

# CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

## BULLETIN

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### THE AUTUMN TALK: “CROOK HALL GARDENS & THE DURHAM CITY GREEN CORRIDOR”

**Martin Roberts** is unavailable to give his annual autumn talk this year, due to a knee operation. We wish him a fast recovery and look forward to welcoming him back in the spring.

One of the most exciting events of 2022 was the reopening under the **National Trust of Crook Hall Gardens**, with ambitions to make them a gateway into a green corridor north of the City, even up to Finchale Priory and including the NT-owned Moorhouse Wood. We are delighted to be able to welcome **Eric Wilton** (regional General Manager), **Helen Moir** (Project Manager), and **Laura McIntyre-Brown** (Durham City Green Corridor Project Manager) for a presentation, open to all, entitled “**Crook Hall Gardens & The Durham City Green Corridor**”. This will take place on **Tuesday 6 December at 7 pm in room 201 of the Elvet Riverside building, New Elvet** (*nb use the more southerly of the two entrances to Elvet Riverside*). Alternatively, you can watch via zoom by emailing [zoom@durhamcity.org](mailto:zoom@durhamcity.org) a day or so before the event to request the link.



### SNIPERLEY DRAMAS

The approved County Plan allocates 1,700 houses to be built as a “sustainable urban expansion” at Sniperley Park on former green belt land west of the A167. Strict conditions include comprehensive masterplanning. The Trust had earlier opposed the loss to the green belt, but accepts this now as an opportunity for a new community to be built here to the highest standards of design in housing, infrastructure, sustainable transport and energy use. After consultation, Durham County Council approved a masterplan in June, a document which trustees broadly support.



Sniperley Park, looking south-east towards New College Durham

However, last year two developers, Bellway Homes Ltd and County Durham Land LLP, put in two complementary applications for 1,920 houses in total at Sniperley. This sidestepped the fact that the Council was developing its own masterplan, and offered no real equivalent in their own plans. Numerous other shortcomings against the County Plan were pointed out by Council Officers earlier this year. However, both developers chose not to work with them on due revisions to their applications. Instead, they jumped into making an appeal to Central Government in August, complaining of the Council’s delay in not yet formally deciding their case. In effect, this would have meant the national Planning Inspectorate would decide the applications, measured against the Council’s submitted evidence for its being “minded to refuse” them, as its Planning Committee decided on 6 September. The public inquiry would have opened on 16 January, with the Trust and local allies supporting the County Council.

However, on 3 November trustees found themselves welcoming the sudden news that both developers had withdrawn from the process, after the Inspector had refused a belated attempt to shoehorn in changes to the

applications after the appeals had been submitted.

The threat of two substandard planning schemes for Sniperley seems to have receded for now. However, the consultant's letter on behalf of County Durham Land LLP states that "it is our intention now to resubmit the planning application with the amendments before the end of the year".

Trustees applaud the Council's stand on this matter and urge that the letter of the County Plan continue to be honoured when considering any renewed applications. It is already clear what trustees and local people do not want for Sniperley, namely any more streets like that imaged here, only recently built at Aykley Heads—bare of front gardens, with minimal greenery, crudely designed, and more like an inhabited car park than a desirable living space.



## ARUP'S POLICE RADIO MAST

Members may have seen an article in the *Northern Echo* recently on the controversy over an application from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) finally to dispose of the sculptural "space age design" precast concrete radio mast that rose over Aykley Heads next to the county police headquarters from 1968 till recently. The 143-metre-tall mast was designed by the company *Ove Arup and Partners* founded by renowned architectural engineer **Ove Arup**, known locally for Kingsgate Bridge and internationally for the Sydney Opera House. This elegant example of brutalist architecture has Grade II-Listed protection. Its removal in 2017 was to enable the building of 18 additional new houses on the site after the new Police HQ was built nearby. It was a condition of planning permission that the mast be



dismantled carefully so as to be relocated adjacent to the new HQ, and the designers gave detailed advice on both its dismantling and its reconstruction. However, the mast has since lain exposed in the long grass outside the new HQ, looking like a stranded sea-monster. This breach of the planning conditions led to a Council enforcement order in June 2020, requiring re-erection of the mast. It is now the subject of a proposed "demolition", asserting that it was irreparably damaged during dismantling, shows significant corrosion and that the cost of repair or proper storage would overstrain police resources.

Trustees have objected strongly to the threatened loss of a unique local monument. The OPCC received a considerable sum for the development of the original site of the mast, over £900,000 we understand, and it should honour the commitment that some of this would be used to relocate the mast. Trustees dispute the Council's position that the new planning application for its disposal could rightly override a standing enforcement order for its re-erection.

It has not been possible to find an image of the original mast to copy in this bulletin, despite extended efforts. However, archive film shows the mast being erected in 1968, <https://bit.ly/3gM8BaK>, and there are further images of its dismantling in 2017, <https://bit.ly/3N9YnwO>. Our thanks to Roger Cornwell for alerting us to both of these.

There is another disconcerting issue. Two supplementary planning applications from the OPCC were made in 2016 (DRC/16/00259 and DRC/16/00344). The first seeks permission for an approved plan for dismantling the mast and the second for its relocation. Both are still listed on the Council's planning site as "Pending Consideration" and the online file of the second application is devoid of relevant documents. Can this really mean that the dismantling of the mast in 2017 broke the law?

The Trust's former Honorary Secretary, Dr Douglas Pocock, has been in close touch with *Ove Arup and Partners* in Newcastle. They wrote to him in October: "Having reviewed the mast condition report as the

original designers, there is nothing contained in it that cannot be locally repaired to allow re-construction as required and proposed by the original planning submission.” If relocation at Aykley Heads is not possible, might Beamish Museum be considered for this iconic piece of mid-20th century ‘brutalist’ design? Any final decision on these issues is unlikely to have been made by the time this bulletin goes out, but the CDT website may have further news. Should demolition be approved, “Historic England” plan to appeal the case to the Secretary of State.

Finally, it is striking that the application to demolish Arup’s mast comes at the same time as another from the *County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust* to demolish Grade II-Listed **Dryburn House** (1824), as part of a scheme to extend A & E facilities at the University Hospital of North Durham. These are plans which the Trust has argued could well proceed without the demolition of the listed building attached to the current hospital. Dryburn House is a rare surviving mine-owner’s home from the nineteenth century, associated with **William Lloyd Wharton**, creator of Wharton Park, founder of the Durham Regatta. “Historic England” decided not to raise an objection in this case. However, the Trust did so. It is depressing that two public bodies, the local police and health services, seem so indifferent to the City’s unique heritage.



## TRUST BUSINESS

Trustees unanimously reelected **John Lowe** in October to serve as chair for another year. Our thanks to him.

**MINUTES of the 80th Annual General Meeting of the Trust** in the Assembly Rooms Theatre, North Bailey on Saturday 1 October 2022 commencing at 14.00. The minutes were approved by the trustees on 18 October.

At the start of the meeting the Trust’s Architectural Award for 2020/21 was presented to Maya Polenz from Durham Cathedral in recognition of the Cathedral’s superb new glazed lobbies.

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE. The Chair (John Lowe) welcomed attendees (in person and via Zoom) to the Trust’s 2022 AGM in the Assembly Rooms Theatre and pointed out the emergency exits. Apologies were received from Paul Beard, Roberta Blackman-Woods, Roger Cornwell, Kevin Cummings, Francis Pritchard, Martin Roberts, Lionel Stout, Angela Tracy and Mr Woolstenholmes.
2. MINUTES OF THE 79th AGM (27 October 2021). The Minutes, already approved by Trustees, were noted.
3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES. There were no matters arising. The Chair thanked Jan Hutchinson for recording the Trust’s Minutes and other documents over the last year.
4. REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES AND PRESENTATION OF ACCOUNTS OF THE TRUST for the period ended 7 April 2022: presented by the Honorary Treasurer. Dr Malcolm Reed Malcolm, the Trust’s Treasurer since 2015, highlighted items from the Trust’s accounts (detailed in the Annual Review). There was a slight loss as there were more in-person meetings over the period, but core membership has remained constant. The end of year balance was £14.3k, so there are sufficient reserves. The 2021-22 Annual Report and Accounts, already approved by Trustees and independently examined, were noted. Malcolm reported that Francis Pritchard has kindly offered to take on the role of Honorary Treasurer now, in addition to his role as Honorary Secretary, so he is very confident that the accounts are in good hands going forward. At the last AGM, Members agreed to remit the appointment of Examiner to Trustees, so Francis will recommend an Examiner to the Trustees. Malcolm thanked everyone for their support during his enjoyable years as Treasurer. The Chair thanked Malcolm for his service, both on managing the accounts and his unrivalled expertise on transport issues.
5. APPOINTMENT OF TRUSTEES. The Chair explained that CIO rules state that one third of Trustees must retire each year but they are eligible for re election. Dr Malcolm Reed and Dr Lucy Szablewska are retiring and not standing again. The Chair thanked Lucy for her sterling work on local issues and for being Minutes Secretary from 2014- 2019. The other two retiring Trustees, Roger Cornwell and Dr Adrian Green, were proposed and re- elected by consensus. The Chair thanked them for their continued service. Lucy proposed Chris Hugill - a retired solicitor who has lived in Durham for 40 years - to become a new Trustee. Chris was elected by consensus. The Chair urged any other Members who were interested in becoming a Trustee to get in touch.
6. APPOINTMENT OF THE HONORARY OFFICERS OF THE TRUST. Proposed by the Chair, and

carried by acclaim, Francis Pritchard was elected in absentia as both Honorary Secretary and Honorary Treasurer. The Chair thanked him. As confirmed at Item 4, Francis will propose the appointment of an Examiner to Trustees.

7. HONORARY SECRETARY'S REPORT. In the Honorary Secretary's absence, the Chair reported that membership numbers are reasonably steady, but we would welcome more recruits, so he urged Members to nudge their acquaintances.

8. CHAIR'S REMARKS. It has been an auspicious year for the Trust on our 80th anniversary, marking the remarkable foundation of the City of Durham Preservation Society in 1942, in the midst of war – just imagine a group of citizens in Kyiv doing the same today! Around that time Thomas Sharp must have started writing his *Cathedral City* (published 1944). The exceptionally good Annual Review, produced by Trustee Prof. Tim Clark, has details of the Trust's work over the last year and how we are marking the anniversary, which includes two commemorative paintings of Crook Hall (by Member Angela Tracy), a new bench in the Botanic Gardens, and 'asset of the month' posts on our website (by Trustee Sue Childs). Trust publications and cards are available to purchase after the meeting. The Trust has sponsored two local guides: *Coal Stories* (co-authored by Trustee Dr Adrian Green) and the Parish Council's Durham Seven Hills Trail (pioneered by Member David Miller). A major event planned is the WHS Conference 'Perspectives on Durham's World Heritage Site' on 5 November at the Pemberton Rooms on Palace Green – final details for this will be shared electronically. On the actual anniversary, 9 November, we are holding an informal reception in St Nics church, from 19.00 to 21.00, that all Members are invited to attend. We are keen to develop partnerships and now have good working relationships with the National Trust at Crook Hall, Redhills CIO and organisations working to improve the riverbanks including the Wear Rivers Trust. The issue that preoccupies us most at the moment is preparing for the public inquiry regarding the major housing developments at Sniperley Park, with a Statement of Case required by Monday and a Case Management Conference next Thursday. The Chair thanked John Ashby and Matthew Phillips for drafting the Statement of Case regarding the appeals. The inquiry starts on 16 January - we will keep Members informed on proceedings. All these outreach activities raise the profile of the Trust and aim to engage as many people as possible to protect and enhance our natural and historic heritage. I was struck by Thomas Sharp's words on the back cover of *Cathedral City* that planning issues should be the concern of everyone: "The thing we all have to realise is that planning in a democracy must either be something in the nature of a national pursuit, or nothing at all. For in a democracy government and local authorities can make the really important moves only under the pressure of public opinion." So, we hope you will all continue to support Trustees in our efforts to protect our city.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS. No other business. The Chair thanked all attendees and drew the AGM business to a close at 14.40. After the formal agenda, Prof. John Pendlebury from Newcastle University presented an illustrated talk on Thomas Sharp, town planner and author of *Cathedral City – A Plan for Durham*. The talk 'Thomas Sharp: Urbanist, Modernist, Preservationist, Planner .... and a Durham lad' was very well received with a number of questions from Members. A vote of thanks was given by Dr Adrian Green, who also invited all attendees to a reception in Durham Museum to view the exhibition: 'How Historic Durham Survived the 20th Century', which includes Thomas Sharp's plaster model of his vision for the city.

## TRUST PUBLICATIONS AND GREETINGS CARDS

With Christmas approaching it seems a good time to remind members that the Trust offers a range of publications about the City and that some could make good gifts, such as Douglas Pocock's collection of poetry about Durham, *Durham in Poetry*, £4.50 or £3.50 for members, or his *In the Steps of the Masters: Durham in Paintings*, £5.00/£4.00

New for this anniversary year are **Angela Tracey's** cards depicting Crook Hall. They are both greetings cards (£0.60) and a postcard as shown here, available in two sizes (£0.30 and £0.50).

We still have a stock of various cards depicting historic images of the City, provided with envelopes. Most designs are left blank for your own message, but one has a printed greeting for Christmas and the New Year.

A full list of publications and cards appears on the website. <https://durhamcity.org/publications/online-shop/>



*The Trustees*