



annual

report

2004

CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

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The Very Revd Cyril A Alington, DD
Dean of Durham 1933-51

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SIXTY-SECOND ANNUAL REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES 2003 - 2004

It has been business as usual during the last twelve months. That is to say, change and rumours of change, across the spectrum, have continued to challenge a Society, the very *raison d'être* of which is to query and evaluate the wisdom of any radical new proposal. Not least has been the proposed reorganisation of the various contexts within which planning takes place.

THE CONTEXT OF PLANNING

Durham District, the area over which we hold watching brief, is threatened by the possible advent of regional government. It will disappear if a majority of people in the North-East vote later in the year in favour of a directly-elected regional assembly. A second tier of unitary councils would then have to be created. At the moment the Boundary Commission of the Local Government Review has options, all of which bring the demise of individual Districts to be replaced by amalgamations. Trustees, who are sceptical of advantages purported to attach to regional government, are bound by their constitution to confine interest to Durham District. Moreover, any legislation which widens responsibility for planning and development control beyond the District would obviously dilute Trustees' ability to monitor changes effectively.

At District level, the current Local Plan process has continued to move slowly to its completion, six years after publication of its *Consultative Draft* set it in motion. Its final stage, *The Schedule of Proposed Further Modifications*, to which Trustees responded, was published in October. Final adoption, expected any month now, can not evade a two-fold irony. One, the Local Plan is intended to be the definitive land use and development control document for the fifteen years, 1991-2006. The other is the fact that it will be a close call between adoption of the Plan and the Government's imminent planning bill which is scheduled to abolish Local Plans and replace them by Local Development Frameworks.

Change is also imminent in the appraisal, designation and management of historic sites and buildings and conservation areas. A Consultation Paper, *Protecting Our Historic Environment*, was published by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in July. Trustees submitted a written response, and your Secretary was invited to participate in the North-East's focus group at Wellbar House.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

Although AMEC received planning permission for Walkergate for the third time in July, the Authority's

commercial leisure project intended to complement Millennium Place has shown no signs of construction. Critical is the need to provide parking for the 340 spaces that will be displaced temporarily from the present surface car park on the Walkergate site. As we go to press, DEFRA is about to hold a public inquiry into the Local Authority's proposal to utilise The Sands – common land – for the temporary parking. Trustees regret that it is only in the last year of a five-year saga that the Authority has turned its attention to a known key component of finding replacement parking during the construction of Walkergate.

Diagonally opposite, on Framwellgate Waterside, a site has been cleared, ready for the 209-bed hotel by Red Box Design. It is regretted that the accompanying multi-storey car park has been dropped from the original planning permission, an action which will apparently significantly reduce the traffic impact of the development.

The new PFI hospital has continued to adjust to its restricted but allegedly adequate site. The admitted lack of sufficient beds was overcome, administratively at least, through a link-up with Darlington hospital. The question of inadequate car parking space has been more difficult to resolve. An extra 178 spaces sought in August may have brought some relief, but the intended total allocation remains more than 200 below present demand. It appears that the hospital authority was taken by surprise that transferred staff should choose to drive to and from the Shotley Bridge area, and that unsociable shifts hours worked by staff may not coincide with public transport timetables. While the present increment will only "reduce the number of staff cars parking in the local streets," the southern half of the site deemed surplus to requirements has been allocated, through a succession of planning applications during the year, for housing (101 units), hotel, restaurant, leisure complex, student residence and creche.

New College is another project which has "downsized" its site requirements despite increased numbers of students. The first tangible signs of concentrating activities at the Framwellgate Moor campus has been the emergence of a pair of four-storey metal-clad buildings flanking the A167. Meanwhile, at its former campus at Neville's Cross, the first of 209 dwellings are under construction at the new address of Sheraton Park.

While Highgate nears completion as a highly successful example of infilling for a historic city, two other major schemes which will impact on the City achieved planning approval during the year. One was the County Authority's three sites for a Park and Ride Scheme at Carrville (409 spaces), Sniperley (363) and South Road (295). When operational, the "ride" element is currently

scheduled for a ten-minute bus service to the centre. The other scheme involves three large sites at Dragonville, between Sunderland Road and Sherburn Road, where the Secretary of State announced his agreement with his Inspector's Report of the called-in Inquiry. With no sequentially preferable sites available, and with no predicted harm to the vitality and viability of the City centre, permission was given for the establishment of a variety of retailing of a bulky or warehouse, non-food, nature. When established, it will balance the development currently existing west of the city at the Arnison Centre and Mercia Retail Park.



Brown's Boathouse rebuilt

Major, by dint of location, is the recent application for 27 apartments on the former library site at the foot of South Street. Directly opposite the Castle, the site clearly demands that design pay critical attention to its context. While Trustees were disappointed with the 29-apartment project of Red Box Design, approved last year for Back Silver Street, the present application for South Street is quite inappropriate. Developments in such locations are as much a townscape challenge as they are an architectural one. The response to the present one, with a frontage onto South Street as well as to the World Heritage Site, must be of the highest order.

Finally, a decision which prevented major environmental disruption in the south of the District was the dismissal of the appeal by the Eco Energy Group for extensive open-casting of the area flanking the proposed Bowburn to Wheatley Hill Bypass, to be followed by mixed use development of business park, hotel and public house. Although the development plan authorities of County and District bore the main thrust against the appellants, it was gratifying to note that the Inspector's conclusion cited the Trust's evidence, given by your Chairman, that allowing the appeal would undermine faith in the plan-making process.

ENVIRONMENTAL HIGHLIGHTS

The past year has seen the architectural stock of the City enriched by several significant additions. The biggest single building was the Earth Science Building (architects Ryder HKS) on the University Science Site. The clean moulded outline of its white concrete-block base and aluminium-faced panels has created a building of stature

which, given its siting, has created its own context. The part-conversion, part new build of the Embleton Garage in New Elvet (architect Andrew Scott) has given a pleasing uplift to that part of the inner city. Especially appropriate is the riverside elevation, where the former industrial unit has been replaced by a rhythmic gabled frontage, its verticality being iterated by changes in material and colour-wash. (It is also pleasing to note the appropriate name for the development - St Andrew's Court – after the chapel formerly on the medieval bridge).

On the other side of Elvet Bridge, the recent unveiling of the former Brown's Boathouse has been especially pleasing. Despite being a rebuild rather than restoration, and despite the raised, gabled roof at the upriver end, the finished result has retained the spirit of the old Boathouse, discretely articulating its evolution for those with historical knowledge to see. Trustees feel that their long campaign to save the Boathouse has been rewarded - even if, on the day following its unveiling, *The Northern Echo* could turn history on its head and inform its readers that "The original scheme was refused planning permission. But the Company got the go-ahead after successfully appealing against the decision."

The Authority's Heritage Economic Regional Scheme has progressively brought an upgrading of North Road during the year, while the unveiling of two large drinking houses has contributed to the townscape uplift. Although Trustees – and the police – opposed the application of Regent Inns for an Australian theme pub in place of Robins Cinema, there is no denying the improvement brought to its façade. Wetherspoon has effected a quieter restoration of its building, which, happily, also restores association with the original occupants in its name, *The Water House*. Incidentally, a unique feature at the lower end of North Road, provided by Regent Inns, is a urilift. The name describes exactly what it is: on weekend evenings it rises out of the ground as a townscape feature, with a specific function for needy male drinkers, but for the remainder of the time descends out of sight to become a floorscape feature only for those who can read the pavement markings.

ENVIRONMENTAL QUERIES



Urilift - new floorscape feature in North Road

Trustees queried the appearance of flues and condensers on the roof of the Clayport Library, especially since no application had been lodged. (Eventually one was forthcoming, and the County Authority duly granted itself permission.) It is regretted that the consulting engineers to the Millennium project miscalculated the capacity of plant needed to serve the Library, for the size and positioning of the additional equipment breaks the clean lines of David Prichard's building.

At ground level the appearance of Millennium Place has hardly been improved by the amount and nature of advertising, not least the dozens of posters on the poster board immediately to the right of the commemorative plaque marking the opening of the complex. The Authority is still considering a more permanent arrangement; in the meantime there is apparently "need for blanket coverage" for events at the Gala Theatre. (In the meantime, the elegant metal lettering announcing the Theatre has been removed.)

Trustees also queried the recent proliferation of banners, which detract from the appearance of parts of the City centre (eg National Savings Building, Millennium Place, Italian Connection) and beyond (eg Maiden Castle, Houghall). A lack of the full complement of Enforcement Officers was given as the reason for lack of action.

A greatly increased number of planning applications determined under delegated powers, and not by committee, brought another query. The change itself is understandable, given the need to comply with central government's "best value performance indicators", moreover, the strictures weigh especially heavily on an Authority such as ours with its large number of listed buildings and high-value townscape. The approval by delegated powers of a new boathouse for St John's College, however, was a surprise because of both critical location and significantly higher riverside elevation. Trustees were informed that it was "categorised as an economic proposal" and, as such, was approved by the Development Control Committee Chairman. Meanwhile, an extension to a semi-detached dwelling in suburbia can still appear before the full committee for decision.

Telecommunication masts and "stealth" designs were mentioned in the last Annual Report. Since that time, three appeals for monopoles in the centre of the City have been dismissed on townscape grounds. One happy, and seemingly obvious, solution came last November with the District's first application for mobile phone antenna and dishes to be attached to an electricity pylon of the National Grid at Thinford. Euphoria over any significant decrease in stand-alone masts was ended when it was noted that a recent application at Relly Steading was not permitted its preferred site on a nearby pylon. An inquiry, to Northern Electric in this instance, elicited that its pylons, often smaller than those of National Grid, could

have difficulties structurally and in terms of current conversion.

An environmental query, which could have been raised for at least a decade regarding the central wards of the City, has been the impact on existing communities of an increasing number of students in rented property as Colleges have been unable to absorb the ever increasing University intake. In some neighbourhoods the change has been dramatic: in nine streets over four-fifths of all residents are students. The impact on property prices and car parking, the occurrence of disturbances, as well as the consequence on local shops and schools are all aspects of a social phenomenon that urgently needs tackling.

An encouraging response to the situation came in January, with the publication of a draft report of a working party set up by the Authority's Area Forum 6, under the chairmanship of former councillor, Dr Muriel Sawbridge. Its clear analysis of the problem, liaison with major players, contact with other universities, together with pointers to necessary steps for a satisfactory solution, all suggest it to be a document of considerable importance. Time will tell. Meanwhile, family house conversions continue apace. Some are more than the straight-forward conversion to accommodate the statutory six students; 24 was the figure in one granted application last year; the most recent feature has been applications for purpose-built student accommodation on infill sites within the City – Finkle Street, off Providence Row (twice submitted, for 75 and 63 units, refused), "surplus" hospital land (132 units, granted) and Gilesgate (59, pending).

LICENSING MATTERS

Although the Trust was present at several licence hearings in the last twelve months, there were no major battles compared with previous years. With changes afoot in the licensing process, the most significant event perhaps was the submission, by your Chairman, of a suggested Draft towards a redrawing of the Licensing Strategy being undertaken by the Local Authority. On the ground, the subsidy provided for six months by Regent Inns for a late-night bus service had a marked effect on easing the dispersal of late-night revellers. Now, a more permanent arrangement, backed by all drinking houses, is required.

EVENTS

The unveiling of a bronze portrait-head of Sir Ove Arup on Dunelm House, at the landfall area of Kingsgate Bridge, was a notable event in the history of the Trust. The unveiling was performed by his daughter, Mrs Karin Perry, on a sunny 16th April, the birthday of Sir Ove. Afterwards, Mr John Martin, who had worked with Sir Ove on every aspect of Kingsgate Bridge, spoke respectfully, but amusingly, of his Master, and showed a 1963

video film of the completion of the bridge.

At last year's AGM we were privileged to have our patron, Sherban Cantacuzino, give an illustrated lecture on the painted churches of Romania. The material was not only fascinating, but up-to-date, for the previous week had been something of a refresher-cum-rehearsal as our patron had been showing the World Heritage Site churches to Prince Charles on site.

The autumn lecture, *Design in Context*, was given by Professor Douglass Wise, who brought to bear a lifetime's experience in the field of architecture to illustrate contextual considerations when designing new buildings. Few topics could be more relevant to our City. David Williams occupied our spring slot, giving much pleasure - and evoking many a reminiscence - with films of the City and its Miners' Gala of the 1950s. Originally shot by Edward Roberts, the added soundtrack of North-eastern ballads and music, along with sounds from the Gala, brought increased enjoyment.

The Trust's Christmas card this year was a view of the cathedral from Framwellgate Bridge, engraved by Hooper and Sparrow for Francis Grose's *The Antiquities of England and Wales*, volume 3, published in 1775. Three Bulletins were published during the year.

The Trust award in the Beautiful Durham Competition, given for the best contribution to local or civic amenity, was won this year by Mr Peter Harding of Oswald Court, Elvet. In September the Trust again provided volunteer stewards at four of the sites opened to the public under the English Heritage Open Day Scheme.

Environmental education of the most rewarding kind took place this spring when the Trust financed the purchase, and, in some instances, encouraged the planting, of trees at four local Primary schools.

TRUST PERSONALIA

At last year's AGM, Mrs Janet Gill and Mrs Julie Hepple were elected Trustees. Their association with resident groups in Elvet and Claypath, respectively, is appreciated.

At this year's AGM, Dr K R Ashby is among the one-third of Trustees whose turn it is to retire. Decreasing mobility has forced him not to seek re-election. Ken, or Kenneth, is our longest-serving Trustee, having been first elected in 1957. From his base in Hawthorn Terrace, appropriately opposite Byland Lodge, he has cast a ceaseless eye on matters environmental, ably complemented by his wife, Gwladwyn. One of his many successes was as lead person at the Inquiry which secured Flass Vale as common land. His environmental vision stretched beyond the confines of the City through active participation in both

the CPRE and Ramblers' Association. For years he was the Chairman of the County Durham CPRE branch, and was awarded the Council's long-service medal. He was national Chairman of the Ramblers' Association in 1976. Clearly, expertise, based on such experience will be impossible to replace. We express our sincere gratitude for nearly half a century's service freely given in the cause for which we all strive.



Mrs Audrey Kelly on the Desmond Kelly Memorial seat

On St Cuthbert's Day this year Trustees gathered at the University Botanic Garden for the official dedication of the seat donated in memory of Desmond Kelly, Trustee 1989-99. The timing could hardly have been more appropriate for a Durham man, born and bred, and his association with the University and Houghall Wood.

Finally, Trustees gratefully acknowledged a legacy from the will of the late Miss Phyllis Carter. Best known as a distinguished Diocesan Secretary, Phyllis was a long-time member of the Trust who would alert us on any perceived breaches of practice or law.

D.C.D.P.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The sixty-second Annual General Meeting of the City of Durham Trust will be held in Room 141, Elvet Riverside 1, New Elvet at 7.15 pm on Wednesday 12 May 2004

Members and friends are cordially invited to attend.

AGENDA

1. Apologies for absence.
2. Minutes of the 61st Annual General Meeting (Tuesday 14 May 2003).
3. Matters arising from the Minutes.
4. Report of the Trustees and the Presentation of Audited Accounts of the Trust for the year ended 31 December 2003.
5. Appointment of the honorary officers of the Trust.
6. Appointment of Trustees.

The following Trustees retire by rotation:

Dr K R Ashby, Mr D M H Glen, Mr F M Orr, Mr N J Ruffle, Mrs D S Stoddart, and Mrs K Taylor. All except Dr Ashby, who does not wish to stand, are eligible for re-election.

Names of other possible new Trustees, together with proposer and seconder, and up to 100 words of recommendation, should reach the Secretary before the meeting.

7. Chairman's remarks.
8. Any other business which may be brought forward by members.
It would be helpful if notice of this could be given to the Secretary.

LECTURE

At 8 pm, after the AGM, Sir Kenneth Calman, Vice-Chancellor and Warden of the University of Durham will speak on

The University and the City