

CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

BULLETIN

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TRUST LECTURE

“Balanced Communities in Durham City ?” An illustrated public lecture will be given by Colin Green and members of the Balanced Communities Working Group into the highly relevant topic of the progressive replacement of family households by student rented accommodation. The dramatic change in social mix in many central streets, and the challenges resulting therefrom, featured in our recent Annual Report. The lecture will be on

**Saturday, 6th October, at 2.15 pm
in Elvet Riverside 1.**

TRUST CHRISTMAS CARD

This year’s card breaks with our tradition of past views of Durham and is a watercolour painting commissioned by the Trust from local artist, Stephen Ward. The depicted scene, *Durham Market Place at Christmas Time*, needs no further explanation. An order form accompanies this Bulletin. The card will also be on sale at our open meeting on 6 October.

The artist, trained in fine art at Southend College and at Newcastle University, graduating in 1982. Since then he has continued to paint in a variety of media, latterly in watercolour, drawing inspiration from the townscapes and landscapes of the North-East, where he has lived since 1978. In 1989 he was a prize-winner at the South Tyneside Open Exhibition at the Bede Gallery, and more recently he has participated in the successful *People Show* exhibitions at the University of Northumbria Gallery in Newcastle. His work is also included in several private collections. Examples of his work can be seen on his website: www.DurhamVisualArts.co.uk/stephen.ward. The artist is pleased to accept commissions, and may be contacted by telephone 0191 384 0485 or 07963 627413.

“DURHAM: BEAUTIFUL....BUT DULL”

“Durham: beautiful...but dull”. This summary finding taken from a Report, published in June, by two firms of consultants into the development potential of the City, provided the headline in both the local and national press. It was warmly endorsed by the leaders of both the City

and County Councils. The Report had been commissioned by the Durham Steering Group, an informal group with representatives from the City and County Councils and One North-East, along with the University and Cathedral. The remit was to seek a way “to fundamentally transform Durham as a visitor centre” in order to generate spending and create employment. Like all dutiful consultants, they reported current under-utilisation of resources and pointed to future exploitation. In view of the remit and implication of the vision presented, which would indeed fundamentally change Durham as we know it, a critique of the Report is justified. Both the nature and scale of the proposals will be queried, as well as inherent inconsistencies. The methodology used is a further cause for comment.

The Report, *Planning for the Future of Durham: The new Retail and Leisure Offer*, covers the three elements of retailing, leisure and tourism. While acknowledging that the elements cannot be compartmentalised, tourism is nevertheless seen as the key to unlocking the future of all three.

The section on retailing is realistic in recognising that the topography of the City centre limits expansion, while a regional setting in the shadow of major competitors precludes mounting any serious challenge. Consequently, the advent of any large leisure project is unlikely, since it would either require a cross-subsidy from shopping facilities, or have to perform a super-regional role. It is ironic to see a cinema listed as a desirable acquisition, and surprising to note the uncritical welcome of seven – the figure of nine is given in the text – bars/restaurants as the sum of facilities planned for Walkergate. Another authority might deem such unrelieved concentration as excessive.

The recommended retail element of the strategy is for small-scale, quality retailing to overcome its mediocre image (in retail speak, to raise its status from Mr Average to Mr Glam). Claypath could accommodate 80,000 square feet of such development, in up to eight units; the centre’s vennels are seen to have potential; the Markets could act as a retail incubator, especially if a mezzanine floor proved feasible. The last mentioned is architecturally questionable, while the disappointing performance of premises in the imaginatively-developed Saddlers’ Yard cautions against expecting too much of vennel and courtyard exploitation. Certainly, active Local Authority encouragement will be

needed. To date, the Local Authority has been powerless to prevent the gradual demise of those unique, locally-generated premises which provide distinctive quality to the street scene - Greenwell's, Smith the Chemist, Peacock's, for instance.

It is the leisure/tourism section which gives cause for alarm. Tourism is said to hold the key to a "better" Durham and the City's future prosperity. However, the diagnosis is questionable, and the recommended strategy, if successful, would radically alter the character of the City. Apparently, "beauty, grandeur and a sense of history are not enough....It's what [visitors can] do that matters." Thus a strategy of "democratisation" of heritage is proposed, based on accessibility and activity. The key location for activity is the Riverbanks - "arguably Durham's most under-utilised asset." Aside from the long-term Riverbanks Garden Project, there is potential for water sports, casual sports area, cafes, bandstand, lights, festivals, themed events, etc. In addition, the creation of a contemporary riverside statement is recommended - "something to make people see Durham in a new light." Apparently, "without this [development] Durham's most flexible, fresh and multi-faceted resource will remain ...a waterway."

Exploitation of the Riverbanks is envisaged as offering a "grooviness", in a counterpoint role to the "gravitas" of the peninsula, where the cathedral, castle and university offer "high quality culture and art, [but] can seem elitist." Gravitas, however, does not bring exemption to change: "Durham's historical assets need to be brought to life - even if that means 'taking liberties' with cherished local treasures." Thus, the castle should be "opened up"; technology to create a virtual visitor experience could be installed; tourist business entrepreneurs might be brought in to manage the castle on behalf of the university. (This "need not mean removing the students"!) On Palace Green a range of "medieval events" could be staged. Elsewhere there might be an "interactive medieval gallery", while the ancient bridges could carry brightly-coloured medieval banners promoting attractions on offer.

The section on the proposed democratisation of asset exploitation also contains the curious comment contrasting the "culture-bound heritage" on the peninsula with "the grassing over and numbing down of the mining industry." Is this reference to the County Authority's extensive and award-winning restoration of pit heads and spoil heaps? Is this a hint that the city might set up a centre of mining history? (In which case, the question was answered in the 1960s, when Aykley Heads was assessed as a site for a regional open-air museum, and rejected in favour of Beamish.)

Marketing is considered to be "chronically under-resourced." As a result, Durham "does not enjoy a must-visit image," and lacks "an explicitly-marketed identity,

over and above the buildings." This is a surprising conclusion, given that the headquarters of the Northumbria Tourist Board is in the City, and that for some years the City and County have had a joint programme to greatly increase tourist numbers. It is also a reflection on the efforts of City Tourist Officer.

The Report, summarised above with copious quotations in order to convey the tenor of the vision, is underlain by inconsistencies. Thus, it states it seeks to avoid a "Disneyfied service culture," yet its democratisation proposes many elements akin to such a theme park. It recognises the asset of authenticity - "Durham is the real thing"- but the quality can be curiously expressed. For example, "From the enthusiasm of the volunteer cathedral guides, through the sauce bottles on the castle dining table, to the cobbled pavements, visitors experience a living heritage."

The most glaring inconsistency concerns the question of size. The vision is allegedly of a City which is "better, not bigger," but the strategy would undoubtedly promote growth. Advertising is to be made more effective. Even the insertion of "Durham" in the renaming of Teesside airport would benefit the City, it being "a boost to international tourism." Many of the centres cited as examples for Durham relate to bigger and very different situations, eg Lyons (festival of lights), Brighton (beachfront), Milton Keynes (Xscape Snowdromes). Comments scattered through the Report from a Panel of Professional Experts further encourage this picture of vibrant growth potential. Thus, "make Durham more international, more cosmopolitan" or "invite the Tussauds Group to visit." They express excitement over the possibility of a Regional Assembly: "Treat it as buncce - if it happens, great." (The consultants do not dampen the enthusiasm. Durham is viewed as a front-runner for securing the Regional Assembly, and estimate that a major new office employer might lead to 3,000 new jobs and 1,500 new households.)

A concluding comment on the methodology underlying the Report may be made. In addition to standard research approaches and consultation with 14 Professional Experts, drawn from various fields, there were consultations with two other key groups - "Local Stakeholders" (totalling 50, of whom six were City Council Officers and four others from the related Durham City Arts) and "Voices of Durham" (numbering 34 and representing "a cross-section of Durham archetypes.") No one from the City Trust was invited to either group. At least of equal significance is the fact that the Bibliography of more than 70 items omits any publication of the Trust. The omission is unfortunate, since its *Visions of Durham* is highly germane to the consultants' topic. It had its origin in the late 1980s when Durham appeared threatened with development from all sides. A day-long conference wrestled with the question, "What is Durham?" in order to tease out essential qualities which should be non-negotiable in the future evolution of

our City. Distinguished panellists – architects, planners, conservationists, artist, theologian, geographer – as well as speakers from the floor, expressed a common appreciation and respect for the City, as well as common concern at possible over-development in the future management of change. Over the years the City of Durham Trust has grown used to repeated accusations of being against all change, wanting to preserve the City as a museum, or hindering future prosperity and job-creation, but simply being ignored is a new experience – and a surprising one, considering the wide consultation allegedly undertaken in the present exercise.

Among the many visitors to Durham in the mid-1990s was the distinguished author, Bill Bryson. Bringing with him the comparative eye of an international traveller, his unbridled response was unequivocal: “wonderful – a perfect little city.” Perfection, however, is not within the consultants’ lexicon. Dullness, on the other hand, justifies their case “to make Durham a more attractive place.” But whatever the motive or vision, we are all sojourners and stewards, and have no right to erode the essential quality of Durhamness.

NEW ROAD FOR THE CITY?

Hard on the heels of the consultants’ Report on the development potential of Durham, the County Authority announced proposals for a new road for the City, an “Eastern Bypass.” The project came as a surprise to the City Authority, while the Trust was rebuffed in its request for a basic map of the route. The press had been informed it would link the Carrville roundabout with Aykley Heads. It is not too fanciful to suggest that the announcement reflects the County Authority’s favourable attitude towards a Regional Assembly and a bigger City, and is a harbinger of policies that can be expected if – or, rather, when – it becomes the planning authority for the City in the imminent reorganisation of local government.

D.C.D.P.

LICENSING MATTERS

In May the Annual Report 2004 stated that it had been a relatively quiet year for licensing matters. That now seems to have been the lull before the storm. So much activity has there been recently that the Trust has formed a Licensing Sub-Committee, comprising Mr. Roger Cornwell, Mrs Julie Hepple, Mrs Janet Gill and Mrs. Karen Taylor. Should you wish to contact the Sub-Committee please do so on Treasurer@DurhamCity.org or 0191 386 8473.

In February next year, following the Licensing Act 2003, the City Council takes over responsibility for licensing from the local Justices. In preparation for this, the City Council has issued a 38-page Consultation Draft of its Statement of Licensing Policy. Trustees were pleased to

note that it includes many of their suggestions. Although the new law abolishes fixed closing times, allowing Councils to set them individually for each pub or club, the draft policy proposes that the normal closing time will remain at 11pm, except for the City Centre where 12 midnight could, with safeguards, become the norm. We now have until 12th November 2004 to respond. If you wish to obtain a copy, do so by contacting the City Council’s new Licensing Manager, Jane Kevan, on 0191 301 8786 or jkevan@durhamcity.gov.uk You may respond directly to her or through the Trust.

City Centre residents may like to note that licensing will be the featured topic at the meeting of Area Forum 6 on 14 October, in the Town Hall at 6:30pm for 7pm.

Perhaps as a result of this impending change, there has been a spate of refurbishments, and Public Entertainment Licence (PEL) applications for both changes in numbers and hours of opening. The nightclub, DH1, in North Road has been refurbished and has virtually doubled its numbers to over 400. The adjacent nightclub, Café Rock, soon to be renamed Studio Nightclub, is currently being refurbished and has successfully applied to increase its numbers from 250 to 450. Presumably it will open when the next University term commences.

More worryingly, the Walkabout theme pub on North Road has asked for its weekday hours to be increased from 1.00am to 2.00am. At the Crown Court in October, 2002, the Walkabout was granted a licence subject to certain conditions including investing money in a late night bus scheme and the erection of two urilifts (nocturnal temporary urinals). The argument for staggered opening hours (ie until 1.00am) with the other premises on North Road was strongly advanced. Although it is accepted that the premises in North Road are not all full at closing time, there is the potential to do so and even a small expansion in customers will more than double the numbers exiting onto North Road at 2.00am. In addition, there is only one urilift after eighteen months of negotiations and the bus scheme has collapsed as a failure.

A meeting was held at The Marriott on 17th August to enable those people who had already expressed concern at the PEL to meet Walkabout management. At that meeting the police actively encouraged all those who are suffering nuisance and vandalism at any time to contact Durham police on 0191 386 4222, so that at the very least incidents can be logged. Without evidence of problems, the police are less likely to oppose proposals for later opening. The application for the revised PEL will be heard in Durham Town Hall on Tuesday, 14th September at 9.30am before the Licensing Panel. It may be a sign of confidence by the Walkabout management that they have asked for the necessary changes in their liquor licence to be heard in the Magistrates’ Court on the same day rather than consequently, as is the norm.

It has been impressed upon Trustees by the City Council that they appreciate written comments to changes in PELs, particularly if backed up by a personal appearance. Trustees feel so concerned about these events that they have sent a letter to the 150 or so members living within a short distance of North Road advising them of the situation. Since that letter was written it has come to the Trust's attention that three more North Road pubs, Bar 19 (previously The Saddle Market), Yates' Wine Lodge and The Fighting Cocks have applied to stay open till 1am, Monday to Saturday. Along with the Coach and Eight, which currently has a 1am licence, these premises have a combined capacity of around 1200 people. These numbers will fill the vacuum in numbers left by the Walkabout if it succeeds in its application and will roughly double the numbers if they succeed and The Walkabout does not.

What may be the final straw is that Sunday, which has hitherto been a quiet night with general agreement for an 11pm closing time, may see opening hours extended to 12:30am, and to 2am on a Sunday preceding a Bank Holiday, excluding Easter Sunday. All of the pubs and clubs mentioned above have included this proposal in their applications.

Trustees are resisting all these moves, which look like bringing a new phase to Durham's nightlife, and we look to Trust members and concerned citizens to lend their support.

K.J.T. and R.J.C.

RETURN OF ST CUTHBERT

The wooden carving of Cuthbert of Farne by Fenwick Lawson returned to Durham in early summer. Having spent a decade in the Cathedral cloisters, the twelve foot sculpture left for remedial treatment in Edinburgh before a bronze was taken, to stand in the priory grounds on Lindisfarne. The "uncorrupt" wooden body of the saint is now back in Durham, standing in the peaceful garden of St Mary le Bow, visible from the Bailey, or more fully, from within the Heritage Centre.

Meanwhile, during August and early September, the artist's Pieta in the Cathedral was joined by ten of his other pieces for a celebratory exhibition. Among the sculptures were his stunning "Risen Christ", which attracted much interest when first shown in the Cathedral in 1974, and "The Journey", the subject for the Trust Christmas card in 1999. The latter, together with the artist's "Wheel Cross", constitutes a project which, if realised, would mark in memorable manner the early cultural evolution of the North – the wanderings of the Cuthbert Community, culminating in the founding of our City.



St Cuthbert of Farne in the garden of St Mary le Bow Heritage Centre

MRS SYBIL STODDART

Trustees were saddened to learn of the sudden death of Sybil in mid May, only four days after the Trust's AGM. The suddenness and severity of her illness took everyone by surprise, for she had been absent from Trustees' monthly meetings only since March. Sybil had been our membership secretary during the time her husband Dick was a Trustee, before becoming Treasurer from 1984 until 1995. She took up the reins again in 2000, on the retirement of Wally Woodfield. During her periods in office, the Trust's financial affairs were handled with competence and good humour. We remain in her debt, and sorely miss her.

CARDS FOR GOOD CAUSES SHOP

Most Trust members will know this very successful enterprise : from a city centre location in the run-up to Christmas, the shop sells greeting cards produced by a number of charities including the Trust. The shop relies on volunteer staffing and we have again undertaken to man it for one morning or afternoon each week throughout the operating period from the end of October. A roster of 2-hour stints is being drawn up and we would be glad to hear from members who would like to participate. Do consider joining in. Telephone Mary Sales on 378 1703.

M.E.S.

