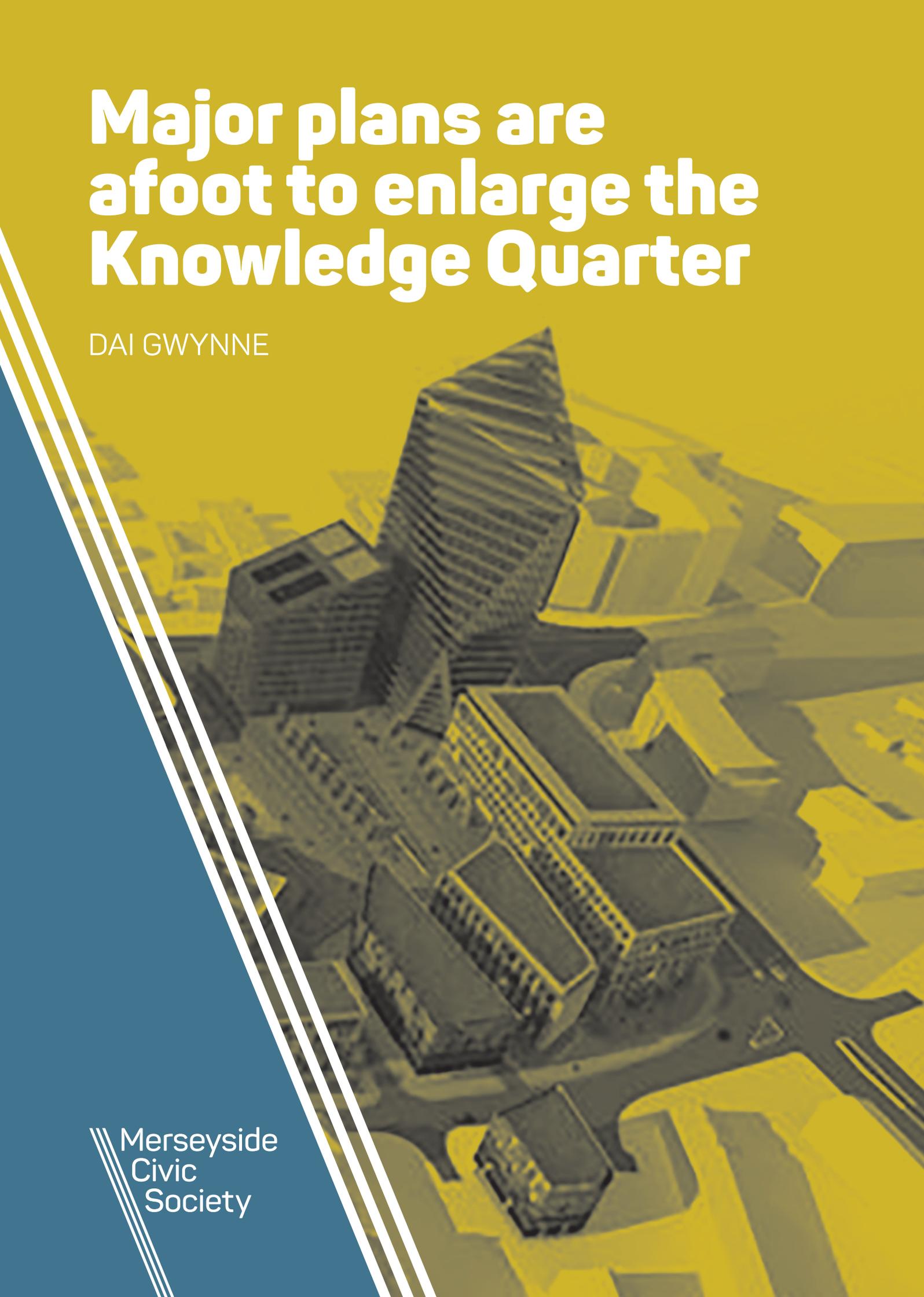


# Major plans are afoot to enlarge the Knowledge Quarter

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Merseyside  
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## Major plans are afoot to enlarge the Knowledge Quarter.

This is a key location, just east of the University of Liverpool and the city planning department is currently running a Public Consultation. Don't miss your chance to influence this important development.

The consultation closes on December 23rd. As I see it the important issues are:

- A proposed new rail station
- Views to, from and through the site
- Density, building heights and massing
- Creating proper streets or allowing an amorphous sprawl
- How friendly the major roads will be
- The heritage of the site – old pubs and the unique Williamson's Tunnels

Check out the Consultation pages: <http://liverpool.gov.uk/paddington>

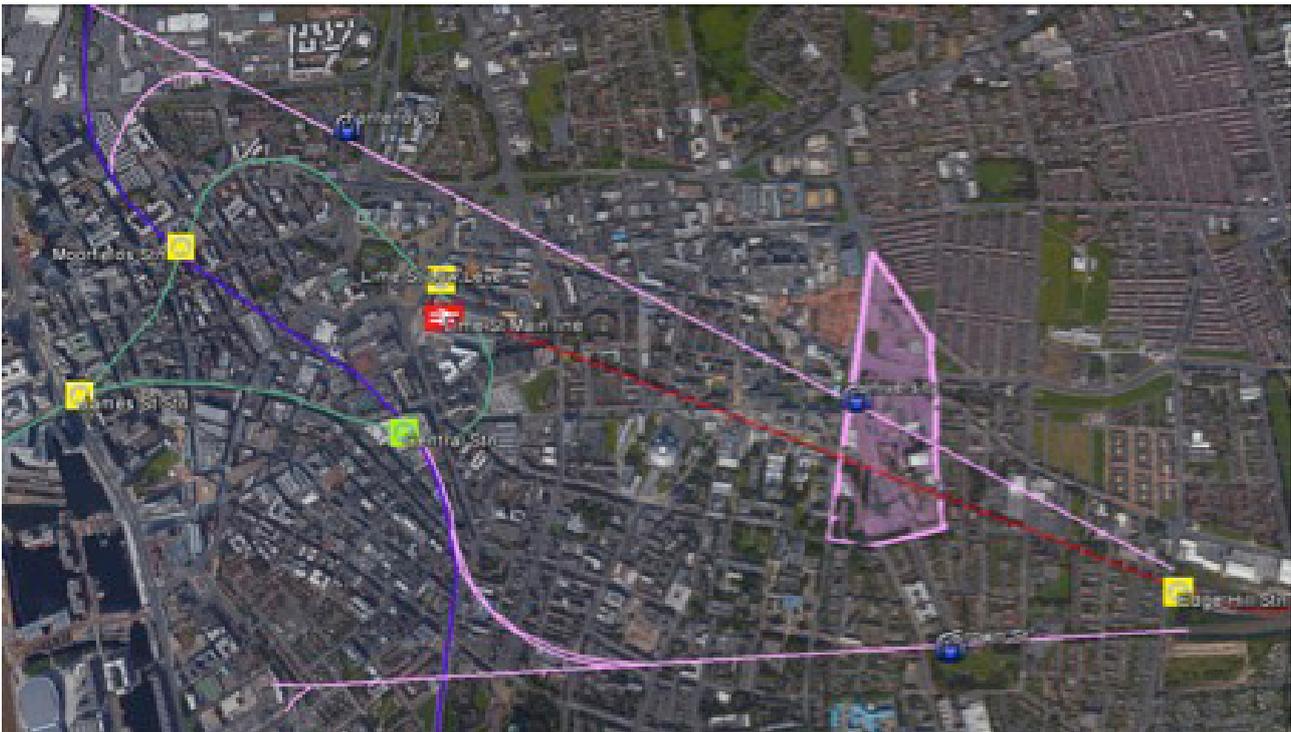
The City Council is currently preparing a framework to guide the development of an extension of the city's "knowledge Quarter" under this title. "Village" might be a strange word to choose for a largely high-density new urban neighbourhood, but we can see that alternative words would be off-putting of peculiar (imagine "Paddington Quarter", ".. Node", ".. Complex", etc. Can anyone come up with a better phrase?

The opportunity has arisen from the move of Archbishop Blanch School to its new site on Smithdown Road. Adjoining sites can be or are already being taken into the city's ownership, and compulsory purchase could be used if need be. There are no long-term residents on the site.

The City recognises that the "Knowledge Economy" is key to the future prosperity of the city region and sees this as a key location where strategic research and scientific industries can be located, next to the University, the Royal Hospital and the School of Tropical Medicine.

The city is preparing a Strategic Development Framework, in effect a Masterplan, which will become a part of the city's planning policy (a Supplementary Planning Document). This way of doing things leaves the actual design of the buildings to the developers, but sets fairly tight parameters to maximise the benefits of the site.

MCS members have been scrutinising the draft framework (see <http://liverpool.gov.uk/council/consultation/consultation-on-the-plans-for-development-of-paddington-village/>) and exchanging comments.



We have been wondering how the much vaunted station was to work. The main lines to Lime St run in a cutting through the site, but stopping the trains there is not a realistic proposition. In fact the proposed station is some 300m from the area concerned at Crown St (now a park, but site of a station which has not served passengers since before Victoria came to the throne and closed altogether in 1972). This would use the 1830 Wapping Tunnel, which would be linked into the Northern Line some way south of Central Station as per plans which have been in Merseyrail's bottom drawer since the 70's. The Waterloo tunnel, which leads to the North Docks also runs under the site; it may be more difficult to link it to the Merseyrail network, but a station where that tunnel passes under the site would be more strategically placed for the Knowledge Quarter. No specific funding has been agreed for reopening either of these tunnels, so we should see it as a longer-term aspiration.

There has been some discussion whether the proposals are allowing enough of a mix of uses. The argument, quite a strong one, I think, is that to create a world-class centre of research and development we will have to really concentrate on these knowledge-industries. The counter-argument is that mixed uses almost always create better neighbourhoods – occupied and active at all times of day, week and year. In any case the plan includes a mix of commercial (presumably with a strong science/health bias), educational and residential uses – so perhaps the question is a matter of scale – is it beneficial to mix these uses within blocks and buildings, or is it sufficient that they exist with a few minutes walk of each other?



The planning department has rightly insisted that views across the city be considered – and has identified several specific sight-lines (such as from Albert Dock or the Wirral Ferry terminals) which should be given special consideration. I would ask that they also insist that there should be views out from the site to the highest peaks of Snowdonia.

A narrow window remains where you can see across to Carnedd Dafydd. (I am not quite clear whether some other viewpoints would exist if trees were pruned/removed.) It needs good visibility and preferably it is snow-covered, with the morning sun behind you to illuminate it - conditions rare enough to remain a special treat (there is not enough snow in these pics). No other large British city offers such a view - of a range of 3,000-foot peaks. Something, therefore which could be built into the SPF is a requirement for public access to such a viewing point. That should be proper public space, not a seat at an elevated bar for those who can afford it. Without something of the sort, it can be hard to remember that you are really on a hill. It's all climbing and no view. But, sad to say, I fear we may missed that particular boat. There



The reason they are so concerned at the views of the site from a distance is that they envision at least one building of substantial height (15-25 storeys) at the centre of the development. They refer to the idea of a “way-finding point” visible from the M62 approach, but the Metropolitan Cathedral and St Johns Beacon already provide landmarks of that sort. I confess that I am sceptical of tall buildings – after all, they are mainly built to make very rich people richer – and they only rarely gladden the heart. It is different of course for a cathedral, and in a secular society a suitable civic function could do the job (as the telecoms mast in Barcelona or our own St Johns Beacon). Anonymous offices just won't do it – the Liver Building manages it, but only through an extraordinary level of extravagance and chutzpa. Could the cutting edge of Life-Sciences research excite us in the right way? Maybe, but it's not a certainty.

That is not an argument against high densities, and the overall proposal that the development reaches the same height as the new Royal Hospital is indeed the way to create the intensity of use that is needed. The framework sets sensible guidance on tapering this down steadily to meet and match the adjoining low-rise residential neighbourhoods.

The framework identifies several axes through the site, two of which re-create lost streets. Crown Street has been chopped into several disconnected segments over the twentieth century. The University's own development framework has seen to it that new developments (the Crown Place flats in particular) resurrect this alignment as a line-of-sight and potentially a cycle/walking route, and the current framework will complete this intention.

The other re-discovered street, cutting the site in half would be what they call St Mary's Walk, which follows the line of the former street called Paddington – nearly. Their alignment is directed towards the eponymous church tower, but does not align with the remaining fragment of Paddington, which runs at the back of the Bears Paw pub (now sadly being turned to student flats). With very slight changes in angle the old streets connect through Church Mount to Gladstone Rd taking you as far as Durning Road. Should the plan recreate this old street pattern exactly or create a straightforward line of sight to the church tower which as it happens aligns directly from Brownlow Hill and if continued over the brow of the hill, hits the tower of the Littlewoods' building 1200m further east. One could imagine that we take this axis-making further and impose it on the development on the south side of Edge Lane.

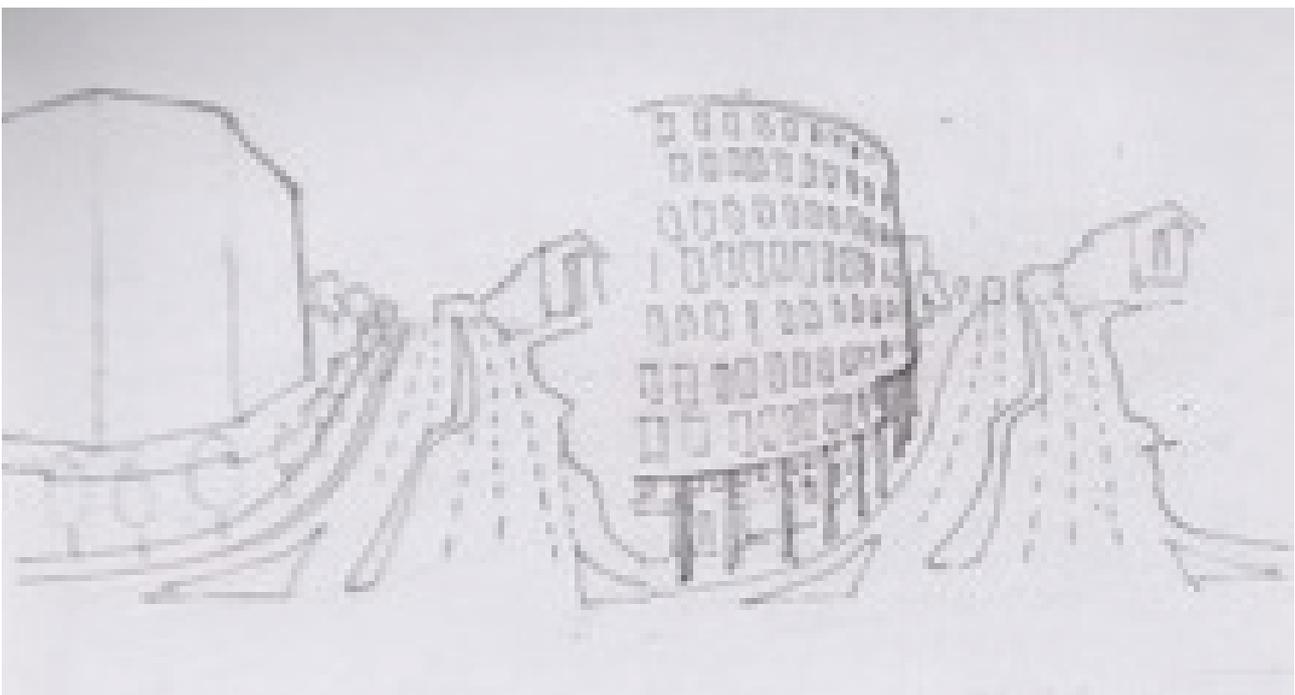


MCS has a clear policy favouring terraced houses over other forms. Though little of this site will be housing, the underlying principle of creating a city from streets and squares of joined-up buildings (rather than free-standing edifices) can be applied. The draft framework certainly does not rule this approach out, but some commentators feel that it is not being prescribed with enough vigour, and that the diagrams seem to imply a collection of isolated buildings. The selection of precedents and ambitions includes examples of both but the image that was shown in the Echo will feed the urbanists worst fears.

The area has two main roads, built in the last five years and perhaps over-engineered. These dual-carriageways are characterised by high retaining walls which seem to preclude active frontages. The draft plans propose a bridge across Mount Vernon to link Paddington North to Paddington Central. I gather there is also talk of bridging over the new Hall Lane dual carriageway to the Royal Hospital. Some of us are very concerned at this:

- major roads under bridges are often somewhat uncomfortable in urban areas. Getting it right without becoming a bit of a downer on those going under it will take some skill.
- Taking the pedestrians over the top invariably has the effect of relinquishing the road to the traffic. OK, so pedestrians (and cyclists) will be able to avoid it if they are on the Brownlow Hill or Hall lane axes, but not if they are on the West Derby St axis .

Some of the alienation generated by the road could be lessened if that retaining wall was reconstructed so that it was lined with buildings. Not a cheap option, but ultimately one that could pay for itself.



The area defined holds no listed buildings and at first glance little of any conservation value – but there are exceptions. There are two closed pubs, either or both of which you would think could be economically viable in that role. In any case, there should be a presumption of keeping them in place as a link to the past, even if they are used for some other function.

I have always felt that the Mount Vernon pub was in some ways the second most important building of the Edge Hill Conservation Area, though itself unlisted and outside its boundary. (The church obviously takes precedence.) It sets up the planes of the front elevations of North View and Irvine St. It would be better if those planes were filled in again where the car park has been behind the pub, and the effect of a prow at that corner could be strengthened by adding one or more stories on top the pub. In fact, the building was originally higher than it is now. The same effect could be built de novo, but something would be lost. Then again- as the picture shows, a key view of the church tower would be lost – so perhaps we should be cautious at raising the height of this building; a single extra floor leaves the tower visible from the west end of the new Royal.



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