



# MEDIA RELEASE

## OPEN LETTER TO THE PEOPLE OF LANCASTER

In recent weeks Mitchell's of Lancaster has been criticised by several campaigning groups, including It's Our City and Save, regarding the proposed demolition of our redundant old brewery buildings on Brewery Lane.

John Whitelegg, Leader of the North West (of England) Green Party and local councillor for Lancaster, has also been extremely vocal in his opposition to the proposed move to demolish the buildings.

Despite communicating with local media to explain why we have chosen this course of action we feel little balance has been given to convey our position. Therefore, we would like to explain to you, the people of Lancaster, why we have, after careful consideration, decided on this way forward.

As you would expect from a company rooted in the fabric of Lancaster for over 130 years, we are extremely proud and respectful of the heritage of our city. And as one of the city's largest employers we are also acutely aware of the need for jobs for local people.

Therefore we would like to make the following points:

*Councillor Whitelegg claims that "The demolition would be an act of unrestrained vandalism".*

- For over 130 years the custodians of Mitchell's have undertaken their duties with a keen interest in the community and the environment. It's preposterous to think that had the buildings any architectural merit the company wouldn't embrace their heritage.
- The truth of the matter is that having worked closely with English Heritage, to assess the significance of the site, on three separate occasions, surveys have repeatedly proven that the buildings do not illustrate an important aspects of the nations social, economic or cultural history; they don't have any important architectural design and they are not of a significant age to be considered a rarity.
- Three failed attempts to have the buildings listed clearly show that they lacked the special interest, in a national context, which is required to warrant the designation of listed status. Indeed English Heritage in a communication with the Department for Culture Media and Sport states that "The brewery itself is not of sufficient intrinsic interest to warrant listing." This comment was made following the most recent assessment of the site in 2007.
- A fourth attempt to gain listed status, brought by members of the campaigning groups detailed above, will be yet another example of tax payer's money being wasted. The condition of the brewery has deteriorated to such an extent, due to years of water ingress causing joists to rot and floors to collapse, that the company is extremely concerned regarding its Health and Safety obligations to members of the public and their employees.
- The demolition of the buildings will dovetail with the Centros redevelopment plans which will generate £3.5 million worth of business rates for the city plus additional revenues that will benefit local suppliers.
- Over 1,000 jobs will be created as a result of this development which will make a huge impact on the lives of local people.

We are also acutely aware of the potential dangers of the building as a result of indiscriminate vandalism, over recent years. Together with a number of attempted forced entries, we have to seriously consider our public liability.

Although we have taken all the appropriate measures to secure the site it hasn't deterred such incidents despite the inherent health and safety issues within the buildings. As owners of the site we, the board, are responsible should any trespasser be injured. Should anyone succeed in entering the building the potential for serious injury cannot be underestimated, particularly when considering the age and condition of the building. This has also influenced our decision.

Irrespective of the Centros proposal we would still have concluded that the buildings had no future. Indeed the site has been taken out of the business rates band as it has been agreed that it has no economic use.



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We feel strongly that our detractors would not be making a case for listed building status had the site been outside of the Centros development plans. Indeed there was no interest in the merits of the building in the immediate years after its closure, in 1999, and it's no coincidence that it is only since the Centros development has been in the public domain that any interest has been noted.

We would ask the minority of people who are opposed to the demolition of the buildings to seriously consider the repercussions of their actions. Not only could they threaten the economic prosperity of the city, they may also be putting the lives and livelihood of local people at risk.

**As a Lancaster company we cannot ignore the many benefits that the Centros development will bring to the city. They include:**

- Up to 400,000 sq ft of retail and catering space
- Up to 179 town houses and apartments, including 25% affordable (up to 45 in total) providing homes for some 300 or more people
- A new public park and five other public spaces
- Improvements to both the Dukes Playhouse and the Grand Theatre
- New premises for the City's unique Musicians Co-operative
- More than 1000 new long term jobs provided in retail, catering, leisure, maintenance, security and management, plus 600-700 short term building jobs created during the 2 year construction period
- 3 million pounds of highway improvements.

As a company we have to consider the interests of all parties, whilst our detractors do not.

As a company we want economic prosperity for our city, whilst our detractors, it would appear, do not.

If, having heard our side of the story, you support us in our efforts to improve the landscape and economic potential of the city, feel free to email your support to [brewery@mitchellsinns.co.uk](mailto:brewery@mitchellsinns.co.uk)

*Thank you*

Andrew Barker

Joint Managing Director

Jonathan Barker

Joint Managing Director