

# CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

## BULLETIN

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### TRUST OPEN MEETING

Our Spring meeting will be addressed by Richard Annis, senior archaeologist in the University, on Durham and Dunbar and Palace Green. The speaker will describe the various buildings making up Palace Green Library, and explain how the initial bones were discovered. He will then summarise how scientific findings have elicited such details as age and origin of the prisoners marched south from Dunbar. The meeting will be in our customary venue, Elvet Riverside 1, room 141, on Saturday, 19th March at 2.15pm.

### TRUST'S ARCHITECTURAL AWARD

The winner of the Trust's architectural award for 2015 is 'The Bowers', a small development of townhouses and mews cottages at the end of Waddington Street. Occupying the tapering rectangular site of the former Arriva bus depot, the scheme is an exemplary piece of place-making. The two tall building at the entrance act as a gateway to the scheme; inside an open square is flanked by three-storey terraces on one side facing two-storey mews on the other; further in a short terrace with garages opposite continue towards Flass Vale.



**The Bowers, Entry**

The location is an appropriate context for a 'safe' design of 19th century Durham vernacular but it is building treatment, degree of enclosure and floorscape which sum to a pleasing unified composition and sense of place. The Istock brick and slate roof structures are given interest by the pattern of bays, some blocked-up windows and chimney stacks. Surfaces other than brick have a restrained colour range, while the absence of PVC, interestingly, is by choice, not planning condition.



**The Bowers**

The scheme, a welcome halt to rampant student advance in the area, and with a planning condition preventing conversion to multiple occupation, is the creation of Gentoo Homes of Sunderland, the architect being Stuart Hutchinson. The plaque will be handed over at the Open meeting.

A second noteworthy scheme in 2015 is the café/visitor centre at the entrance to Crook Hall gardens. It is a simple, clean-line, contemporary expression of a barn-like structure, having a slender section with a high pitched roof. Stained shingles cover the roof, while rougher shingles cover the entire side fronting Frankland Lane - including the door to the private apartment on the first floor - and the upper part of the elevation facing the garden. Cedar timber cladding prevails elsewhere. Windows are aluminium-framed; skylights maintain the clean line of the roof. On the garden side large sliding windows open out onto an attractive, paved seating area encircled by a low wall of 2x2 brick. Altogether, it provides a decidedly enhanced sense of arrival to, as well as a place later to reflect on, a visit to the historic house and garden.



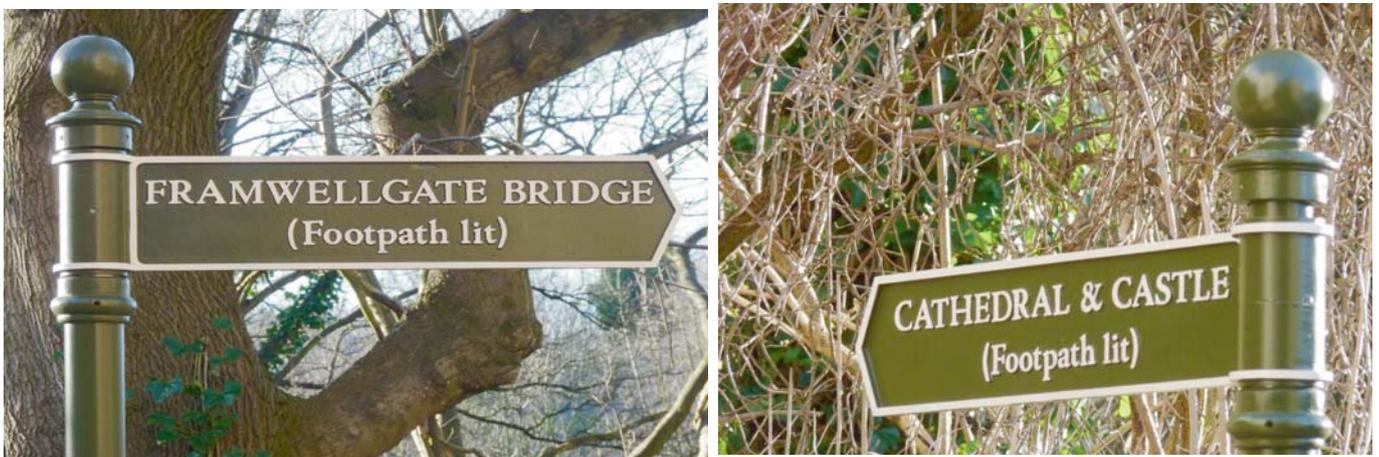
**Crook Hall: Seating Area from the Maze Field**



**Visitor Centre, Crook Hall**

Despite the integrity of the structure and appropriateness of materials, a query must be directed to the scale and massing, since the decision to incorporate a tourist apartment in the roof space of a slender, elongated building results in a very high angle to the pitch. The architect refers to this "exaggerated pitch" as reflecting that of the Hall itself, but one has to be at a particular spot to appreciate the relationship with the latter - which, even then, is some distance away. Confirmation of this querying of mass is best appreciated when the structure is viewed from across the maze in the meadow leading to the gardens. The design of the structure was by Elliott Architects of Hexham.

The part restoration, part new-build, of Ward Court, the former Neville's Cross Club, has given a stronger statement to the western entrance to the city. The architecture - another contextually appropriate piece by Garry Hodgson - is welcomed, its use as student residences, less so.



**Signpost information for students**

## **TOWNSCAPE QUERIES**

Trustees have been concerned at the threat of possible suburbanisation of the riverbanks arising from the response of the local authority to recent student fatalities in the river. Among their specific queries was the stated need to illuminate Broken Walls, the path which runs in the shadow of the castle between Framwellgate Bridge and Windy Gap and Palace Green. It can hardly be said to be near the river. The Highways Authority originally proposed four metre high lamp standards. The bollards actually erected are taller than recommended by Trustees, and do more than 'wash' the pavement with helpful light. The Authority made the additional (strange) claim that the light seen from the opposite side of the river would be minimised by positioning the bollards in line with the (much thinner) barrier posts. The work is now completed, including directional finger posts indicating to students at either end of the path that it is a "footpath lit".

Another query is the lack of attention paid to the state of the floorscape of Old Elvet Bridge. Originally an integral part of Tony Scott's Award-winning central floorscaping scheme of 1978, it was inexplicably omitted from Durham City Vision's Central Area Project. Large sections consist of cracked stone, tarmac infill of different ages and cement. In response to queries, the Authority



### **Floorscape, Old Elvet Bridge**

cites limited funding among competing demands. Meanwhile, if residents are getting resigned to it, one can only wonder what goes through the mind of tourists, with their fresh eyes, as they make their way - not least from the Royal County Hotel - to the cathedral.

Of course, if Durham City Vision had not insisted on relocating the Lord Londonderry statue, with the consequent re-contouring of the Market Place, its resources could have well afforded repaving Elvet Bridge. Members will remember that the equestrian statue was moved on the pretext of creating an arena for the staging of some 20 major events a year, a key factor for the regeneration of the whole city. No evidence was provided, despite our request at the critical committee meeting, beside pointing out that, among other things, the space was always occupied by an open market on Saturdays. Of course, it has proved a hollow claim; the presence of an NHS or army recruitment bus, or stalls for Sky TV, dogs or cats have hardly got Durham 'moving'.

A third query concerns the Authority's commendable extensive restoration of Wharton Park, the gift of W L Wharton in 1858, while at the same time consenting to the demolition of the benefactor's house nearby. The latter action was sanctioned despite the listed building being in good condition, and an acknowledgment that there were other feasible solutions for the hospital's needs.

### **COUNTY PLAN: BE PREPARED**

Last, but certainly not least, the Authority hopes to have the Pre-Submission Draft of its new Plan ready for public consultation in "the Spring" (with the Examination in Public in "early Summer"). Although "updating" has been mentioned, there has been nothing to suggest that the new Plan will depart significantly from its previous over-concentration on the city to the detriment of both city and the rest of the county. It is essential that members respond to the consultation, even if you find yourself repeating the arguments advanced last time, for those earlier responses will not be considered by the County or seen by the new Inspector.

D.C.D.P.