

# CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

## BULLETIN

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### TRUST LECTURE

**Our spring lecture will be given by *Dave Wafer, Acting Head of Highways Management Services for Durham County Council, on 'The Challenge of Durham's Traffic Problems'* on Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> March, 2.15pm, Elvet Riverside 1, room 141.**

In December the County Authority announced it was no longer considering a Northern (or Inner) Relief Road or, indeed, a Northern Bypass. Trustees therefore released Steer Davies Gleave from their standby position, ready to analyse on the Trust's behalf the County business plan for the former project.

Removal of the threat of the Northern Relief Road, however, still leaves serious questions to be answered concerning traffic movements in and around the City. There is a range of possibilities, from better management schemes and improved cycle tracks to more radical considerations of extended Congestion Zone charging, more Park and Ride sites and charging for workplace parking. These topics, together with the predicted effects on movements on the abandoned road schemes will be covered in the lecture.

The County's findings, and thoughts for the future, were recently outlined by Mr Wafer to a group of Trustees. Their immediate reaction was to ask whether he would be willing to share the material with our members. Happily, Mr Wafer readily agreed. Hence our lecture on what is undeniably an important and - thus far - seemingly intractable problem

The lecture will follow immediately after presentation of the Trust's Architectural Award for 2008.

### TRUST'S ARCHITECTURAL AWARD OF THE YEAR

The worthy winner of the Trust's Architectural Award for 2008 is **Freeman's Quay Leisure Centre**. It is an elegantly distinctive building, the genius of which is best appreciated from the west, from Freeman's Place. From here the defining feature of its broad, sloping roof

can be seen over-riding the sweeping curve of the wall enclosing the pool. The series of steel beams overshooting the wall come to rest on a line of tapering and gently bevelled concrete columns, a feature suggestive of monumentalism, but on a human scale. The columns blend naturally with a parallel row of sycamore trees along Freeman's Place.



Leisure Centre from Freeman's Place  
(Photo: D. Pocock)

Beneath the pergola-like structure formed by the beams, the concrete wall changes progressively to glazing as it swings round towards the entrance. Here, the tinted glass, which blends with the colour of the overhanging beams, complements the shining Lignum panelling. Inserted in the middle of the latter is a section of lighter, buff-coloured panelling, plus window, angled markedly out of the horizontal – a humorous touch appropriate for a building devoted to enjoyment or fun. Above, a gentle 'wave'



Leisure Centre from the north  
(Photo: G. Pocock)

in the roof gable might be seen to echo that of the pool. (It certainly contrasts with the rectilinearity of Walkergate.)

The full-length window, with etching, into the pool is a spectacular feature of the view from the north or Sixth Form College playing field. From here also the ‘fall’ in roof level can be fully appreciated. Towards the rear the enclosing wall appears to be bursting out of its concrete shell at first-floor level. The projecting panels may be an architectural device; they certainly reflect the compact site into which it had to fit. (Here, sports hall, fitness centre and dance studio had to be raised to the first floor.)

Inside, an immediate sense of openness facilitates a grasp of layout or orientation. There is high degree of natural lighting, pastel colour scheme, clean lines and high quality of finish. Notable among the technical installations is the floating floor of the main pool, which makes it suitable for a variety of water sports.

The Centre is the initiative of the Local Authority. Appropriate parameters were set in its Design Brief, and the promise of the selected architects’ draft - recognised by Trustees at an early stage of consultation – has been amply fulfilled. The result is a distinctive addition to the architecture of Durham; in contextual terms the structure halts and ‘civilises’ the northern advance of Walkergate.

The architects are from the William Saunders Partnership in Nottingham, under the guidance of concept designer Andrew Bottomley and Senior Partner, Chris Houldsworth. The contractor was Morgan Ashurst.



Radisson Hotel from Pennyferry Bridge  
(Photo: G. Pocock)

The Radisson Hotel on Framwellgate Waterside is another notable addition to the City’s architecture, constituting a successful contextual, rather than landmark, building. For a large structure – 210-bed hotel, with conference centre and fitness suite – its scale and massing are respectfully compact and restrained.

From a central hinge point two solid wings possess well-ordered lines and simple detailing. The large hinge point itself, however, is the weakest part of the design. A glazed frontage in such a position is an accepta-

ble concept, but here the glazing bars are too thin, so that from a distance they evoke the 1950s, while the prominent projecting vertical feature rising through all floors is, strangely, positioned to one side. At closer quarters, none of the three identical, modestly-proportioned glass doors is the immediately obvious entrance. (Hotel guests were observed attempting to enter the locked doors.)

Inside, the entire height of the front glazing, accompanied by an atrium towards the rear, creates a voluminous space in which seasoned travellers will feel at ease. An occasional wall-hanging, mural or other depiction of Durham might be an appropriate addition in order to anchor such international space more specifically in our City.

The Hotel was designed by Red Box of Newcastle, with Terry Greenwell as the lead architect. The contractor was Sir Robert McAlpine.

## DESIGN BRIEF FOR ICE RINK SITE

The Design Brief for the site of the former Ice Rink was produced in October. Its 72 pages make it by far the longest such document for any key site in the City. No applicant will be able to plead ignorance of the guiding principles and constraints, even though pictures of other cities – much larger and very different – are surely of questionable value. One particular reference to the Walkergate scheme caught the eye, given Trustees persistent urging that the latter complex should ‘cascade’ towards the river:-

“one practical obstacle to be tackled is the significant fall in ground level between the MillenniumPlace/Walkergate developments and the ice rink site. This has resulted in a substantial blank wall being presented to the Ice rink site.”

## SIGNAGE

Several past Bulletins have drawn attention to the plethora and variety of roadside signs which are of questionable value and which certainly do not enhance the environment. In the last edition we cited for a second time the excessive number of yellow signs advertising housing developments. Within a month of the appearance of the Bulletin, it was satisfying to witness the County Authority’s blitz in which every yellow sign was removed.

At the very time that the signs were being removed, the same Authority erected a new directional sign of its own. Positioned in Sutton Street, and pointing along Hawthorn Terrace, it read, ‘Durham City Council Offices.’ At any time during the past 34 years the sign might have been helpful. Unfortunately, the Council Offices were closed last April and have since been subject to a planning application (for housing). The irrelevance – and lateness - of the sign was immediately pointed out to County Hall, but at the time of going to press the unwary are still being sent on a wild goose chase.



Late, misleading County Highways sign, Sutton Street  
(Photo: D. Pocock)

## RETAILING IN DURHAM

At our October meeting Colin Wilkes spoke on 'Durham as a Retail Centre.' Such was the reception from the filled lecture theatre, that Trustees asked, and the speaker kindly agreed, for a precis to appear in this Bulletin. The value of his comments which follow is enhanced by the fact that its author is not an outside consultant, but managing director of Durham Markets Company, vice-chair of the Chamber of Trade and co-founder and director of Durham City Forum. He thus speaks from 'within.'--

"The Indoor Market, open for six days a week and housing 50 stalls, is the largest provider of City Centre space for independent retailers; the Company also provides outdoor facilities for some 30 traders on a Saturday, as well a monthly farmers' market.

A decline in the former thriving City Centre began soon after the A690 Leazes Road cut through the heart of the City in the late 1960s. Claypath never recovered from being severed, being perceived as too remote; North Road similarly declined (even Waitrose has left, citing lack of trade); Elvet is still seen as tertiary shopping.

### Some reasons for the current predicament of the City Centre:

1. Competition, not just from large outside centres such as Metro Centre and Newcastle, but from Durham's own extensive edge-of-town centres at Arnison/Mercia and Dragonville (with the emerging former Mono Containers site). Crucial here has been how these centres were initially granted A1 use for

bulky goods retailing, but have been allowed to add A1 general retailing. This move has adversely affected trade in the City Centre.

2. Car parks are seen as too expensive; park and ride is not conducive to carrying back full loads; edge-of-town centres offer free parking.
3. Rents and rates. As local traders have retired, properties have been snapped up by investors, forcing up the price of property and rents to ludicrous proportions. Moreover, rent reviews find comparisons set by national businesses able to pay the increased rents. No recognition is given to the extra burden of having to upkeep a listed building. (Edge-of-town units are simple, rectangular boxes, easy to maintain.)
4. Perceptions. Perception still persists among many that motorists must pay a £2 toll to enter Durham. The range of quality shops is low. Retailing is sacrificed to heritage and conservation (Some officers on the City Council seem to want to see Durham remain a museum).
5. Tourism. Encouraging high-spending independent travellers, while discouraging group coach travel, is misconceived. Both kinds are needed.
6. The university. Its ongoing and projected migration to Mountjoy will mean a loss of trade from teaching and support staff who currently use the lunch hour for shopping.
7. Growth in use of the internet.
8. External consultants. A fortune has been spent on consultants, who originate from outside Durham and know very little about the City, but who tell us what they think is wrong. Durham does not conform to national retail models.

## The Future: Some Rays of Sunshine

Durham needs the Market and the Market needs the support of the people of Durham. There is still some innate snobbery about shopping in a market, yet at Durham we stock some of the finest quality comparison goods as well as a huge range of foodstuffs from 13 food-related stalls.

It is hoped that tourist visitor spending will increase now that Durham is on the itinerary of cruise ships docking in the Tyne and that highlights off the peninsula are being publicised. (The recent removal of £5 parking fee for coaches is welcome.)

A leisure visitor attraction for the Claypath area would benefit the City as a whole. An Events Team, set up by 20/20 Vision and holding high promise of bringing more people into the City for some spectacular happenings, is a welcome complement to the seasonal events put on by the Markets Company and City Forum.

"At the end of the day we need to make a visit to Durham, whether it's for shopping, work or leisure, an experience, something you can't find in the anonymous sterile atmospheres of shopping centres, somewhere where children can be entertained whilst parents shop. But overall an experience laced with plenty of reasons to come into the City Centre.

- COLIN WILKES (18th October 2008) "

## CHRISTMAS CARD

Our 2008 card was extremely popular, in fact stocks are exhausted. Thank you for your support. Now, early though it is, Trustees wonder whether any member has a suggestion for this year's card. (A decision is usually made by the end of April.) Please contact any Trustee with your idea!

## ALINGTON HOUSE COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

Enclosed with this Bulletin is an information sheet containing a membership form for Alington House Community Association. Dean Cyril Alington was prime mover in the formation of the Trust, his wife Hester played a similar role in setting up the centre which now bears their name. Our Trust therefore has a special relationship to the building where we hold our monthly business meeting.

Members will have read recently of concerns over the Centre's future, but the charity's new management team is currently taking a realistic approach to what needs to be done, and considers that in the medium term the future appears to be more certain than was originally broadcast. One way of encouraging an assured long-term future would

be to increase the membership base of the Association. Please consider the possibility of joining.

## FOR YOUR DIARY

The AGM of the Trust has been arranged for Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> May. Please do reserve the slot!

**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 subscription and any donations to be reclaimed by the Trust.

Signed..... Date .....

### Current annual membership subscriptions:

#### Please Tick

Please tick 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 .....