

CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

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REDHILLS' LECTURE

Our Spring lecture is '**Redhills: History and Future**' given by **Ross Forbes**, who is Programme Director of the Durham Miners' Association. The lecture will be given in the Miners' Hall at **Redhills on Saturday 9th March at 2p.m.** (Note that both time and venue differ from past lectures.)

The Miners' Hall was built in 1915 to house the Pitman's Parliament, when Durham was the country's largest coalfield employing some 200,000 miners. The impressive Edwardian baroque building has recently been listed by Historic England in the country's top one hundred most irreplaceable buildings. Our forthcoming meeting will provide an opportunity to explore the interior of the remarkable building and to learn of its history, also of its ambitious plans for the future, with a £5M appeal with the aim of making it a centre for education, heritage and culture. (An early feature of the Appeal is the sponsoring of a seat in the Council Chamber, each seat marked by a small engraved token of the sponsor. The Trust has already agreed to sponsor one such.)

ARCHITECTURAL AWARD OF THE YEAR

Through the years the Trust award has been given to a variety of structures - large and small, new-build and restorations. Hitherto the last-named category had to include external treatment, but this year Trustees waived this criterion in deference to the significance of a building in the story of Durham which had undergone remarkable internal transformation. Old Shire Hall had stood empty since the University vacated the building in 2012, and a building without a use has no future. Fortunately, the International Hotel Group saw the potential of converting a structure built for administration into **Hotel Indigo**.



Dining room in former council chamber, Hotel Indigo

As a fiery redbrick Victorian extravaganza amid Georgian neighbours, its external appearance remains as incongruous as ever, but the internal interior re-design, part preservation, part conversion, is highly imaginative.. Preservation includes the highly glazed decorated tiles on walls and ceiling, staircases of white Sicilian and black Frosterley marbles, as well as much stained glass. The undoubted highlights of the conversion are the oval former council chamber (now a restaurant) which is entered through a hexagonal rotunda (now a cocktail bar). The additional lighting fixtures and exploiting of a circular theme have resulted in two quite special architectural spaces.

Overnight visitors will never stay in a more place-related hotel, for bedrooms are heavily themed through artefacts, furniture and furnishings, leaving no doubt that this is a city with a venerable cathedral and long-established university.

It is unfortunate that the central main entrance, an imposing flight of steps with wrought iron grille, is no longer the main entry - and hence, heightened anticipation - for the hotel reception. Those with mobility problems would clearly find the steps difficult, quite apart from carriage of luggage for able guests. The hotel reception is at pavement level at the north end of the building, an entry which introduces arrivals to the adjacent coffee bar.

The architects responsible for the transformation are Howarth Litchfield of Durham, with Neil Turner being the overall director of the project and Kathryn Mason the interior designer.. The plaque for the Award will be presented at our meeting at Redhills.

OTHER NEW ARCHITECTURE 2018



Duresme Court PBSA

Two purpose-built student accommodation blocks (PBSAs) were completed during the year. On the former Berendson site at Neville’s Cross there emerged a 277- bed unit, Duresme Court, revealing its Norman scholarship, after the emerging PBSA at the Gates had taken Dunholm, the Anglo-Saxon version of Durham. Three of its six terraced blocks front the curve from the Victorian terrace at the top of Neville's Cross Bank to the A167 in an inflated, acceptable interpretation of the neighbouring property. Sections of ‘hit and miss’ brickwork add interest to the elevations, but large ventilation towers hardly replicate chimneys, while prominent angular dormers look equally overdrawn. While the overall result may be satisfactory - award-winning according to its self accolade -

queries relate to it from a planning point of view, for, at this extremely busy cross roads, students find themselves on the ‘wrong’ side of the highway for the cycle track and university, while adding to children and parents on the school run.

Rushford Court, with accommodation for 363 students, is the second PBSA, built on the site of the former County Hospital. The site is steeply sloping from a high platform, on which the 1850 hospital was built. The original building, a non-designated heritage asset, has been sensitively restored after removal of later appendages, but the three new accommodation blocks, rising to five and six storeys, stand fortress-like on the perimeter low ground. The light-coloured brickwork and cladding of the towers fortunately lessens to a degree their prominence. English Heritage were not the only ones to consider the “overall impact [to be] harmful”. For once the Authority’s planning committee agreed and refused the recommendation for approval. Unfortunately, at the subsequent appeal hearing the Authority presented a weak defence, and the stand was lost.



Rushford Court PBSA.

On the other side of the city another sizeable project, part restoration, part new build, is that associated with 29-33 Church Street. The work at the rear was in fact as much rescue as restoration, and well done. Less convincing is the development lining the path to Kingsgate Bridge. It begins with a two storey gable roof structure, initially render, then brick, which is residence for students, then changes to a stone-faced, flat-roofed, block intended to be a coffee outlet. The latter’s up-lighting illumination does not improve its attraction by night.

Finally, the bridgeheads of both medieval crossings have received prominent face-lifts. That on Elvet Bridge, on the premises last occupied by Van Mildert’s, the opportunity to improve on the 1960’s windows has been missed by inserting a set of eight-light windows having exaggerated verticality which juliet balconies are unable to conceal.

he public house at the landward side of Framwellgate Bridge has had its former messy roof garden given order with a low permanent structure. It is a pity that its lightweight aluminium retractable roof is light-coloured and it is to be hoped that the strength of light emanating across the river towards the World Heritage Site will be restrained. (And what statement is being made in the re-naming of the premises?)

COUNTY PLAN

The County Durham Plan: *Pre-Submission Draft* was published in late January and is open to consultation until 8th March. Trustees, spear-headed by its sub-group, are framing a response to the document (including dozens of its supporting evidence papers).. In summary, the County's overall approach is similar to the last, withdrawn, Plan in that a disproportionate amount of the housing and industrial development is concentrated on Durham, deletions are again made to the Green Belt and two relief roads are retained. Such an approach is at the expense of the rest of the county.

Members' attention is drawn to some specific policies. Thus Aykley Heads (Policy 3: 4,000 jobs - the published 6,000 is for the next Plan! - if not fanciful, then excessive in relation to the promotion of other sites); housing allocations (Policy 5: Green Belt sites at Sniperley and Sherburn constitute over 90% of the City's allocation, despite the Green Belt policy (20) promising "strongest possible protection"); the University and student accommodation (Policy 16: the nettle of spreading studentification has still not been fully grasped, for controls on the spread of HMOs takes no account of the proximity of PBSAs, neither is there anything on extensions to existing HMOs); the two relief roads (Policy 23: a not inconsiderable hurdle for the Authority to overcome is the comment of the Inspector at the last EiP, who concluded in his Report that "the proposed Western and Northern Relief Roads are not justified, deliverable or environmentally sound". Housing at Sniperley is stated to be reliant on the Western Relief road, for which it must provide "significant funding").

Members are urged to read the document (online or at public libraries) and to submit comments, one policy at a time, either to cdpconsultation@durham.gov.uk or in writing to Freepost Spatial Policy, County Hall, Durham. The closing date is 8th March. Any comments which you may have submitted at earlier stages of the Plan process now count for nothing, **but your comments to this consultation will be placed before an independent Inspector. It is imperative, therefore, that s/he is able to gauge the depth of feelings on the proposed policies.**

ABOUT TOWN

An unexpected bonus for shoppers in the **Prince Bishops** for the last three months has been the conversion of an empty retail unit into a temporary art gallery. There is no entry fee, no attendant, simply some two dozen eye-catching coloured photographs of the city.

A more permanent fixture adding interest to the townscape is the **sculpture of a heron** in early flight, originally displayed in the 2017 Lumiere. It makes a dramatic statement when illuminated at night-time, especially when viewed from the Milburngate bank. On the opposite bank, especially in the cool light of day, one has to query the chosen site - adjacent to the road (Freeman's Place) and not further into the river, on the strip of land between the race feeding the Archimedes Screw and the river proper. Again, a spot of dark paint on the stainless steel fixing bracket might lessen the suggestion of any restraint to the bird's flight.

Further along Freeman's Place is the site of the proposed **new County Hall**. The incomprehensible nature of the application was given in the last Bulletin. As we go to press no fewer than 28 amended documents have been deposited; critically, however, the site remains the same. Meanwhile, a reply to a Trustees' freedom of information request revealed that the car and coach park site currently yields £400K profit a year, whereas the replacement multi-storey park will incur an annual loss.

Finally, there would appear to be some recent inconsistency in the Authority's planning world. Thus, it gave itself permission for a giant advertising hoarding (3 x 5 metres, to tell of the future Aykley Head) on the roundabout by County Hall, but refused a slightly smaller one at the Milburngate roundabout (for the Milburngate development). Again, at the same time as advising against a single hanging banner for the Covered Market, it submitted its own application for three such banners for the Town Hall, (Historic England stepped in at this point.)

TRUST'S NEW CHAIRMAN, JOHN LOWE, WRITES

Roger Cornwell decided to stand down as long-term chairman of the Trust when he was elected to the new City of Durham Parish Council in May 2018. At the meeting in June I was invited to succeed him, but felt reluctant to do so as I was a relatively new Trustee. However, after various discussions I agreed to accept the role, my one condition being that Trustees also appoint a Vice-Chairman to support me. I was delighted when Roger agreed to take on this role.

I have since thought hard about what I have taken on and identified a number of priorities. My first was to assure myself that the Trust was on a sound financial footing, and the Trust's treasurer, Malcolm Reed, assured me on that point. It was also clear that we needed to ensure that our membership records were accurate. Paul Beard, the membership secretary, and Roger have been dealing with that. Douglas Pocock's decision to retire as honorary secretary also presented a significant challenge, and there is a notice regarding this below.

I was aware that a revised version of the County Plan was on the horizon, and I made sure that our Plan sub-group was in a position to deal with that. I also wanted to make sure we developed a good working relationship with the new Parish Council. A degree of overlap in membership has helped with that; most recently I made an invited presentation to the Parish Council on the Trust's views about the new County Durham Plan.

In addition to all the above rather obvious points, my main concern was to raise the profile of the Trust by developing partnerships with other related bodies in the area. We already have a degree of involvement with the World Heritage Site, Bow Trust of the Durham Heritage Museum, CPRE and Civic Trust for the North-East. These are all relationships I would wish to strengthen

In addition to the above, the project to restore the Miners' Hall at Redhills presented itself as a new opportunity. Trustees have agreed to support the project, and we shall be sponsoring one of the tokens to be attached to seats in the 'Pitman's Parliament', with a special Trust inscription. A very obvious sign of our support for the project is the invitation to hold our next open meeting at Redhills.

I am constantly surprised how much work is involved in my new role, but I have been supported by the Trustees and look forward to getting to know more members and working with you all to ensure a productive future for the Trust.

SITUATION VACANT

Douglas Pocock has announced his intention to retire after the AGM in May. This faces the Trust with the impossible task of replacing the irreplaceable. However that is the task facing us and this is an appeal to all members of the Trust to consider whether you could take on this role. or at least some aspects of it. Let me explain.

Douglas has provided me with a list of duties to be performed, also the mechanics of how to do them. (These include arranging meetings, correspondence, minute checking of monthly Trustees' meetings, preparing the twice-yearly Bulletins and Annual Report, filing annual returns to Companies House and Charity Commission, dealing with publications, welcoming new members and, not least, responding on behalf of Trustees to planning applications.)

Someone has already volunteered to take on responsibility for dealing with publications. It is possible that others might come forward to take on other aspects of the work so that it does not fall on to one set of shoulders. If you think you could possibly help with any of these, please contact me at chair@durhamcity.org or telephone 0191 386 2595 to discuss the possibilities. It is imperative that the Trust is in a position at the AGM to present a candidate whom members can approve as the new Honorary Secretary and whose role will be to co-ordinate all the required responsibilities and be the voice of the Trust in responding to planning applications

John Lowe, Chairman