SNOW HILL PUBLIC CONSULTATION
Response from BPS Birmingham Future Members

Do you support the proposed public realm improvements to Snowhill Square?

Yes

What do you like about the proposal?

The Snow Hill area of the wider Colmore Business District is an essential aspect in setting the tone, environment and overall welcome to this significant part of the city where many of Birmingham’s professional firms are located. For BPS Birmingham Future, as the representative body of young professionals in the city, Snow Hill is both a place of work and a key access route for their business lives. In general terms both the proposed transportation and public realm aspects of the proposal are warmly welcomed. However, as with all development on this scale BPS Birmingham Future is concerned that the appropriate balance of funding is implemented between the public realm and landscaping elements and the more impactful changes to traffic flow that will improve not only the access around the site but safety particularly to pedestrians using the area.

This is a key part of the Colmore Business District and therefore the aesthetic element is important - not only to improve both the daily experience of our members working or passing through the Square on a daily basis but the wider reputational aspect of having a clean, safe and welcoming vista for visitors using Snow Hill station, this Square being their first external visual welcome to the city. You only have to reflect on the positive impact that has been generated by the improvements to New Street Station and Grand Central to see this.

We welcome the proposals around changes to Livery Street and the proposal for it to be a two way flow and the proposals to re locate both the taxi rank and redirection of some bus routes. Clearly public transport connectivity is of vital importance to this area of the city and its proximity to the rail network out of Snow Hill Station but it is certainly true that congestion both on the road and pavements caused by the current public transport provision is worsening and impacting on safety and access for pedestrians. Therefore improvements to make this a better environment for pedestrians is to be welcomed. Although outside the scope of this consultation we would note a concern that the effective entrance to the CBD via the underpass at the bottom of Livery Street needs to be improved both from a safety and experience point of view. In general terms there are clearly issues around the resilience of the traffic flow in this area and one incident can bring traffic to a halt. We would hope that changes proposed will not enhance this situation but improve it.

In terms of the specific public realm improvements proposed for the Square again is welcomed however, we urge the developers to handle the improvements sensitively and in context to the existing surroundings and balanced against the budget required to improve the transportation and connectivity improvements we have commented upon. Currently it could be argued that
this relatively large space in a key area of the CBD is underused. Better street furniture, lighting, greater use of greenery and we welcome the detail contained within the proposal on this aspect of the development, and overall infrastructure improvement will heighten the usage of the Square during all parts of the day. We would urge both the city and CBD to ensure once the improvements are made that a more effective and inclusive use of the space is implemented - perhaps re locating events from St. Philips Square and creating new exciting cultural activity including regular live performances is established. Clearly increased dwell time will have a positive impact on neighbouring food and beverage outlets and increase the opportunities to add to this mix with the likes of the Grand Hotel development and Great Western Arcade being able to market the improvements to the overall area. This is the opportunity to create a space that encourages the local business community to use it as a meeting space, lunchtimes, early evenings and to give this part of the city a truly cosmopolitan feel.

Wayfaring is mentioned in the proposal but we feel it is important to underline that this is an important aspect to the proposed improvements and should be given a clear status in the plans. The city is broadly improving its wayfaring and this is an opportunity for this part of the city to lead the way in this regard.

What do you dislike about the proposal?

Any significant improvements both in infrastructure and accessibility terms is to be welcomed and therefore there are no specific aspects of the proposal we oppose. We once again reiterate our view that it needs to be done sensitively- reflecting the current usage of the area and reflecting the importance this Square has as a gateway to the central business district.

Do you have any other comments on the proposal?

Although the proposals for the Square and the transportation around it are very welcome improvements and we understand that they are limited to a very defined area in this consultation, we would take this opportunity to say that this proposal should act as a catalyst for further work around Snow Hill. The city council operated car park is unwelcoming, tired and certainly during nighttime, unpleasant. Its opening hours do not reflect the burgeoning night time economy of the surrounding area and the increasingly growing and diverse market it is serving. A review of its market and its overall quality needs to be undertaken particularly in the light of the Snow Hill Square improvements. Snow Hill station is also aesthetically very poor. Dark, dismal and soulless and not a positive example of the type of welcome we all want the city to have when you emerge at ground level. We would hope and appeal that although the proposals for Snow Hill Square are very welcome they should form only a phase one of an overall review and subsequent improvement to the wider Snow Hill area.

Submitted by Tara Tomes, Chair of BPS Birmingham Future, 2 November 2016