

# CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

## BULLETIN

Number 98

Spring 2024

Registered Office: c/o Blackett, Hart & Platt, LLP  
Aire House, Mandale Business Park, Durham, DH1 1TH

[durhamcity.org](http://durhamcity.org)

### **THE SPRING TALK: Durham Castle and Cathedral World Heritage Site: a changing context**

On Saturday 9 March, 2.00 pm in Elvet Riverside, ER140, Dr Anne Allen, Senior Manager Durham World Heritage Site, will speak about the World Heritage Site.

2026 will mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the inscription of Durham Castle and Cathedral on the UNESCO World Heritage List. A lot has changed since 1986. This was also the year that our speaker came up to Durham from Bishop Auckland to read archaeology. She describes her new role as Senior Manager of the World Heritage Site as her dream job. In this conversation Anne will explore the opportunities and challenges ahead and discuss the emerging priorities for the new management plan. Members are invited to submit questions in advance by emailing [chair@durhamcity.org](mailto:chair@durhamcity.org).

The talk is available online. Email [zoom@durhamcity.org](mailto:zoom@durhamcity.org) to request the link.

### **Kingsgate Bridge – 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration**

On a wintry day close to the winter solstice (Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> December 2023), trustees joined representatives from Durham University, Durham County Council, Durham Parish Council, and Arup engineering to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the construction of Kingsgate Bridge. The University's Vice-Chancellor, Karen O'Brien, suggested the event at her talk earlier in the autumn to the City of Durham Trust AGM, on "*The Built Life of a University in its City: Durham University Now and in the Future*". Professor O'Brien had recently attended Sydney Opera House's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations and felt that Ove Arup's iconic work in Durham should be equally celebrated. This was a valuable occasion to reaffirm the joint commitment of Durham University, Durham County Council, the City of Durham Parish Council, and the City of Durham Trust to the preservation of Durham's built heritage.



L-R: Victoria Ashfield, City of Durham Parish Council; Douglas Pocock, former Hon Sec CDT; Chris Beck, Arup; John Lowe, Chair CDT; Alan Patrickson, DCC; Prof Karen O'Brien, DU VC; joined on the bridge by CDT Trustees and others from the University, Arup, DCC and Durham Parish Council

This was a valuable occasion to reaffirm the joint commitment of Durham University, Durham County Council, the City of Durham Parish Council, and the City of Durham Trust to the preservation of Durham's built heritage.

John Lowe chaired the event, which involved a photo-call on the bridge, followed by tea and talks in Dunelm House. Alan Powers, from the Twentieth Century Society, spoke over a video link, and a representative of Arup engineering explained the great architect's legacy today. A focus of the afternoon was the portrait head of Ove Arup on the side of Dunelm House – which the City of Durham Trust arranged to be cast from the original 1987 sculpture by Diana Brandenburger in the National Portrait Gallery. Erected

in 2003, the bronze was stolen in 2006; replaced by a new bust cast in resin which remains in place. At the 60th Anniversary, Douglas Pocock recalled the Trust's involvement in these earlier celebrations.

Kingsgate Bridge opened in November 1963. A river crossing was needed to link the university's colleges and departments on the peninsula with its expansion into Elvet. The original idea was a low-level crossing, reached by steps from Kingsgate on the peninsula side, providing access to the planned teaching blocks, student union and staff club on the Elvet riverbank. The student union and staff club came to occupy Dunelm House, with teaching blocks in Elvet Riverside. The genius of Ove Arup's solution was to install a high-level bridge, linked by just a few steps at Kingsgate to Bow Lane. Because of the need to avoid scaffolding across the river, Arup conceived of the bridge in two halves, swung together and joined by a bronze expansion joint. Unlike Arup's delicate bust, the bronze joint has proved invulnerable to thieves. The intersecting T and U shapes of the expansion joint are said to refer to the bridge's role in joining town and gown, but that may be myth. One of the many challenges of swinging the bridge into place was the need for single-use ball bearings; squash balls were used. Alan Powers told the squash balls story as part of his talk to the event, recalling that his father, Michael Powers, was architect of Dunelm House, with Richard Raines. Ove Arup was consultant engineer to Dunelm House, erected alongside his masterly bridge.

Kingsgate Bridge was Ove Arup's favourite building – the last structure he completely designed himself, though his legacy remains alive through the global firm that bears his name. Arup regarded Kingsgate Bridge as his personal best because it fulfilled his ideal of architecture – combining ingenious engineering with aesthetic beauty for human utility. Kingsgate Bridge is recognised as a Grade I Listed building and has become an adopted highway maintained by Durham County Council. The bridge has been in the care of the County Council rather than the University since 2005. The City of Durham Trust has made repeated efforts to ensure the bridge is well maintained – with the surface and drainage channels kept clear of leaf mould and weeds. Recently, ivy on the west leg was seen to be encroaching onto the bridge and it has now been removed. Sydney Opera House – Kingsgate Bridge's distant cousin – sits alongside the Sydney Harbour Bridge, which is a twin of the Tyne Bridge in Newcastle upon Tyne – the birthplace of Ove Arup: connections that point to the global significance of Kingsgate Bridge.

## Sniperley Park Public Inquiry

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 1700 houses in what was described as a “sustainable urban extension”.

A development of this scale will have significant impacts on the city. It will increase pressure on the already busy road network and require improved cycling and walking routes; there will be a need for many more school places; the fully stretched health facilities will face additional demands. Retail and leisure opportunities will also need to be provided on site.

Policy 5 of the CDP recognises these impacts and sets out very specific requirements to meet them: convenience retail provision; a new primary school and playing fields; suitable, convenient, safe and attractive cycle ways and footpaths; all necessary on and off-site highway works and improvements. In addition there is a requirement to explore opportunities for a district heating network.

Overarching all these particular requirements, “Development is required to be comprehensively master planned and to demonstrate how the phasing of the development...will have regard to the provision and timing of the infrastructure and services necessary to support them.” The County Council has produced a master plan that incorporates all the requirements of Policy 5. These are necessary not only to ensure a “sustainable urban extension”, but also to justify the removal of such a large tract of land from the Green Belt.

This requirement for a comprehensive master plan is given added significance by the fact that two major developers are involved, County Durham Land LLP and Bellway Homes Ltd. It is essential that their works are coordinated to ensure the successful implementation of this ambitious scheme.



Unfortunately the developers have disputed the Council's master plan and produced their own version. This is at the heart of the dispute that has led to the need for a public inquiry. As far as we can see, the Council has been trying to negotiate changes with the developers, but is still not satisfied that their proposals meet the master plan's requirements. For some reason, rather than refuse the planning applications, it has failed to determine them within the statutory timescales. Hence the developers have appealed to the inspectorate on the grounds of non-determination. This means that it will now be up to an inspector to recommend to the Secretary of State what the decision should be.

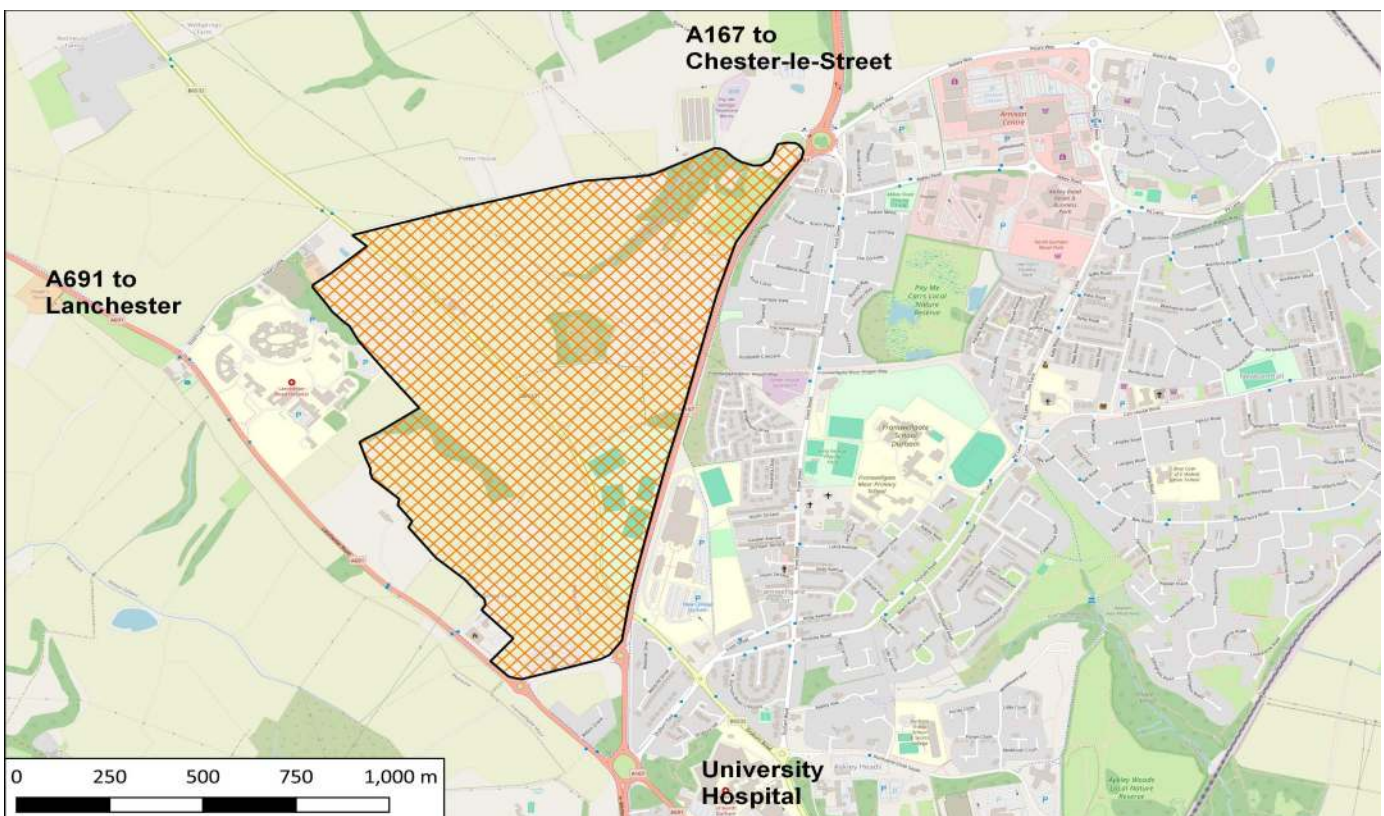
It will be a complex matter for the inspector to judge. There are four planning applications with their associated appeals involved in the inquiry. It started on January 30th and 15 sitting days have been allocated to it. It is being held at the Chester-le-Street county cricket ground at 9.30 am each day and the Trust will be represented there throughout. It is a public inquiry and anyone is entitled to attend.

The County Council has set out 5 reasons for challenging the developers' proposals namely:

1. that they fail to conform to the Council's master plan;
2. fail to deliver sustainable transport options for future residents;
3. fail to provide education facilities;
4. fail to demonstrate that a district heating system is not feasible; and
5. fail to provide playing field facilities.

The Trust will be particularly interested in the first two items and we have submitted extensive documentation on both matters. Quite what opportunities we have to influence the outcome remains to be seen. We are an interested party but not a main participant at the inquiry. It will depend very much on the inspector, Mrs H Hockenfull, how much opportunity we are given. We are coordinating our planning with the Western Relief Road Action Group that is also particularly interested in the transport issues, and CPRE The Countryside Charity that is particularly concerned about the Green Belt.

You can find details of our documentation and other details relating to the inquiry on the homepage of our website: [durhamcity.org](http://durhamcity.org). We shall also post updates there as the inquiry progresses.



Background map data from OpenStreetMap - [openstreetmap.org/copyright](http://openstreetmap.org/copyright)

## Milburngate

The stalemate afflicting the vast Milburngate development is of great concern. It looks ready for occupation of its hotel, offices, restaurants, apartments and cinema but is lifeless. The construction firm went into liquidation a year ago. The company behind the scheme is reported to have explained that there are issues including the incorrect thickness of fire-retarding paint on steel in parts of the complex. We understand that remedial work has been commissioned but at present there is no public information as to the completion date.



## Prince Bishops Place

A development company called Citrus has bought what used to be called Prince Bishops Shopping Centre and has ambitious plans to refurbish it with student accommodation on upper floors and a hotel instead of the main department store. Trustees have been invited to a preliminary consultation and we'll report further in our next bulletin.

## Millennium Place

The County Council has announced plans to demolish the former District Council offices at 13-17 Claypath and create a prominent corner site with 3-5 Millennium Place. They are seeking occupiers who will “complement the wider cultural offering as well as add to the vibrancy of Millennium Place.” Do get in touch if you have any suggestions.

## The New Durham Bus Station



After more than twenty years of controversy Durham City and the wider County has a new bus station on the same site as the old one. For most of those twenty years the proposal was to replace Hopper House and the adjacent roundabout, reserving the site of the existing bus station for a speculative commercial development such as a ‘department store’. Reality dawned in 2018 and the County Council recognised that public opinion favoured retaining the roundabout as a valued green feature. Funding, demolition and construction issues caused delays but on Sunday 7 January 2024 the new bus station opened to the public. Reactions have been very favourable for its spaciousness, information displays, seating and toilets. Externally, it certainly declares its presence in North Road but the stone cladding is at present a monochrome grey; time will tell if it weathers attractively.

## New Membership System

The Trust is now using a new membership system, which enables people to join online. It can be found on the Trust's website at [durhamcity.org/join-us/](https://durhamcity.org/join-us/). It can also be used by those members who pay their subscription annually and not by standing order.

For people who do not wish to use online systems a downloadable joining form can still be used.