

# CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

## BULLETIN

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### TRUST CHRISTMAS CARD

After a break of a year we resume our annual publication of a Christmas card. It is a feature which Trustees feel not only spreads greetings among friends, but at the same time announces the society's existence far and wide. For this year's card we are indebted to Michael Richardson, who has kindly agreed that the Trust might use a recent acquisition to his extensive Gilesgate Archive. It is a water colour by an anonymous artist of Durham at the turn of the 18th-19th century viewing the city from Aykley Heads. The ancient streets and key features are clearly discernible, with the church tower of old St Nicholas standing proud in the Market Place.

The card, which is illustrated below, can be seen in colour online via our website. An order form accompanies this Bulletin. Cards (with or without seasonal greetings) will also be on sale at our Open Meeting on 28th October.



### LECTURE

At the Open Meeting **Martin Roberts** will give his annual lecture, this year entitled '**The amiable Dr Spence: sermons and gardens in mid-18th century Durham**'. The illustrated lecture is on **Saturday, 28th October, at 2.15pm** in Elvet Riverside 1, in our usual room, 141.

Dr Joseph Spence was appointed a canon of Durham Cathedral in 1754, and remained in that position until his death in 1768. He was a polymath, at different times holding professorships at Oxford in English Literature and History, but it was as an accomplished landscape designer that he is most widely known. He was a strong advocate of the emerging English Landscape school, in this respect being a close friend of Alexander Pope. He designed a number of parks and gardens in the county and city. The lecture will outline these works and also consider a number of contemporary landscapes he may have influenced.

## DUNELM HOUSE: CONFERENCE:

The controversy aroused by the University's decision to seek prevention of listing of Dunelm House catapulted the building into the spotlight. One positive and highly significant spin-off has been the organising of a day's conference, **'Caring for Brutalism' on Saturday, 21st October in Elvet Riverside 1, room 140**. The conference, the idea for which belongs to Adrian Green, is sponsored jointly by the University's Centre for Visual Arts and Culture, the Twentieth Century Society and the City of Durham Trust. The recent announcement by the Secretary of State (see below) gives added significance to the event.

The conference brings together leading experts on 20th century concrete architecture - teachers, authors, Historic England - to explore issues of aesthetic appreciation, cultural value and the criteria by which university, civic and national communities decide to conserve. There will be a visit to Dunelm House, which, unsurprisingly, figures highly in some of the lectures.

The conference is open to the public, and without charge, but, since numbers are limited, members are advised to register in advance.

The quickest way is online: <https://www.dur.ac.uk/cvac/events/eventslisting/?eventno=34768>

## DUNELM HOUSE: PROMISING NEWS

Members will be aware that last year the University sought a certificate of immunity from listing for this distinctive building. Its Master Plan had other plans for the site. When the Secretary of State announced she was "mindful to approve" the application, it brought forth a host of submissions putting the case for its retention from distinguished architects, civic leaders and societies. The Twentieth Century Society's call for a review was firmly supported by Trustees. Thus, we welcomed the news in July that the Secretary of State had agreed to reconsider the original evidence and also the architectural and historic evidence subsequently submitted.

## UNIVERSITY MASTERPLAN

In May of this year the University, under the direction of its new Vice-Chancellor, published a strategic Masterplan (2017-27). The document was premised on the need for expansion. Thus, "Durham wants to be so much more ....cannot afford to stand still. Our goal is for Durham to be delivering world-leading and world-changing research across all academic departments. To sustain this success the University needs to build its complement of world-leading academic staff. [S]ubjects require a critical mass of high quality academic staff." Hence, in addition to extra academic staff, the aim is to bring another 6,500 students into Durham.

In view of such emphasis on growth, an initial fundamental question surrounding the Plan is whether the stated driving force of the proposed expansion is need, requirement or whether it is an aim, a desire. If the former, then it should be noted that for a decade Durham has been hard on the heels of Oxbridge - and in particular disciplines its departments have been ranked above the equivalent ones in the two ancient foundations. The official 2017 university rankings, in order, is Cambridge, Oxford, St Andrews, Durham. Here, it is enlightening to compare more closely the third and fourth, which happen to be by far the smallest of all the leading institutions.

Institution	No. Students	Proposed Increase	Town Size
Durham	14,500	+ 6,500	20,900
St Andrews	8,200	+1,800	16,800

(Note that the population figure for Durham is that of the Neighbourhood Forum Area.

This corresponds closely to the area traditionally recognised as the city.)

St Andrews can be seen to be a much smaller institution and yet, interestingly, sees no need for any large expansion to maintain academic excellence, which is equal to that of Durham. There is no policy of numbers catch-up: no emphasis on critical mass. A section headed 'Our Size' in its Strategic Plan 2015-25 is unequivocal:

"St Andrews has always been a small University, and intends to stay relatively small. The intimacy of the town, the closeness of the community and the interaction of Town and Gown are key elements of the St Andrews' experience."

Numbers have consequences: repercussions beyond the classroom or laboratory on the settlement in which the university is embedded. Here, Durham's Masterplan speaks of "rationalisation" of its units on the university's estate, but the city's infrastructure will be severely over-loaded by thousands more cross-city journeys. This is inevitable, firstly, because colleges, teaching and library facilities are in separate locations on different parts of the estate. (This is a legacy, confirmed in the 1960s, when the university colonised buildings in the centre vacated by the county council and other dilapidated structures, rather than developing a campus further south.) Secondly, and most recently, the centre has become ringed by purpose-built student accommodation blocks on land not on the university estate. (Four are functioning, three are about to open, another five are building, summing to almost 3,400 beds). Thirdly, over 1700 houses have been converted into student rentals (say 4-5 beds in each), a process which is continuing. As a consequence, the city's narrow streets and grossly inadequate pavements will experience tidal waves of students, already likened in a previous Bulletin to tsunami, corresponding to lecture timetables.

Another cost to the city is the loss of any revenue from community charges on student houses. A further one impinges on many shop-keepers, given that for five months of the year more than 10,000 of their potential customers are absent. (Summer tourists conceals any decline of busyness, but not the emptiness of the swathes colonised by student housing.)

In response to the above, the University will point out that it brings huge financial and economic benefit, locally, regionally, even nationally. While this is, of course, accepted, should any implication that further expansion would bring further economic return be a primary concern in university growth? Durham is the country's only university town with parity between resident and student numbers; no other town approaches this ratio. The present Masterplan will alter even this 'balance', and mean that the city will have to adjust yet further to the University - rather than the University adjusting to the city - and thereby assume increasingly the character of a campus settlement. In so doing it reaffirms the metaphor of the University, traditionally considered to be the goose that laid the golden egg, now proving to be a cuckoo in the nest.

## **UNIVERSITY PLANS FOR MAIDEN CASTLE**

The sports component of the University's Masterplan, is a large expansion of its facilities at Maiden Castle. This must be challenged, not only for its size, but for its development of Green Belt. New all-weather pitches and lighting is already work-in-progress, but in July a second application proposed the extension and erection of new sports stadia. One extension will be capable of holding indoor cricket matches, one of the new halls ("sporting boxes") will house eight tennis and squash courts, another, twelve badminton courts and seating for 2000. In summary, the new constructions will sum to more than double what is there now, or, in view of the extra height of the buildings, four times the existing volume.

National planning policy is clearly breached. In Green Belt any extension to existing buildings must be minor and. new sports halls are deemed inappropriate. The openness of the Green Belt is not preserved, neither is the character and appearance of the area - here designated as one of High Landscape Value, while it can hardly claim to preserve the setting of the historic city, which was the reason for the Green Belt creation.

The University admits some of these points, but rests its case entirely on what it sees as a lifeline in the planning policy, namely, the case for "very special circumstances", whereby the inappropriateness and harm caused are "clearly outweighed" by the benefits which will accrue.

The University's "very special circumstances" hardly stand up to scrutiny. Consider, for instance, the following: the "need" to facilitate achievement of the University's strategic aims and to maintain its sporting profile and national significance; justification of individual sports; (solicited) support from sporting agencies; social and economic benefits, both locally and regionally, including revenue-raising sporting events (one stakeholder instanced the possibility of hosting professional boxing); absence of alternative sites

These "very special circumstances" would hardly apply were the University a specialised sports college. However, the over-riding factor against Green Belt development is that of Case Law, where at the beginning of the year the High Court ruled that an adverse impact on Green Belt openness was just that: there was no latitude for finding otherwise. Subsequent Appeal decisions have already followed this ruling

## **DELAY IN COUNTY PLAN**

The news on the County Plan is that it has been further delayed: 2020 now seems the earliest that a new one will be in place. It was in early 2015 that the County Authority rejected any of the Inspector's alternative strategies and withdrew its original plan; since then we have had publication of, and consultation on, the Options and Issues of a new one, but further progress was halted as the Authority awaited publication in February of a government White Paper which promised to give a formula for estimating housing needs, which is a basic building block of any plan. Unfortunately, the Paper contained no such advice; July was then given as the date, but the snap general election put paid to that date; September is the current expectation for its appearance. Since this will be a consultation Paper, time will slip even further. Hence the further slippage of the County Plan.

At a meeting kindly agreed to by the Authority, a group of Trustees met with planners at County Hall in July to discuss County Plan matters. We were informed that the next stage, Preferred Options, would take six months to assemble after the White Paper formula becomes clear.

## **INTERIM POLICY ON STUDENT ACCOMMODATION**

Application of the above policy, which came into force in September 2016, continues to fail in one crucial respect in its intention to "promote the creation of sustainable and mixed communities". While it uses the threshold of 10% of houses in multiple student occupation within 100 metres of a would-be applicant to decide an application, it takes no account of nearby purpose-built student blocks (PBSAs) with their hundreds of occupants. Thus, the policy has been unable to prevent recent conversion of new housing in Sheraton Park in the shadow of Sheraton and Neville Cross halls. Will similar conversions to HMOs take place on Mount Oswald? Meanwhile, the scattering of eleven PBSAs in a collar around the centre will continue to carry no planning weight in deciding future HMOs. Clearly, late as it is, the "interim" policy needs a re-think in order to achieve sustainable and balanced communities.

## **ABOUT THE CITY CENTRE**

At a recent one-night stand at The Gala, comedian Rory Bremner apparently remarked that he had had a walk around the centre and concluded that "Durham would be a fine city when it's built". Apart from work on Elvet Bridge, Owengate and North Road, there are several large, intrusive schemes of demolition and rebuilding which could justify such a remark - not that residents have necessarily found the experience amusing.

The large gap in Lower Claypath, scheduled for a PBSA block of 477 student beds, has been a site mainly occupied with deep piling since demolition of all buildings. In The Gates the remaining shopkeepers have been bravely operating under siege conditions as construction of 253 student beds provide a financial base for its transformation elsewhere into Riverwalk, with its promise of restaurants, cafes and drinking establishments. Demolition of this thirty-year old structure proved much easier than that now occurring nearby to Milburngate House, where the solidity of the reinforced concrete of its Brutalist construction is slowing progress, eventually towards retailing, offices and many apartments. (In passing, it is noticed that the company concerned, Carillion, was reported in July to be in financial difficulties.) Lastly, the former County Hospital site is currently a mass of renovating the original building and erecting tall surrounding blocks to house a further 363 student beds. All that is needed now is for permission to be given for the - unnecessary - demolition of the bus station and removal of the roundabout, with its trees and flower beds, at the top of North Road.

**D.C.D.P.**

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<i>IN THE STEPS OF THE MASTERS: DURHAM IN PAINTINGS</i> Douglas Pocock 2010. 44 pages 35 colour illustrations	4.00	5.00		
<i>THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST ARCHITECTURAL AWARDS 1990-2009.</i> Timothy Clark (editor) 2010. 64 pages 52 colour illustrations 4 maps	4.00	5.00		
<i>THE UNMAKING OF DURHAM'S HISTORIC MARKET PLACE</i> Douglas Pocock 2010. 24 pages 14 colour illustrations	3.00	3.50		
<i>THE FUTURES OF DURHAM</i> Douglas Pocock 2006. 27 pages 17 black-on-white illustrations	1.70	2.50		
<i>DURHAM CATHEDRAL: AN ARCHITECTURAL APPRECIATION</i> Douglas Pocock (editor) 2014 84 pages 60 Colour and black-on-white illustrations Essays by: Douglas Pocock Malcolm Thurlby David Park Ian Curry	5.50	7.50		
<i>IGNATIUS BONOMI OF DURHAM : ARCHITECT</i> June Crosby 1987. Monograph. 104 pages Black-on-white illustrations.	2.50	3.50		
	TOTAL carried forward			£

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