

CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

BULLETIN

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TRUST OPEN MEETING

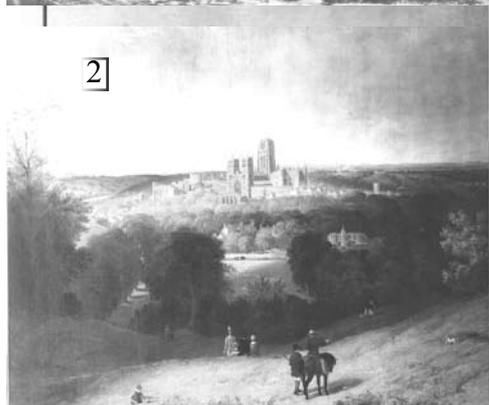
Our autumn lecture will be given by **Melanie Sensicle**, chief executive of Visit County Durham, a keystone in the economy of Durham, both city and county. The title of her lecture is '**Durham's Visitor Economy**', and will be held on **Saturday 3rd November** in our usual venue, Elvet Riverside 1, room 141, at 2.15pm.

TRUST CARDS

At this point in the autumn Bulletin we normally announce the new Christmas card. However, this year Trustees decided not to produce a new card in view of the growing stock of past cards and the unknown effect of the large rise in postage. Instead, for this year we are offering several of the past cards, with greetings or plain, at greatly reduced price. The enclosed yellow sheet lists the bargains.

COUNTY DURHAM PLAN

We are now halfway through the consultation period of the County's **Preferred Options** document, the fourth and penultimate consultation in a sequence which began three years ago.



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Trustees would strongly urge members to consult the 290 page document and to submit comments, even if you have commented previously. (Public responses will be considered before a Submissions Draft is produced for one final round of consultation. Following that, the Plan will be submitted - along with public responses - to a Public Examination before an Inspector.)

It will be seen from the present document that the prime aims of the Authority with regard to the City remain essentially the same – to make it the economic powerhouse or driver of the County, with a key focus on Aykley Heads, 3,500 houses in the Green Belt and two new relief roads. Although several Trustees are veterans of past County Structure Plan battles, the stakes this time are much higher in that no previous Plan has threatened so drastically to change the character of the City. In order not to leave anything to chance, therefore, Trustees decided to supplement their own expertise by engaging traffic consultants to analyse the critical element of proposed western and northern relief roads.

The Preferred Options document is available for consultation in libraries and on-line at <http://www.durham.gov.uk/cdp>. Comments should be sent either to Freepost Spatial Policy, Durham County Council, Civic Centre, Chester-le-Street, DH3 3UT, or by e-mail to CDPconsultation@durham.gov.uk or on-line at <http://durhamcc-consult.limehouse.co.uk/portal/planning/> The deadline for submissions is Friday, 2nd November.

ABOUT PALACE GREEN

For many months building trade vehicles have been camped around Palace Green. As a result, a new heating system for the area has been installed, and the **Castle (University College)**



Durham Castle Kitchen

has undergone a complex programme of restoration projects on many parts of the old fabric. The most extensive has been the refurbishment of student rooms in order that modern facilities co-exist with history. It is only proper, therefore, that the Master's house should currently be undergoing similar renovation.

While refurbishing the student accommodation was carried out with sensitivity, that meted out to the **Castle Kitchen** was decidedly not. Trustees could hardly believe their eyes when they saw large, bulky machinery filling much of the precious medieval space, obscuring much of Durham's earliest brickwork and one of its original fireplaces. It is, after all, a Grade I-listed building in a World Heritage Site. There had been no details of the project available at the planning application stage; nevertheless, planning approval was given, but with the condition that "final drawings and any supplementary information [were] to be submitted to, and agreed in writing by, the Local Authority, with the agreed works to be implemented in accordance with the said agreement."

Trustees, unable to find any such final drawings or written consent, sought and received confirmation from an Environmental Information Regulation request that there were none. The University thus did not have permission for the work, as it originally held. Subsequent comments that the time schedule was tight or that insufficient electric power necessitated installation of gas-fired machinery in no way negated the fact that a planning certificate was a pre-requisite. Equally inadmissible is the assertion that the installation is reversible (sometime in the future).

One can but agree with the comment of Dr Simon Thurley, Chief Executive of English Heritage, who visited the kitchen at Trustees' request, that "there are a number of lessons to be learned from this project which could usefully be applied to the planning of future schemes at the Castle and World Heritage Site generally." Meanwhile, the recent AGM of the Architectural and Archaeological Society of Durham and Northumberland unanimously passed a motion expressing dismay at the result and deploring the University's behaviour.

Another project nearby has been the creation of a highly attractive space in the former **University Library**. The current exhibition is an excellent one on Bishop Cosin. (It is interesting to note that in the introductory film, narrated by Martin Roberts, the castle kitchen is shown as it was before its summer refurbishment.)

At the head of **Owen Gate**, the University has recently narrowed the entry and egress with Palace Green, the aim being to stop night joy-riding around the Green. A barrier is formed by a variety of inoffensive bollards, including a rising one in the centre of the roadway. One small blemish is the laying of small, smooth cobbles adjoining the area of bigger, irregularly set

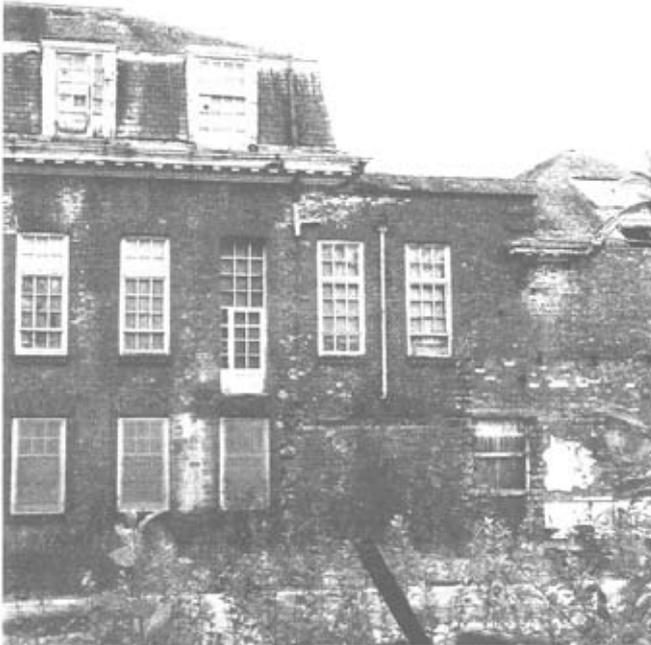
cobbles around the World Heritage Site plaque column. Although a detail and a seemingly trivial point, the eye is immediately drawn to the junction of the two treatments. Detail can make or mar; it certainly is a measure of the care or sensitivity accorded to an environment.

MOUNT OSWALD

For the third time in recent years a planning proposal has been lodged by **Banks Property** for Mount Oswald. The main ingredients remain essentially the same – student accommodation, housing, executive housing (but not a millionaires row this time), conversion of Mount Oswald House, community open space and shop.

The plans remain contrary to the existing Local Plan policy for the area, but since a recent County Plan supplementary document allocates housing to part of the site, it is assumed that the Authority is happy to agree to a departure from the existing policy. The position of the University is also an unknown factor with regard to additional student accommodation.

Banks has again been open in promoting its complex scheme with another lavishly illustrated public exhibition. Trustees, however, have reservations. They have also drawn the attention of the County Authority to the legacy of Banks' last multi-faceted scheme at Neville's Cross, now known as Sheraton Park. Here, in 2002, Banks obtained permission, and promptly sold parts to other developers. The result is that a key element in the complex scheme - the conversion of the Neo-Georgian Neville House (to 62 apartments) and Sheraton House (to offices and leisure facilities) – has not taken place. Deterioration of the properties, however, has clearly occurred in the ten years since permission was obtained. Although Banks claim that it is not responsible



Sheraton House still awaiting conversion

for the present state, deflecting inquiries to Crosby, it surely has at least a moral obligation to expedite completion of the scheme. Banks' slogan, incidentally, is 'Development with Care'

ICE RINK SITE

Members who attended the summer exhibition in the Town Hall will know that Arlington Developments, backed by Carillion, are proposing to redevelop the Ice Rink site, now known as **Freeman's Reach**. In terms of scale, massing and materials it is far superior to the previous proposal which the Trust successfully defeated after a local inquiry. Here, offices, and not housing, are proposed. A feature of the building will be its zero carbon footprint, a contribution to which may come from use of water directed from the weir. At this most southerly point, where coaches disgorge visitors, there will be a tourist reception centre which will incorporate a history of the ancient mill. The latter is to be demolished.

Trustees reluctantly acquiesced to the loss of the mill, given the knowledge that at the previously-mentioned 2006 local inquiry, the saving of the mill was the only point on which the inspector disagreed. Nevertheless, that does

not stop Trustees sympathising with the view expressed by a respected Durham-watcher, who viewed this part of the exercise - of demolishing history and then going to some lengths to interpret what formerly existed - as cynical.

HERITAGE CENTRE EXHIBITION

To mark the end of the Trust's 70th anniversary year, an exhibition of Trust material is currently on display at St Mary le Bow Centre. It illustrates the founding of the Society and the successful objection to the proposals for the Kepier Power Station in 1945 through to the public inquiry in 2006 which resulted in the proposals for redevelopment of the Ice Rink site being stopped. Other examples include the saving of the tea pot, the protection of Flass Vale and the restoration of Neptune.

The collection has been mounted by Dennis and Jo Jones, as the latest in a line of professionally-produced exhibitions. The City is fortunate to have such an active, caring and knowledgeable pair at the heart of its Heritage Centre.

DR SORAN READER

Trustees were saddened to hear of Soran's death at the beginning of September. Soran was elected a Trustee in May 2008, bringing to our table her experience of the river and rowing, in addition to having a keen eye on stirrings in the Providence Row area of the city. Ill health forced her to retire after two years, but both she and we were expecting her to rejoin when well. Alas, it was not to be.

D.C.D.P.