

CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

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TRUST OPEN MEETING

We are privileged that our spring lecture is to be given by the Very Revd Michael Sadgrove, Dean of Durham and, of course, Trust patron. The title of his illustrated lecture is '**Historic Cathedral City: Expectation and Reality at Durham.**' It will be given in our usual venue, **Elvet Riverside 1, room 141, on Saturday 26th February at 2.15pm.** Those who know the Dean from his writings or personally will be aware that he has both a deep interest in, and is highly sensitive to, the environment. His lecture is therefore anticipated with pleasure.

REVIEW OF ARCHITECTURE, 2010

Trustees did not make an architectural award for the past year. This is not to say that there was an absence of quality or merit in structures restored or constructed, but that certain, perhaps less obvious criteria, came to the fore. Normally, scale, massing, design, detailing, etc may come readily to mind, but there are always other aspects to be weighed up – degree of challenge, degree of 'value' added or presence of external elevation. The latter group were important when considering the best of this year's structures.

In the basement of the deanery a vaulted 13th century undercroft has been converted into a **Chapel of the Holy Cross.** The restoration, or transformation, was undertaken on the Dean's initiative under the guidance of cathedral architect, Christopher Downs, with sculptor Colin Wilbourn responsible for the woodwork. Such a team ensures success, of course. The stonework has been cleaned, the walls transformed with cream limewash and light wooden benches and altar stood on the existing tiled floor. The genius of the sculptor is seen at the east end, where frosted glass over an existing aperture, with a wooden surround and hinged side pieces, mould the incoming light into a cross to evoke memorably the chapel's designation. A space with no obvious recent use has thus been converted into a hidden gem. – Hidden that is, except to groups who, by arrangement, wish to step aside for awhile from everyday bustle.

A second internal restoration, or updating, took place in the 19th century **North Road Methodist Church.** Functional updates, making the building more 'user-friendly', include a new lift, kitchen and toilet, but it is the main church interior or 'room' to which one is immediately drawn. Fullest appreciation is obtained from the first floor balcony, where colour, line and depth create a harmonious composition. From here, amid the original, quite basic wooden seating benches one looks down to the browns of the new seats and ground-floor area framed by the curve of the white balcony. The large, round-headed windows flood the space in light, while, above, a 'sunny' ceiling completes a composition which stands in complete contrast to the austere external appearance of the chapel.



Chapel of the Holy Cross. (Photo. .D. Pocock)

A further internal addition, which, although more public, may well be missed in view of the sheer busyness of activity around, is the extension, or completion, of the mezzanine floor across the lower end of the **Indoor Market.** Initially refused by the Authority but allowed on appeal, the balustrading presents a unifying end feature above the diversity of stalls. An attached emblem of the Dun Cow legend adds interest. A larger artwork, hiding on the end wall in the depths of the Market, is a coloured mural of the market and city centre by the Durham University Student Community Action Group. It is a pleasant surprise for the explorer.

Two properties at the head of Saddler Street – ‘Salvation 21’ (Salvation Army) and ‘The Varsity’ public house - illustrate how simple design adjustment can achieve marked uplift, while the rejuvenating effect of an appropriate coat of paint is shown in Prebends’ Cottage. This modest stone cottage no longer hides unnoticed amidst the foliage on its corner site on the way to the bridge.



North Road Methodist Chapel. (Photo. D. Pocock)

MARKET PLACE

A design and townscape assessment of the Market Place and Vennels project must await completion of the scheme: it would be inappropriate to comment when the transformation of the centre, with its inevitable disruptions, is still to the fore.

The manner in which the Central Area Regeneration Project progressed and was approved is now history. It is documented in the Trust’s publication, *The Unmaking of Durham’s Historic Market Place*. The last chapter of the history, however, may not yet have been written, for a complaint about the handling of the application is currently with the Council’s Corporate Complaints section. If this complaint is not satisfactorily resolved, the matter may then be referred to the Local Government Ombudsman.

THE COUNTY PLAN AND CONSULTATION

Cynicism is never far away at the mention of public consultation. With regard to the present County Plan, the behaviour of the Authority has hardly been such as to encourage confidence.

At the outset, consider the sheer number and changing dates for submission. On 3rd December the Authority issued on its website a list of no fewer than seven documents, with consultation to end on 14th January. Ten days later the Authority extended the consultation period to 21st January. Then, on 5th January the consultation was further extended to 11th February. The changing dates seem not unconnected to its ‘treatment’ of the crucial Green Belt document.

Both content and ‘treatment’ of *The Consultation Report Durham Green Belt Assessment Phase 2* are cause for considerable concern. Concern over content derives from the fact that the Authority, with no strong mandate for such strategy from responses to its initial *Core Strategy and Issues* document - in fact 60% elected for alternative strategies - decided to focus development on the City in order to regenerate the County. Accordingly, the City - by which the Authority does not mean the former, more extensive area covered by Durham District, but the area immediately around the central, built-up area - is to receive 5050 houses, the bulk of them in the City’s Green Belt. This action is proposed even though it is less than a decade ago since the designation was made, following an Examination in Public before an appointed Inspector. It would also appear to be at odds with central government policy which states that “the essential characteristic of Green Belts is their permanence.”

From the point of view of consultation, the ‘treatment’ of this key document might be called indefensible. The 137-page document was issued on 3rd December, and then withdrawn a week later because the “wrong version” had been “uplifted”. This term was used, since the document was only available on-line. The correct version did not appear until 21st December – and, then, again only on-line. No paper copies were produced for consultation in libraries or elsewhere. Moreover, one Trust member, who does not have on-line facilities and took advantage of the apparent offer to be sent a paper copy, reported she had received only the one-page Introduction and the 9 pages of Conclusions, but none of the central portion of 117 pages containing discussion, analysis and recommendation for each of possible sites, to which responses were requested in the Conclusion.

The serious question to be asked is how can such behaviour be accurately described as public consultation, or consultation of any meaningful kind? One might also ask what exactly was taking place ‘behind the scenes’ for a wrong version of a document 137 pages in length to be published and then withdrawn for amendment.

HIGHWAYS QUERY (1)

The County Council is in the process of assessing various improvement schemes on particular bus routes in order to give priority to buses, thereby making their journey time more reliable. Funding is provided by the Department of Transport from application made in the County's Local Transport Plan 2.



South Road, 2010. (Photo. D. Pocook)

Trustees are in favour of giving preference to public transport, and can appreciate that time-saving will accrue on busy sections, such as the A690, inward, to the Bede roundabout. Others may be too short to contribute to any real saving to overall journey time. Moreover, two in the approaches to the City will incur unfortunate environmental consequences.

At **Shincliffe** a bus lane will be added to the A177, inward, approaching the lights at the junction with Mill Lane. A new footpath/cycleway will be taken from the field on the east and a retaining wall built. The Council estimates that a bus "will pass approximately 15 queuing vehicles." The cost is given as £124,000.

More costly in terms of money and environmental consequence is the proposal for **South Road** in the section adjacent to the University Science Site to the lights at the New Inn. Here, the additional bus lane will involve the removal of fifteen lime trees, thereby weakening the experience of a green entry delaying revelation of the City until the last minute. – Weakening it for everyone in order that seconds may be saved by those travelling to work by bus.

The County's consultation literature for South Road is quite adamant that while "queues only occur for an

hour in the morning and an hour in the evening", and that the saving may amount to only "seconds off a bus journey", nevertheless, "benefits are greater than costs. This means that the project represents good value for money." Trustees' response to such logic is that the Authority's case is based solely on technical grounds of time-saving benefits (accumulated over a long period) vis-à-vis cost of constructing. In fact, of course, any such cost/benefit ratio could show value for money if the programme were run a sufficient number of times. However, such a technical approach does not factor in any environmental impact (or cost).

The argument by traffic engineers here is another example of their apparent tunnel vision: a negation of the 'joined up' activity which surely constitutes planning. It is the same narrow vision that was revealed in the suggestion of consultant traffic engineers some fifteen years ago that the Palmer's Garth playing field, opposite the New Inn, be converted into a car park.

HIGHWAYS QUERY (2)

The proposal of the County Council to erect three sets of "speed cushions" (traffic humps) in a traffic calming exercise on **Margery Lane** has little or no environmental significance, although their origin - and imminent - arrival is interesting. They are the result of a single individual, who witnessed a near-miss due to a speeding car, making representation to his local councillors. The latter warded money from their neighbourhood budget after "speed surveys" found that 56% of vehicles exceeded the 30mph speed limit.

Trustees queried the statistics, given that the 300 yard section involved has two areas for parking which restrict the highway to a single lane, has two roads entering and is terminated by a right-angled bend at one end and a bend and lights at the other. We requested times of the traffic censuses - since even 10 mph is hardly possible at times of journey to- and from -work - and speed details.. The reply on times was simply "August", while speed details were offered on payment of £85. The offer was declined. Incidentally, the cycling fraternity is not best pleased with the proposals.

TOWN COUNCIL

Trustees are fully in favour of a Durham Town Council and fully support the campaign by Alderman Mary Hawgood in her efforts to bring one to fruition. It is hardly credible that our historic county town should be left

without any representation or voice of any kind. For the first time in its history it is in limbo, administratively. Thus, while the County Authority targets the City for unprecedented development, there can be no comment in response. - Except, of course, by individuals through 'public consultation'.

'TO LET' SIGNS

A flurry of 'To Let' signs for student accommodation has returned again to those parts of the City most characterised by 'studentification.' It has not reached 'forest' proportions of a few years ago, when the Trust Bulletin contained a picture of Mitchell Street with three-quarters of the houses displaying signs, but there are still 'hot-spots.' At the bottom of South Street, for instance, why do all six premises constituting The Maltings need a sign? And why have they been displayed – at the time of writing – for two months?



'To Let' signs, The Maltings. (Photo. D. Pocock)

Clearly, a voluntary code of practice, brokered by the old District Authority, no longer works. The County Planning Officer recently called a meeting of those involved, but in the absence of something stronger than at present, it is impossible to see the situation improving. The whereabouts of properties is well-known centrally at Dunelm House, apart from offices and literature of entrepreneurs or agents - if not among the students themselves - that it seems fair to conclude that the boards are primarily displayed for general advertising.

D.C.D.P.

APPLICATION FORM

I/We wish to become a member of the City of Durham Trust and I/We enclose cash / standing order / a cheque payable to The City of Durham Trust.

Full Name & Address (capitals) Dr/Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms

postcode
 Tel. No
 Email.....

GiftAid: I pay income tax and, unless I cease to do so and notify the Trust, I would like the tax on my subscriptions and any donations to be reclaimed by the Trust.

Signed.....Date

Current annual membership subscriptions:

	<i>Please Tick</i>	
Ordinary.....	£10	<input type="checkbox"/>
Joint (couple).....	£12	<input type="checkbox"/>
Senior (over 60).....	£5	<input type="checkbox"/>
Joint senior (both over 60)	£7	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student.....	£5	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dependent solely on State Benefit ...	£5	<input type="checkbox"/>
Life.....	£150	<input type="checkbox"/>

Completion of the following Standing Order form will enable your bank to make the payment now for this year and on 1 January of each subsequent year. Most members pay by this method which is convenient for them and for the Trust.

STANDING ORDER

To:(Your bank's name)
 (address)

Please pay to the Co-operative Bank plc, 29 High Street, Durham DH1 3PL now and on each 1st January starting 1st January 20... until further notice, the sum of £.....
 For the credit of the 'City of Durham Trust'
 (A/c number 50410022, sort code 08-90-70) and debit my account; number.....

Signed.....Date
 Name (capitals)
 Address (capitals).....

Postcode