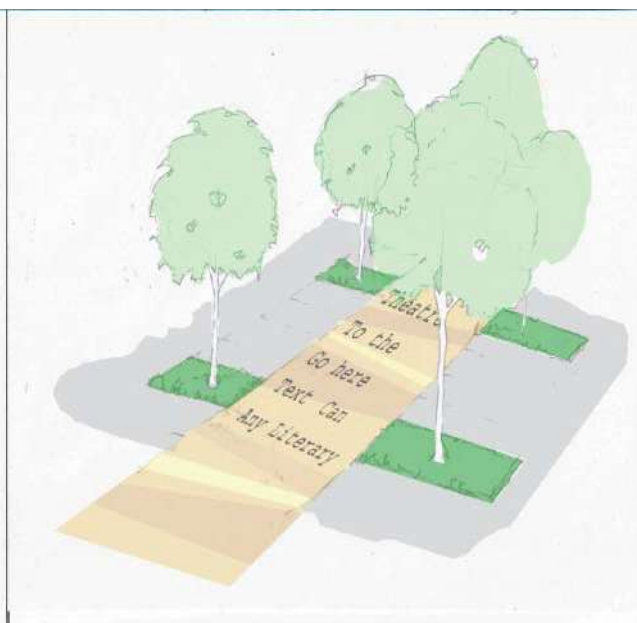
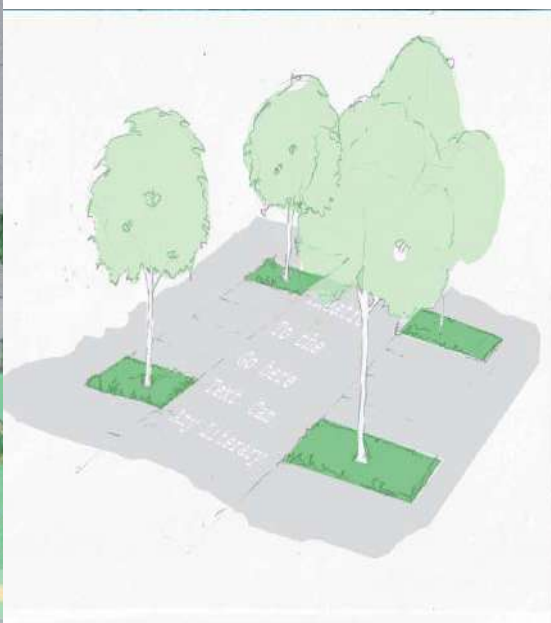
1 Theatre Avenue

This proposal would, for simplicity and immediacy utilize the existing carpark layout, creating a tree lined avenue along one access route. The tidal nature of access to and from the theatre suggests existing parking is retained and the access route re-designated a shared surface using alternative materials and/or patterning. Vehicle movement and utility should be retained to avoid damaging revenues in the short to medium term making the development more palatable. The same quantum of disabled parking bays will be retained.

The avenue would be created by converting a number of parking bays directory into large tree pits utilizing soil cells. Care should be taken on the eastern side to ensure secure drainage due to the propensity for flooding and culvert proximity in this location. Likely planting species would be *Platanus x hispanica* to provide scale and species association with other city centre carparks. This can be augmented with simple Ivy ground covers.

The avenue alignment is set by the existing car park layout. This would bring the avenue to a southern termination on Oaklands Way at what is currently an undesirable point but may be relevant should an at grade crossing prove viable in the coming years.

The avenue paving could be entirely new high quality material or a fresh wearing course. As the commencement of the Literary Trail the surface could be imprinted with literary text read by visitors walking to and from the theatre. A great opportunity to commission new poetry or prose or simply draw existing texts to prominence. The avenue would be lit, potentially with light boxes containing further texts which could be curated with each performance season.



2 Oaklands Way Park

In order to create an appropriate visual edge to the northern side of Oaklands Way and to comfortably draw pedestrians from the under pass to the alignment of theatre avenue a section of parking is removed to create a generous park space emphasizing the green quality of Chichester and creating a new permanent pocket park. The park would feature seating and further literary elements the light boxes of more permanent monoliths reflecting the sites identity as a Roman cemetery site.



3 Entrance Plaza

The current cluttered and confused access in the carpark will be generously reconfigured. Over mature planting will be removed to be replaced with a new bosque of trees, the low wall removed or breached to ease access and the undulating paving leveled to forma plaza that ties the underpass access to the parking area. The plaza would host orientation and payment facilities and the existing toilet block would be adapted to meet contemporary hygiene and access standards and properly address the space.

The vehicular entrance to the car park will be given a stronger character to announce the feature better on the roundabout.



Layout Alternatives

The Northgate Car Park represents an ongoing revenue source and a potential development site. Utilising a single at grade parking area it is not possible to introduce the park, plaza or avenue and retain the exiting number of parking bays (809 tbc). The scale of the park and avenue could vary the loss of bays but is likely to be of the order of 40 -100 bays depending on the configuration there is a clear choice to be made at plan level between parking revenue and environmental quality.

The Neighborhood plan could recognize the opportunities to utilize some of the sites development capacity to form a stronger western such development receipts from such a development could be used to maintain or increase car park capacity by utilizing a parking structure to the eastern part of the site. Which would provide for all environmental improvements and increase total parking capacity



Phasing

Initial works would establish large trees by identifying and constructing generous tree stations in individual parseasons. king bays along the Theatre Avenue to establish plants on this route. The Route could be further enhanced as a stProposals
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Establishing the park along the second edge would make the theatre link clear and a new exciting open space would be created for the City which would impact on the identity by bringing a new park following the linear ring partially established by Jubilee Gardens.

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