

An Open Letter to the Mayor from Stephen Baker

The Worshipful the Mayor of Chichester,

Since the Council's decision to reject the Baker & Bond proposal for the redevelopment of the Chichester Butter Market, I have taken considerable time to reflect on the possible reasons and the next steps available. In addition, I have fully digested our subsequent correspondence with the Town Clerk.

Allow me to recap why I believe that our vision for the Butter Market remains popular with local consumers and producers, as evidenced in comments to me at the public exhibition, since we were outbid, and through our web site.

Our bid's aims were not only to use our team's unique combination of skills to ensure a viable business proposal, but also to protect the heritage of the site and improve it in a way which is ultimately beneficial to the local population, including the existing tenants of the Butter Market. We wanted to create a new retail environment, which retained traditional character and variety, and was not simply another shopping mall of the kind that increasingly dominates many British towns. I hear that there is already sufficient vacant retail space in Chichester that could be profitably and easily occupied by national high-street retailers. Surely, the Butter Market deserves something that better reflects its own history and reinforces its place as the city's beating heart.

We never lost sight of the fact that it is the tax payer who owns the building. First and foremost, therefore, I still believe our vision represents the best net value for the local tax payer, even though it has been suggested to us that our bid did not represent the best value for the city. I disagree. While large retailers may be able to afford to pay greater rents in the first instance, I believe that, by providing an environment that catalyses local business, this would not only have created more guaranteed net revenue, but lead to a healthier local economy. The fact that the majority of produce sold in the "Toll" market would be local would directly benefit local producers. In short, a local Toll market means more revenue is returned to the local tax payer than is the case with a modern retailer, where only the agreed rental is paid, no matter the level of their turnover or profits.

In a note to me on 12th December 2007, the Town Clerk wrote "**no decision of the City Council may be reversed within six months, save by special resolution, the written notice of which bears the names of at least eight (of the twenty) members of the City Council.**" I am asking you therefore Mr. Mayor, in light of the increasing level of frustration about the original decision, whether you are willing to add your name to a written notice to call for such a "special resolution" thus enabling the Butter Market proposal to be considered by the whole council if, of course, another seven council members are also ready to sign?

To close, I would like to emphasise how passionate I feel about this city and that I truly believe a Toll Market along the lines defined in our bid document and on our web site, represents the best chance for local producers, local consumers, and all tax payers to share in the benefits of a regenerated Butter Market for many years to come. A Toll market thrived in Chichester 200 years ago at this site, for the benefit of tax payers then, as I still feel it should now.

The Observer could help us both gauge and respond to public opinion in Chichester regarding the re-development of the Butter Market. I'm keen to determine once and for all whether the continued feedback and support we are receiving on an almost daily basis – especially from our highest quality local producers – is truly representative of the majority opinion of local tax payers.

Thank you, Mr. Mayor, for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you shortly.

Yours respectfully,

Stephen J Baker