



CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

Annual Review

2023-24



CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

The Trust was founded in 1942. On 8 April 2021 it became a “Charitable Incorporated Organisation”, remaining registered as charity no. 502132

Founder:

The Very Rev'd Cyril A Alington
Dean of Durham 1933-51

Patrons:

Roberta Blackman-Woods
Member of Parliament 2005-19

Bill Bryson
Chancellor of the University 2005-11

The Very Rev'd Michael Sadgrove
Dean of Durham 2003-15

Trustees:

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Chair

Sue Childs
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Francis Pritchard
Hon. Secretary & Treasurer

John Ashby

Tim Clark

Roger Cornwell

Adrian Green

Richard Hird

Chris Hugill

Michael Hurlow

Matthew Phillips

SNIPERLEY PARK INQUIRY

We set out the background to this public inquiry in *Bulletin 98*. Sniperley Park is currently a large area of farmland and playing fields on the north-western edge of Durham City, near the new fire station along the road to Lanchester. The *County Durham Plan* (CDP) adopted in 2020 removed the land from the Green Belt and designated it for the development of up to 1,700 houses in what was described as a “sustainable urban extension”.

Such a significant development was almost bound to be controversial and was further complicated by the fact that two developers were involved who had their own priorities, but also needed to coordinate their work so that the construction of public facilities and infrastructure kept pace with the building and occupation of the homes. The root of the County Council’s concerns was that they lacked confidence that the development as a whole could be delivered unless the two developers could guarantee their joint working, or at least ensure that one would complete the works if the other defaulted. We have seen great difficulties caused in the Milburngate development where two major construction firms have become insolvent and the vast project is suspended.

Policy 5 of the CDP recognised the need for a comprehensive master plan to coordinate the development and contained very specific requirements. These were not always to the developers’ liking, so that was another area for dispute between the developers and the Council. Complex negotiations dragged on as the County Council planners tried to negotiate for full compliance with all of the requirements in the County Plan. and so, perhaps not surprisingly, the developers appealed to the Planning Inspectorate that the Council was taking longer than the statutory limit to determine the application and so the public inquiry was initiated.

Mrs H Hockenhill was the inspector appointed and it will be a complex matter for her to judge. There are four planning applications with their associated appeals involved in the inquiry. It started on 30th January and lasted 15 sitting days. It was held at the Chester-le-Street county cricket ground and the Trust was represented there throughout. It was a public inquiry and anyone is entitled to attend, but hardly anyone else bothered. Trust member John Pacey, Chair of the Western Relief Road Action Group, was one other faithful attendee.

The developers were represented by experienced barristers backed up by expert witnesses, whereas the Council was represented by middle-ranking officers who sometimes had impossible positions to defend. The clearest example was that the Council insisted that the new primary school should be provided before any of

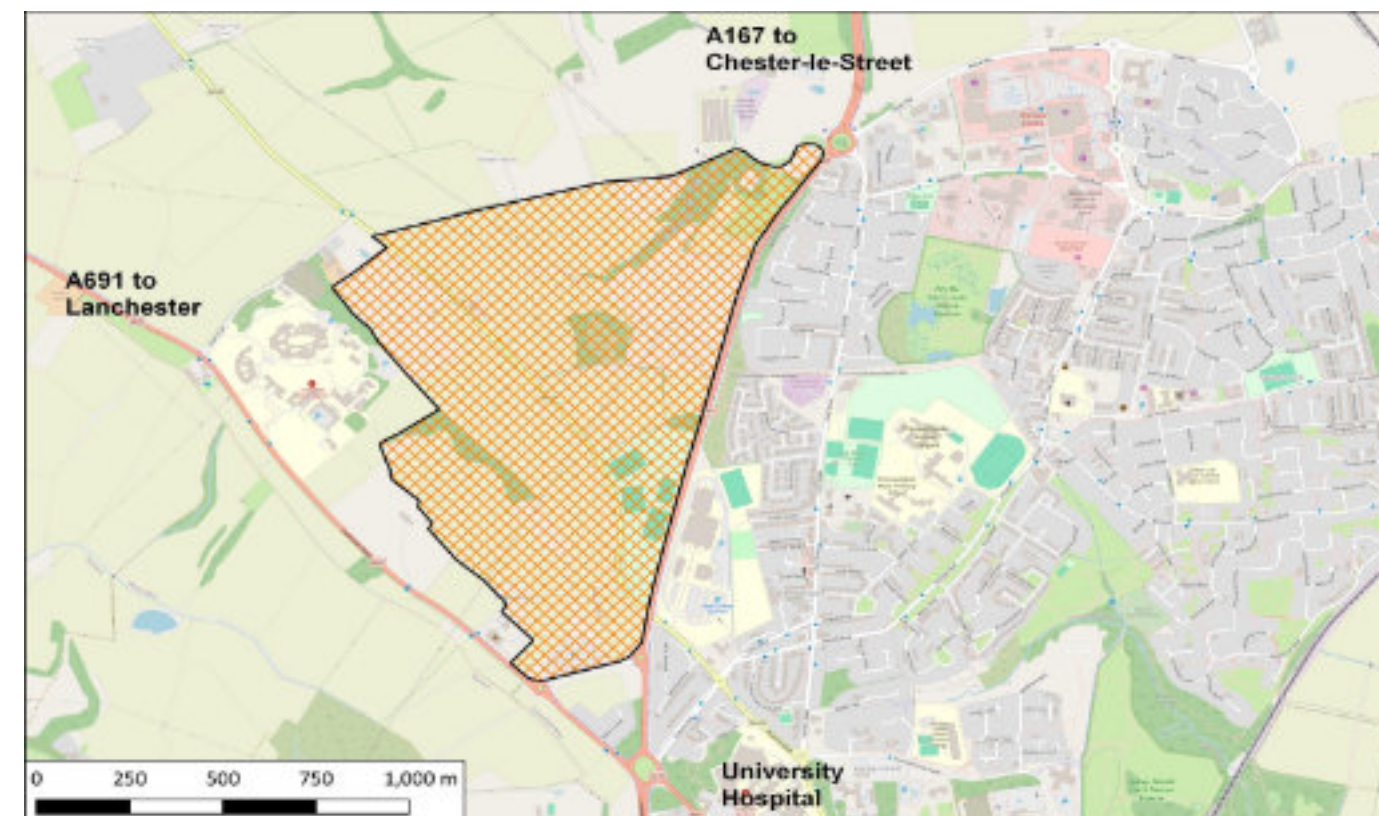
the houses were occupied. Other areas of contention included the provision of playing field facilities, the amount of affordable housing to be included, and the provision of sustainable transport. The argument was often about “who would pay how much for what?” rather than the principle of the development.

The Inspector conducted the inquiry in a remarkably open and friendly manner. This undoubtedly helped the three main parties to resolve some of their differences during the course of the inquiry and much hard work went on behind the scenes as representatives took away their “homework”. We were particularly pleased about the Inspector’s willingness to allow us to state our points of view. Our detailed documentation can be found on our website: <https://bit.ly/3JHn1nI>

In particular, Trustee Matthew Phillips was literally allowed hours to present his expert evidence on transport matters and a more detailed summary of that follows below. Michael Hurlow also presented a masterly summary of our views as the inquiry drew to a close. The effort that the Trust put in to commenting on the initial planning applications, preparing for the appeals and then participating in the inquiry, day after day, paid off in the end. The Inspector and barristers took our interventions seriously. On the final day the three barristers made their concluding statements and there were five references to interventions that Trustees had made during the inquiry. This was a very pleasing vindication of our efforts. Of course, we still await the outcome of the Inspector's recommendations and the final decision by the Secretary of State. That is impossible to forecast in these unstable political times.

Transport at Sniperley Park

When the County Council proposed in the County Plan that the land at Sniperley Park be removed from the green belt and allocated for housing, the main reason for choosing the site was that distributing the housing further afield in the surrounding villages would give rise to higher carbon emissions as people would have to drive further into Durham to access employment and amenities. Yet the Council also argued that the motor traffic generated by the site would have such an impact that it would be necessary for the developers to fund the majority of the costs of building a Western Relief Road from Sniperley to Broompark, relieving the A690 and A167 from Stonebridge to the Sniperley roundabout.



Sniperley Park - background map data from OpenStreetMap - openstreetmap.org/copyright

At the Examination in Public of the County Durham Plan (CDP) in 2019 the Trust argued against both the housing allocation and the relief roads. In the latter stance we found ourselves in an uneasy alliance with the developers, who wanted to avoid being landed with the construction costs by seeking to demonstrate that the traffic impact would be minimal. On the relief roads, the Trust's argument carried, and the resulting CDP Policy 5 includes no less than six paragraphs or clauses requiring transport interventions intended to reduce the impact of the development on traffic levels and congestion.

The argument at the public inquiry was largely about the degree to which the developers had adhered to these requirements of the policy, and the extent of the measures that were necessary to achieve an appropriate reduction in private motor traffic. Bus access through the site was secured, thus ensuring that more of the houses were within 400m of a bus stop. This was a matter of agreement by the time the inquiry opened, but the extent to which the developers would fund the establishment of the new bus services was still contested. The provision of a direct bus service to the Arnison Centre, rather than a route that required a change at the hospital, was something that had to be fought for at the inquiry and the Trust gave significant evidence in support of the need for that route. When the Arnison Centre is a few minutes away by car, no car owners are going to prefer to travel there by bus with a change at the hospital.

On the subject of active travel, walking and cycling, the Council was seeking to secure funding for various off-site improvements to the east and south-east of Sniperley, but the developers resisted funding some proposals. The Trust supported the Council's position to provide the most direct routes possible.

Another example concerns road junctions and the safety of pedestrians and cyclists. The Trust had submitted criticisms of the six detailed junction drawings that would be approved as part of the planning permission, showing how they did not conform to national design guidance for providing crossings for pedestrians and cyclists. We were able to restate our objections in a paper rapidly produced over the weekend and, after discussion with the developers' transport witnesses, satisfactory outcomes were at least promised.

Such detailed interventions are impossible if a planning application is determined in the normal way through the planning committee. Usually the Trust's multiple pages of evidence are summarised in a single paragraph in the officer's report, which the committee members are not guaranteed to have read. The Trust's representative often has only two and a half minutes to speak, as the objectors' allocation of five minutes has to be shared with others. If the officer or the developer responds with incorrect assertions, the Trust has no right of reply, and we sit patiently while the members debate the issues until the decision is reached without further recourse to technical or local expertise. By contrast, the prolonged process of the inquiry gave us ample time to make our case and respond to issues raised by other participants. Given that we were only "an interested party" and not a main participant, this was a major achievement.



Seen on the A691 near Sniperley Hall

The Trust's participation has been invaluable. It was gratifying to hear our opponents after the final in-person session describe our contributions as well-informed, educated and articulate.

Even if we do not get all the improvements we would wish to see at Sniperley, the Trust continues to push good design up the agenda in architecture, transport and the environment. Long may that continue!

The Trust's work on Sniperley is not yet done. We will seek to ensure that the commitments are delivered and enforced by the Council and, as the majority of the site would have only outline permission, we will be responding to any "reserved matters" applications which come forward in due course.

ARTICLE 4 DIRECTIONS AND PERMITTED DEVELOPMENT

Does this affect your property?

When is planning permission required?

Section 57(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 provides that planning permission is required for the development of land.

We usually think of planning permission being granted following an application to the local planning authority. There are however other ways in which permission may be granted. One of these is by the development falling within the list of works permitted by a general development order (permitted development rights). In such cases there is no need for any application to be made. The current general development order granting permitted development rights is the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015 (the GDO): <https://bit.ly/3JEmSkU>

The impact of a general development order

The cumulative impact of small changes to residential properties permitted by the GDO can have a detrimental effect on the appearance and character of our streets and has been a particular problem in conservation areas such as the Durham City Centre Conservation Area. The changes have included unsympathetic designs; the replacement of roofs with different types of material or windows and doors with modern materials such as UPVC; the addition of hard standing in front gardens; and the application of rendering or redecoration in an inappropriate colour. Where buildings are listed, the problems caused by permitted development rights should in principle be avoided due to the requirement that listed building consent is needed for works that would affect the property's special architectural or historic interest.

Article 4 Directions

To address this problem of detrimental small changes to unlisted properties, the Secretary of State or the local planning authority can restrict permitted development rights by making an Article 4 Direction. The impact of this is to take the works specified in the direction outside of the scope of the GDO and an application for permission must therefore be made for those works.

Article 4 Directions are often made in conservation areas. See the map showing the Durham City Conservation Area at: <https://bit.ly/4b8XjV2>.

There are two relevant directions made under Article 4 affecting the Durham City Centre Conservation Area.

1. Made in 2007 by the former Durham City Council affecting all unlisted residential properties (save for flats) in Crossgate, Crossgate Peth, Nevilledale Terrace, Summerville, Brierville, Beechcrest, St Margarets's Garth, Alexandra Crescent and Palatine View (the 2007 Direction). This is still in force in those locations and is unaffected by the 2016 Direction referred to below.

2. Made in 2016 by Durham County Council covering the extensive list of properties listed in the Article 4 Direction in the remainder of the Durham City Centre Conservation Area (the 2016 Direction). See Schedule 1 of the Article 4 Notice at <https://bit.ly/4dlr5rq>

These two Article 4 Directions are distinctive from other Article 4 Directions relating to parts of the City extending both to and beyond the Durham City Conservation Area which deal with a change of use to an HMO and which is not discussed in this article.

The 2007 Direction was viewed by the former Durham City Council as a trial scheme and it was hoped that it would quickly be followed by the other residential areas in the Durham City Centre Conservation Area.

Local government re-organisation seems to have got in the way of early progress and a further 9 years elapsed before the 2016 Direction was made covering other properties in the City Centre Conservation Area.

What type of alteration or development which would otherwise comprise permitted development rights are within the 2007 Direction and the 2016 Direction and therefore require an application to Durham County Council for planning permission?

Examples include the following:

- Extensions
- Material alterations to elevations such as porches fronting an adopted highway, or the removal of architectural details and other works materially affecting their external appearance such as a satellite dish. Some very minor works may be excluded from this but it would be prudent to check with the Council before incurring any expenditure or commencing works.
- A change from traditional roofing materials or alterations to a chimney.
- The replacement of a front door or windows.
- Installation of dormer windows or roof lights.
- Constructing vehicle hard standings or erecting or removing boundary structures or gates.
- Exterior painting or rendering of brickwork or stone and, where external areas have already been painted, decorating in a significantly different colour. Having regard to the cost of decoration, house owners should check any change in the colour scheme in advance rather than after the decorator has started work.

General guidance is available from the Design and Conservation Team at County Hall on their general approach to commonly proposed alterations on durham.gov.uk or by emailing design.conservations@durham.gov.uk. General guidance can be found at: <https://bit.ly/3UC1GIW>.

Caveat house owners in Durham City

We know of many cases in Durham City where house owners have not realised that they need planning permission in Article 4 areas for what may seem to be small changes to their property and which if situated outside of the Durham City Conservation Area would not be necessary. Surprisingly, this lack of public understanding of the need for consent sometimes extends to listed buildings.

House owners should not rely on what their builders, roofers and decorators or other contractors tell them in this regard however eager all parties are to start work. The first step should be to ask the Council whether permission is needed ideally using the Council's Householder Pre-Application Enquiry Service. The Council will consider before responding whether the works are within the GDO or excluded from the ambit of that by an Article 4 Direction. Works often evolve after a project has started and advice should be taken before making any change.

Those that proceed with development without the necessary planning approval face the possibility of enforcement action from the local planning authority often following complaints by concerned members of the public. This may result in house owners having to apply for retrospective approval (which may not be granted) or applying for consent for an alternative scheme for development. Furthermore, any dispute over planning permission must be disclosed to a buyer and, in any event, should be revealed by the requisite local search and enquiries of the local authority requested on behalf of the buyer or a lender making such a property difficult to sell or use as security for a loan.

We think that it would be helpful if local planning authorities were more pro-active in writing to house owners in areas covered by Article 4 Directions or to owners of listed buildings reminding them of the need for planning permission or, where relevant, listed building consent where alterations are proposed.

ENHANCING NATURE

New legislation has recently come into force that requires development projects in England to have a positive impact on the environment – Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). This should ensure that habitats for wildlife are left in a measurably better state than they were before the development.

Biodiversity (biological diversity) is the variety of all living things (animals, plants, fungi, and microorganisms) and their interactions within local habitats and the wider ecosystem. An ecosystem is a community of living organisms interacting with each other and the physical elements of the environment. A habitat is a specific, localised environment. Habitats can be very different from each other because of which living organisms are present in the habitat, the climate, topography, water availability and soil type of the area, and the effects of human activity.

Since 12th February 2024 for big sites, and 2nd April 2024 for small sites, a minimum of 10% BNG is required for development projects. BNG goes beyond existing protections by creating new habitats, improving existing ones and ensuring ecological connectivity.



Japanese Knotweed near Framwellgate Bridge

The BNG Process, Stage by Stage

The developer must employ someone qualified, usually an ecologist, to assess the biodiversity of the development site using the Statutory Biodiversity Metric calculation tool. After classifying the habitat, three units are assessed: the area as a whole, and the size of the different types of habitat within it, e.g. woodland, grassland etc.; hedgerows and lines of trees; watercourses. The metric tool measures the size and condition of the habitat before and after development and uses this to evaluate the impact of the development on the environment. Four factors are used in the assessment:

- habitat size and mapping of the different sub-areas
- habitat condition (its health and quality)
- habitat distinctiveness (species richness and rarity; presence of priority or protected species, priority habitats (because of their rarity, or vulnerability), or irreplaceable habitats)
- strategic significance (e.g. a local priority area or species, or a local area designated for retention, creation or enhancement).

Distinctiveness and significance should be thought of with respect to the local area.

BNG requires not only the replacement of an equivalent amount of any habitat loss through development but also a minimum 10% increase (net gain). This 10% net gain must be achieved for each of the three units of the development site (area, hedgerows and lines of trees, and watercourses). Significant habitats on-site and all off-site habitats must be maintained for at least 30 years.

There are three steps, in order of priority, for the developer to achieve this net gain. Only if a step cannot be demonstrably achieved can the developer move on to the next step.

Step 1. On-site. This is the preferred option. On-site the developer should, in order, avoid adverse effects, if this is not possible then mitigate these effects, if mitigation is not possible then habitat enhancement should be done, and if enhancement is not possible then habitat creation will be needed.

Step 2. Off-site, on their own land or by purchasing biodiversity units from other landowners. The creation of a market is envisaged with landowners creating habitats on their land and 'selling' this to developers. Off-sites judged too distant from the primary site are discouraged.

Step 3. Statutory Credits, sold by the Government at the rate of two credits for each biodiversity unit that requires compensation: the higher 2:1 rate is designed to deter use of this non-local option except as a last resort. Funds from the sale of Statutory Credits will be used for habitat creation or enhancement.

Developers can combine all three of the above steps for a particular development but must follow the steps in order.

The BNG condition must be discharged before the development can proceed. A two step process is required. On planning application, the developer must state whether or not the site is subject to a BNG condition, provide information about the biodiversity condition pre-development of the on-site habitat, and draft information on how 10% net gain could be achieved. Once planning permission has been granted, the developer must provide a Biodiversity Gain Plan with evidence using the metric tool, maps etc. to show how the net gain will be achieved and maintained.

The Local Planning Authority (LPA) must review and check developers' metric tool calculations, review biodiversity gain plans and decide on approval within 8 weeks of their submission, monitor the landowners providing the habitat and enforce compliance, and report on biodiversity gains. Local authorities can also produce Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS). The task of the LNRS is to produce a local map, with assessments, of biodiversity in an area, to be used to inform all nature recovery plans, including sites that might benefit on occasion from the BNG process (though the latter's main focus is on enhancing a primary development site). Durham County Council have just completed a consultation on their LNRS. The Trust made a detailed response, and this can be seen on the Trust's consultation webpage: <https://durhamcity.org/our-work/consultations/>

The Trust's View

The idea of BNG could be a valuable benefit to the environment, attempting as it does to accommodate the enhancement of biodiversity in terms that fit the workings of a market economy committed to continual economic growth. However, how it will work out in implementation awaits to be seen. Three of the Trustees have taken a short introductory course on BNG provided by the Field Studies Council. Once the Trust begins to assess planning applications that require a BNG condition we can provide feedback on how the legislation is working in Durham City.

At this stage, as well as the benefits, we can see potential problems and concerns.



The view from Sheraton Park Field

- Does Durham County Council have the capacity and expertise to cope with the increased workload that BNG will require?
- Are there sufficient ecological experts to carry out the BNG assessments, and how will quality levels and conflicts of interest be managed?
- How bureaucratic will the BNG process be?
- The creation of a market will involve developers, landowners, agents, consultants, lawyers and financial advisers. Will this market divert resources from actually creating and managing the habitats to servicing the market?
- All this will clearly demand more time and attention to detail in the planning process – and this at a time when all the political and commercial pressure is to speed things up.
- The Trust strongly feels that where on-site gain cannot be achieved a local site that reinforces other green space needs and initiatives would be preferred.
- Will big landowners receive the majority of off-site BNG resources at the detriment to the improvement or creation of small pockets of local habitat managed by councils, charities and local residents?
- How practical or achievable is the 30 year requirement to maintain BNG habitats?
- Habitats with existing very high protection, and/or irreplaceable habitats, such as ancient woodland, lie outside the BNG system. They rely on the LPA gauging suitable compensation and judgement of “exceptional circumstances” should development still be allowed, and this must make them vulnerable.
- BNG conditions are not retrospective, so the two large development sites within the city - Bent House Lane and Sniperley - which applied for permission before the law came into force are not included.
- Government assessments suggest that 10% BNG will only achieve no net loss across the board. 10% BNG is a minimum, so ways to achieve more, such as requirements for a bigger minimum in the Local Plan, would be welcome. Ref: Wildlife and Countryside Link <https://bit.ly/3WiQeNe>

Sources of Information

Understanding biodiversity net gain: <https://bit.ly/3Uo2PMJ>

Statutory biodiversity metric tools and guides: <https://bit.ly/4aXpjef>

Biodiversity Net Gain: what local planning authorities should do: <https://bit.ly/4bezgnu>

PERSONALIA

We are delighted to announce that our Chair, John Lowe, has been chosen by the City of Durham Parish Council as one of its Citizens of the Year. John attributes it to the wonderful work done by the whole team of Trustees. They continue to give generously of their time and expert knowledge in the service of the Trust. We are also pleased that another recipient is Trust member David Miller who led the work preparing the walking trail leaflets we sponsored with the Parish Council. John Ashby, Sue Childs and Roger Cornwell are previous recipients of this honour. The Trust's close working with the Parish Council is a key factor in our impact on the city.

We are extremely grateful to Tim Clark who has stepped down after editing our Bulletins and Annual Reviews for the last few years. His work was always both meticulous and informative and we shall miss his expertise. We are fortunate that Francis Pritchard has stepped into the breach and has designed and edited the Annual Review..

STUDENT ACCOMMODATION

Many strands of concerns and issues continued to flow this year, particularly the contested question of need for more student accommodation, the spread of such applications to the outer areas of the city, the interpretation and application of current planning policies, and the best ways of enforcing basic standards on landlords.

It is remarkable that developers are still asserting that there is or will be a shortfall in the number of student bed-spaces needed. This is despite the University proving that there is a significant surplus already. Developers point to the night-time queues of three years ago and submit ‘trend projections’ of future student numbers based upon the unplanned bulge to a total of 22,220 students in 2020/21 arising from the Covid lockdown ‘A’ level fiasco. The fact is that the University has publicly declared that it would manage numbers down to the agreed target for 2026/27 of 21,500. It has succeeded in doing so; the figure for the Academic Year 2023/24 is 21,588. The University is clear in its strategy - stability at around 21,500 from now on, and there are more than enough bed-spaces already. In contrast, developers come up with ‘trend projections’ of up to 33,000 students, which of course produces the “shortfall” they wish to fill.

County Durham Plan Policy 16 has very successfully halted the loss of family homes to Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in the core of the City, so HMO developers have turned to Nevilles Cross, North End, Gilesgate and Belmont. County Councillors have appreciated the concerns of residents in these areas and have rejected several HMO applications despite recommendations for approval from their officers. Appeals to Inspectors have had a mixed outcome - some refusals upheld but unfortunately some overturned. The resulting uncertainties around Policy 16 and related policies need to be resolved in the formal review of the County Durham Plan starting next year, and in the interim there is a crucial need for absolute consistency of interpretation and application of all the relevant current policies.

There is no doubt that some of the existing student HMOs are not of the standard that match the high rents that students are paying. Large HMOs are subject to a Licensing requirement, but that counts for nothing if such properties are not inspected and followed up with enforcement action. In any case, three quarters of the HMOs in Durham City are below the definition of ‘large’ and escape this Licensing requirement. The Trust is fully behind the efforts of the University, the Durham Students Union and the Parish Council in seeking to have an Additional Licensing Scheme adopted here that would cover all rented properties and all landlords.

OTHER DURHAM CITY MATTERS

There are a number of issues within the City that merit highlighting. Some of them are of concern, others of benefit, but all have a cumulative impact on our small City centre.

There are a number of empty premises, mostly through the loss of retail. One example is Barclays Bank. The original building was built by a prominent Victorian architect, A. Waterhouse, in 1887 for Backhouse & Co., later Barclays. How to re-purpose this large listed building originally built with a very specific purpose in mind? The old M&S building still stands empty. When will Stack start their conversion? Durham County Council has started their plans to demolish the former District Council offices at 13-17 Claypath and create a prominent corner site with 3-5 Millennium Place. What will this space be used for? Please respond to our post on the website with your ideas. <https://durhamcity.org/2024/04/28/ideas-for-claypath-site/>.

Milburngate needs more mention. After Tolent, the builder, went into administration the work already done was technically reviewed and problems with the fire-proof paint on the steel structures were discovered. But why has the failure of the multi-million pounds Milburngate redevelopment to satisfy basic fire safety standards resulted only in silence? Or is work being undertaken to find a way out of this costly stalemate? The need for an early opening of the site is even more important in relation to the forthcoming programme of demolition and redevelopment of the Prince Bishops Place shopping area, and the continuing decline in the quantity and quality of shopping floor space in the City. Unless there is a huge effort to resolve the problems, the next few years look like a disaster for the City’s economy, attractiveness and reputation. We appeal to the unfortunate developers and to Durham County Council to be open and honest about the options

ahead. Would a building by building approach to remedial action be possible? Might some of the buildings have to be demolished if too expensive to meet the safety requirements? One of the options cannot be to do nothing and leave this vital part of the City centre shuttered and silent.

The planning application for the Prince Bishops Place redevelopment is now on the planning portal. The Trust has submitted a detailed response. Will existing retailers and services find temporary alternative accommodation in the City while the building work takes place? The decision to allow Stack to occupy the whole of the redundant M&S premises rather than reserving the ground floor for retail and services has come back to haunt us.

Recently both Barclays Bank and Virgin Money have closed. Barclays have set up a basic service desk in Freeman's Quay but this only provides information. People have found ways to manage this loss of facilities, but what will be the future of banking outlets in the City?

Leazes Road Footbridge has been closed for safety reasons. The County Council does not plan to repair or replace this footbridge, but instead to install a pedestrian crossing at the top of Leazes Road. There is widespread concern that this would not be an equally safe alternative. A local petition calls for making a functioning footbridge a top priority. The attitude to Leazes Road Footbridge contrasts with the plans to repair Baths Bridge. The Trust believes both should be repaired.

The shutting down of Shakespeare Hall is a loss: there is a need for suitable community facilities in the City centre. Alington House, and rooms for hire in church premises and the library, are the only facilities still available. Setting up a Community Hub in premises in the redeveloped Prince Bishops Place would be a way forward.

Areas of the castle are out of bounds due to long overdue maintenance by the University. Repair of the pavements starting from the bottom of the Bailey has been in progress for some time, and replacement of the cobbles has started. Currently the cobbles cease at St Mary the Less. When will this task be completed? The pavement and road urgently needed repair all the way to Owengate.

The Trust commends the clearing of the weirs from the tree and vegetation build up. The weir across from Milburngate Bridge has also been basically repaired. Cormorants are common on the river, and they like to perch above the water to dry their wings and inspect for fish. With the removal of the trees they aren’t visiting us so often. Should we install cormorant perches now the trees are no longer available for them?

Two important and positive developments are making progress. An update of the Durham City Conservation Area appraisals and production of a management plan are underway: consultation should open in the autumn. An update of the World Heritage Site management plan is in its early stages. Chris Blandford (Associates) are currently undertaking a setting survey to inform the new management plan which should also be available for consultation by the autumn.

And hot off the press: Durham County Council is putting Hopper House and 7 Atherton Street (Metcalf House), located next to the roundabout at the top of North Road, up for sale with a closing date of 1st July for offers. The Council is open to consider any proposed scheme, assessing these on their own merits.

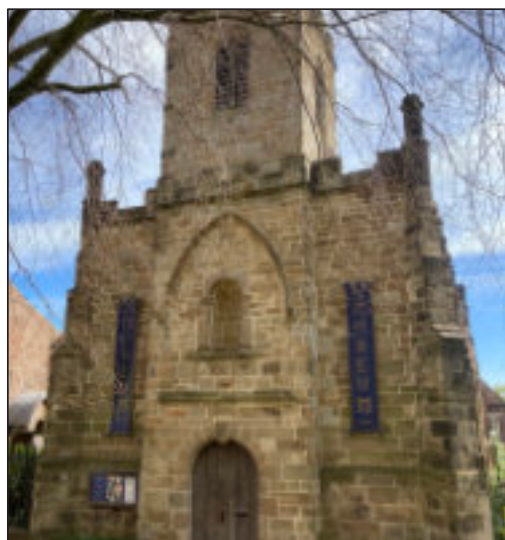


A Tower at Durham Castle

DURHAM MUSEUM

Durham Museum in St Mary le Bow on North Bailey is currently closed. The Bow Trust is responsible for the Grade I Listed building. The City of Durham Trust has been closely involved with the Bow Trust since it was founded in 1975 to find a use for the former parish church. Starting out as a “Heritage Centre”, with brass rubbing and a few display boards, it has developed into Durham Museum. A fully Accredited Museum, Durham Museum “tells the people’s story”.

Last year Anna Bridgeman was employed as a Museum Officer and created a new volunteering programme, and successfully won a grant from the Arts Council England’s “Connected Communities” scheme, to develop community volunteering in 2024.



Building repairs to the belfry tower, however, have meant that the Bow Trust has had to commit its reserves to the repair of the fabric. Sadly, the Trust is not able to continue to commit funds to a salaried employee. Happily, Anna has a new job at Richmond Georgian Theatre. Without a Museum Officer, the museum is currently closed.

The Bow Trust is considering new options for the use of the building. Opening the building as a music, drama and exhibitions space for hire is one possibility. Whatever the Bow Trust decides, it will need to find sufficient income to meet the costs of the ongoing repair of the Grade I building. The belfry tower needs a new roof, as does the chancel. The current leadwork is Victorian. It may be possible to find an “eco” solution for the chancel roof, adding to the solar panels already on the nave roof. The nave roof was renewed in the 1980s, and a major masonry repair was

completed in 2000 with National Lottery funding. Further major grant funding will be needed to fix the belfry tower and chancel roof in the next few years.

Durham Museum’s collections on the social history of Durham City will need to find a new home. The City of Durham Trust is actively supporting the Bow Trust in finding the best outcome. The Town Hall on Durham Market Place has been suggested.

TRUST RESPONSES TO PLANNING APPLICATIONS

An important task of the Trustees of the City of Durham Trust is to respond to planning applications that affect Durham City. New planning applications are discussed at the monthly Trustees' meeting and decisions on how to respond (object, support, comment) are made. The response is then developed via email correspondence after the meeting to gather evidence and then submitted to the planning department. Summaries of these decisions can be seen at <https://durhamcity.org/our-work/summaries/> and the responses themselves at <https://durhamcity.org/our-work/planning/> If a member of the Trust, or any local resident, has any concern about a new development in the City please do share it with us at trust@durhamcity.org

From 19th April 2023 to 16th April 2024 the Trustees considered 331 planning applications. For these 76 objections were made, 12 letters of support and 15 letters of comments/concerns. The rest were just noted as no response was considered necessary or appropriate. We also keep track of the outcomes of planning applications, though because of the delay in decisions (and in implementation) this data below does not correspond with the data above.

Applications with Trust objections: Approved 20, refused 20, withdrawn 10. Applications with Trust support: Approved 12, refused 1. Applications with Trust comments: Approved 9, refused 1. Applications with Trust concerns: Approved 2, refused 1.

We also respond to appeals made by a developer after their proposal has been refused by Durham County Council. The Inspector sees all the responses made to the application in question. Additionally, if necessary, we may make an additional response to the appeal.

Appeal with Trust objections: Dismissed 4. Appeal with Trust comments: Dismissed 1. Appeal with Trust concerns: Dismissed 1.

PLAQUES IN DURHAM CITY

When the City of Durham Parish Council started their blue plaques scheme in 2021 we thought it would be interesting to obtain photos of these for the Trust's website. This work soon expanded hugely as we discovered how many commemorative plaques of all kinds could be found in the City - 168 as of the date of this article. This work has been greatly helped by members of the public who have contacted the Trust with their photos of plaques, in particular the help from Mark Nimmins.

The plaques can be seen on the Trust's website at <https://durhamcity.org/resources/list-of-plaques-in-the-city/>, sub-divided into a number of pages relating to the type of plaque. As well as the City of Durham Parish Council plaques, there are plaques put up in the past by the City of Durham Trust, and by Rotary Durham as part of their 50th anniversary celebrations. Additionally, a wide range of other organisations and individuals have put up plaques.

Plaques commemorate:

- **people**, e.g. Daisy Edis, the pioneering female photographer at 142 Gilesgate; Sir Ove Arup, structural engineer and architect, on Dunelm House
- **buildings**, e.g. the Market Hall; Tithe Barn of Elvethall Manor; Milburngate Bridge
- **sites of lost historical buildings**, e.g. site of a theatre at Drury Lane; site of the house of Sir John Duck at 39 Silver Street
- **walks**, e.g. Moatside Lane, medieval pilgrims’ route to the Cathedral; Fearon Walk, the riverside walk between Elvet Bridge and Bow Lane
- **the natural environment**, e.g. Prince Bishops Garden, Botanic Gardens, University of Durham; Lime trees, County Hall
- **works of art**, e.g. The Journey, by Fenwick Lawson, in Millennium Square; Durham Marketplace Timeline
- **coats of arms**, e.g. list of coats of arms in the College; St Chad’s College coat of arms on their new building on the corner of Bow Lane and the North Bailey.

Searching out the plaques the Trust has listed is a good way to discover something about the history of the City and the people who have lived here. You can get more involved either by telling us about plaques we've missed, or suggesting new plaques to the City of Durham Parish Council.



The Vennel’s Renovation

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2024

The Trust's 82nd Annual General Meeting will be held on Tuesday 6 June, 7-9 pm in Elvet Riverside ER140, New Elvet. It is planned to make the meeting available via Zoom and a link has been emailed to members. The detailed agenda can be found below.

Our speaker at the AGM this year will be Professor Robin Coningham, UNESCO's 2014 Chair on Archaeological Ethics and Practice in Cultural Heritage, Department of Archaeology, University of Durham. Robin will speak at 8 pm and his title will be **What Will The UK'S Ratification of UNESCO'S 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Mean For The City and County of Durham?**

Twenty-one years after its launch, the UK Government will ratify the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage on 7th June 2024, with the intention of protecting "the crafts, practices, and traditions which are recognised as being key part of national life and providing a sense of identity to communities across the UK" (<https://bit.ly/4dgsJKL>). While the results of the recent public consultation designed to inform the UK's approach to creating a new register for traditions valued by communities up and down the country are awaited, this presentation will discuss the 2003 Convention and consider what it might mean for the city and county of Durham.

AGENDA

1. Welcome and apologies for absence.
2. Minutes of the 81st Annual General Meeting
3. Matter arising from the Minutes.
4. Report of the Trustees and the Presentation of Accounts for the period ended 7 April 2024
5. Appointment of the Honorary Officers of the Trust
6. Appointment of Trustees
7. Secretary's Report
8. Chairman's remarks.
9. Any other business

MINUTES OF THE 81ST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE TRUST IN ELVET RIVERSIDE ER140 ON TUESDAY 31ST OCTOBER 2023 AT 7 PM

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE John Lowe (Chair) welcomed attendees (in person and via Zoom) to the Trust's 2023 AGM in Elvet Riverside ER140 and pointed out the emergency exits/facilities. Apologies were received from Dr Anne Allen (WHS Senior Manager), Prof. Maggie Tallerman, Dr S J Hannahs, Kevin Cummings, Dr Malcolm Reed, David & Catharina Miller, Anne Bothwell, Carole Lattin, Sue Childs (Vice-Chair), The Very Revd Michael Sadgrove (Emeritus Dean of Durham/Patron) and Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods (Patron).

2. MINUTES OF THE 80th AGM (1 October 2022) The Minutes, previously approved by Trustees, were noted.

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES The Chair said he will address matters in his remarks. There were no matters arising from the floor.

4. PRESENTATION OF THE ACCOUNTS OF THE TRUST for the period ended 7 April 2023 Honorary Treasurer, Francis Pritchard drew attention to items from the Trust's accounts (detailed in the Annual Review), including that the Trust's assets are slightly greater than the previous year. He noted that an insurance payout for water-damaged publications will be included in the 2023/24 accounts. He informed attendees that Trustees had moved funds from the current account to a savings account with Virgin Money but, as Virgin Money is closing their Durham branch, Trustees agreed to move these funds to a savings account with Newcastle Building Society (who are retaining a branch in the city). The end of year balance was £15.8k which leaves the accounts in a healthy position. The Chair thanked Francis.

5. HONORARY SECRETARY'S REPORT Francis, also the Honorary Secretary, reported that membership numbers are steady at: 8 Honorary; 143 Individual; 94 Joint and 41 Life members (a total of 286 memberships). The Trust has acquired a new membership system whereby you can join and pay online (via PayPal or credit/debit card), which went live this week. We hope this will help increase membership. The Chair thanked Francis for taking on both these officer roles and combining the tasks so economically.

6. 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. The retiring Trustees, John Ashby, Sue Childs, Prof. Tim Clark and Michael Hurlow, were proposed and re-elected by consensus. There were no new nominations from the floor. The Chair explained that we can have up to 20 Trustees according to our Constitution (currently there are eleven), so if anyone is interested in becoming a Trustee or proposing someone else, please get in touch with him via chair@durhamcity.org. He said it is a pleasure for him to lead this team of skilled and dedicated Trustees and he thanked them for their continued service. He thanked Jan Hutchinson for producing the Trust's Minutes and other documents. The Chair reminded members that the Trustees are selected by Trust members but Trustees choose their Chair in accordance with our Constitution. So, the Chair for the coming year will be decided at the next Trustees' meeting in November.

7. APPOINTMENT OF THE HONORARY OFFICERS OF THE TRUST As there were no other nominations put forward for the honorary officer roles, the Chair proposed Francis Pritchard be re-elected as both Honorary Secretary and Honorary Treasurer. The motion was carried by acclaim and the Chair thanked him. The Chair also thanked Prof. Tim Clark for producing the magnificent Bulletins and Annual Reports, but noted that he will be stepping down from this role shortly. Anyone interested in writing articles for the Trust should contact us on chair@durhamcity.org.

8. CHAIR'S REMARKS The Chair thanked all for their attendance/contributions this evening and Trustees for their splendid work over the last year. He announced that the Trust's Architectural Award for 2022 goes to the owners (Debbie Hill & John Carter) of 173 Gilesgate, a listed building to which they have added a modern extension. The award is covered in detail in the Annual Review. Debbie and John have kindly offered to hold an Open Day in the spring, so the plaque will be formally unveiled then. We will let members know details of the event. On highlights of the past year, the Chair drew members' attention to the excellent reports in the Annual Review. Spare copies are available at front of the room this evening.

The Chair noted that at the time of the AGM last year, we were on the verge of a public inquiry into the Sniperley Park housing developments, but the developers withdrew in the face of strong opposition from DCC, the Trust and other objectors (e.g. the Parish Council (PC), WRRAG and CPRE). Sadly, it is déjà vu time again as the developers have submitted further appeals to the Inspectorate due to non-determination by DCC. We are in touch with DCC, the Parish Council (PC), WRRAG and CPRE about the appeals, with a preliminary meeting with the Inspector due on 20 November. If the appeals continue to a public inquiry, then this would start on 30 January 2024 – we will keep members informed. The Trust's main focus is to ensure that DCC keeps its resolve to demand that the developers conform to the requirements of the approved Masterplan (and conditions in the County Durham Plan (CDP)), as such a large development will have huge impact on the infrastructure of our city.

The Chair reminded attendees that last year marked our 80th anniversary, with many events held that members may have attended. He said the highlight for him was the Day Conference held at the Pemberton Rooms, when a variety of speakers shared different "Perspectives on Durham's World Heritage Site (WHS)" (proceedings can be viewed on the Trust's YouTube channel). After the talks there were visits to parts of the WHS with expert guides. A splendid and well-attended event. Another venture to mark the anniversary was to co-publish (with the PC) *The Durham City Seven Hills Trail* leaflet, which has been immensely successful and reprinted already. Trust member David Miller, who produced the guide, has since pioneered a second leaflet, *The Durham City Heritage Trail*, also co-produced with the PC and equally popular, with some organisations requesting bulk supplies for events/ welcome packs. Copies are free and there are some available to pick up at the front of the room this evening (also available from Durham Town Hall).

The Chair emphasised the importance of the Trust's close, mutually supportive relationship with the PC, especially on planning matters, which are the main bulk of the Trust's activities. Trustees carefully consider DCC's weekly lists of applications to decide which need further scrutiny. In 2022 we scrutinised 304 applications, submitted 95 objections, 14 letters of support and 15 letters of comments/suggested improvements. There is widespread concern about the number of applications seeking to convert family homes into HMOs, usually for the student market. In a sea change recently four such applications were refused at planning committee, despite being recommended for approval by the officers. A major factor in convincing committee members to reject the applications was that local residents turned up in force and made their well-founded opposition with great dignity and restraint. And it is notable that committee members expressed a degree of dissatisfaction with the CDP policies governing such decisions. The CDP is due a review in 2025, so Trustees are already sharing ideas with the PC on improvements to the existing policies, which the Trust was heavily involved in formulating.

Talking about public involvement in planning reminded the Chair about the quote on the back cover of Thomas Sharp's *Cathedral City* headed "A Note to the Man in the Street" which concludes: "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." Today's news on the government's U-turn on the rail ticket office closures illustrates the power of public opinion! So, the Chair made no apologies for repeating this quote and for asking members to all recruit one more member to ensure the Trust's voice can be heard louder.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS There was no other business raised but two points from Trustees. John Ashby agreed that CDP Policy 16 has been under stress recently, so the more people we can gather to review it the better. Residents are getting upset in areas of the city that have not yet reached the 10% level, so we need ideas on how better to manage the issue. Richard Hird noted that an important thing that Trustees have been doing is trying to ensure that accurate information is used in the planning processes by seeking to correct misinformation quoted in the local press. The Chair thanked all attendees for their attention and drew the AGM business to a close at 19.40.

After the formal agenda, the Chair welcomed and introduced Prof. Karen O'Brien, Vice-Chancellor and Warden of Durham University, who presented an illustrated talk about the relationship between the City and the University. The talk "The Built Life of a University in its City: Durham University Now and in the Future" was very well received. Following some questions from the floor, a vote of thanks was given by John Ashby and Karen was given a copy of a Trust publication, *In the Steps of the Masters: Durham in Paintings*, signed by the author Douglas Pocock.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Please find here the draft accounts for 2023-24.

Francis Pritchard
Hon. Treasurer

Receipts and payments accounts				CC16a	
For the period from	Period start date	To	Period and date		
	8th April 2023		7th April 2024		
Section A Receipts and payments					
	Unrestricted funds to the nearest £	Restricted funds to the nearest £	Endowment funds to the nearest £	Total funds to the nearest £	Last year to the nearest £
A1 Receipts					
Subscriptions & Donations	2,385	-	-	2,385	2,510
Gift Aid	-	-	-	-	-
Legacies	-	-	-	-	-
Publication Sales	1,350	-	-	1,350	1,559
Interest	125	-	-	125	22
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total (Gross income for AR)	3,859	-	-	3,859	4,091
A2 Asset and investment sales, (see table).					
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total	-	-	-	-	-
Total receipts	3,859	-	-	3,859	4,091
A3 Payments					
Cost of sales	-	-	-	-	-
Direct expenditure on charitable purposes	-	-	-	-	-
Subscriptions and grants to other bodies	1,127	-	-	1,127	156
Management and member services	2,657	-	-	2,657	1,785
Governance and professional fees	341	-	-	341	674
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total	4,126	-	-	4,126	2,595
A4 Asset and investment purchases, (see table)					
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total	-	-	-	-	-
Total payments	4,126	-	-	4,126	2,595
Net of receipts/(payments)	- 266	-	-	- 266	1,496
A5 Transfers between funds	-	-	-	-	-
A6 Cash funds last year end	14,103	-	-	14,103	-
Cash funds this year end	13,837	-	-	13,837	1,496
Section B Statement of assets and liabilities at the end of the period					
Categories	Details	Unrestricted funds to nearest £	Restricted funds to nearest £	Endowment funds to nearest £	
B1 Cash funds	Co-operative Bank current account	3,881	-	-	
	Virgin Money charity savings account	11,589	-	-	
		-	-	-	
	Total cash funds	15,469	-	-	
	(agree balances with receipts and payments account(s))	Agreement Error	OK	OK	
COX R1 accounts (55)	1				30/04/2024