



Durham Castle – Norman Chapel

City of Durham Trust

Prepared by Michael Hurlow with apologies for not being able to attend. Read by Adrian Green

The Trust is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). It has long been part of Durham's civic life having been formed in 1942. Its members and trustees have been drawn from a long list of those who have strong connections with Durham and its heritage, the Cathedral and University having been prominent in its organisation. It is not a Civic Trust but operates in a similar way to many of the functions of one. It has always relied on voluntary input – we run on a minimal budget. That does not stop us from being a potent force in defending Durham's heritage. Our current 11 Trustees includes those who have worked in the County Council and University or are in some instances still working for the University. Others include those living in the City with experience of commenting on its various developments. All bring a rich variety of experience, knowledge, and passion for Durham. Our membership is currently just over four hundred largely drawn from those resident in City and with long experience of its growth and changes.

The Trust inevitably finds itself providing comment, objection, and support on planning applications. It also, where the opportunity arises, involves itself with Council policy development. It is a supporter of the City of Durham Parish Council, and its Trustees were a strong driving force in the evolution of the Durham City Neighbourhood Plan. We endeavour not to be NIMBYs, as now increasingly maligned. We relish being involved in more positive ventures including our own publications and architectural awards. However, we rely on the prominent organisations in Durham respecting the Trust and providing openings for its involvement.

We are therefore very pleased to have this opportunity to offer a few thoughts on the Norman Chapel and its role as a community asset.

The Chapel feels like a buried secret hidden within the heart of the Castle. It is very different to the buildings that enclose it; it is isolated from the bustle of the University College flowing around it. Architecturally it seems a remnant of some distant past tucked away beneath the grander buildings now composing the Castle. Its columns and carvings feel rather more exotic in origin. It is a very different experience from the rest of the Castle, Cathedral, and buildings of the World Heritage Site. Entering the Chapel gives an awareness of the nearly 1000 years of its existence, we experience its age through its character.

Its essence as a secret place presents difficulties in trying to increase awareness and use. At what point does exposure devalue that secret? Can you publicise a secret? There will those living and visiting Durham that are aware of its existence, but this is probably not true of the wider population. How many in the student population are aware of it?

Defining the community for which this is an asset is potentially an elusive goal. There are several, and potentially many, different ways to view whose community this could belong to. Working outwards, there are the students and staff of the University College and the Castle community. There is the rest of the University for who will not be necessarily aware of its existence. There is the local residential community for the City, this will an important asset for some. Then there is the County and region amongst whom there may be some awareness. There are visitors to Durham who can be introduced to it. As part of this there is a small but growing interest in visiting World Heritage Sites.

Evolving further use and awareness will need to be handled with sensitivity to conserve the Chapel and its unique character. Retaining the essential character of the Chapel is paramount and if multi-functional use arises as a conclusion for future development, it will bring a need for servicing. Lighting, power and sound will all need to be catered for without disturbing the architectural simplicity of the Chapel. There may have been provision leading towards this as part of the conservation works. Seating and staging will need movable provision and adequate storage.

Concentrating on the local community, research should reveal a lot of interesting information. It would be useful to summarise this in a form that various organisations such as the Trust can incorporate on their websites. Is a comprehensive and interactive 3D scan possible to make remote visiting a possibility? Awareness of the Chapel could be increased through drawing in other organisations. The Parish Council would be a very useful starting point. There are others speaking to other aspects of tourism and different communities. Moves to improve awareness locally would also serve other users and audiences. Where would expanding social media use fit into this?

The Chapel is included on Castle Tours (post conservation) but there is an opportunity to reinforce this and advertise it in connection with these. It may be possible, short of full event use, to allow local organisations to stage their own more limited events in the Chapel. There may be scope of small group visits by schools, FE colleges and other local organisations. Music events would seem to be a possibility – the type being dependent on the scale of power, lighting, and sound provision.

The increasing financial pressure on the University would seem to present problems in both finding funding for use development beyond conservation and the necessary support for organising increased use. The volunteers from the WHS Centre provide excellent support but there is only so much that can be expected of volunteers. Dedicated staffing is limited but the WHS Coordinator provides a tremendous service (thank you Anne) in drawing together the various opportunities and events on the WHS. The reaching out to new audiences such as young people is an important development area by the Coordinator. This is important for the

local community – the volunteers are local either Durham City or the wider County. It obviously also services the wider tourism provision as well.

Possibilities relating to the local community are:

1. Resolve what level of expanded use is possible through servicing while respecting essential character of the Chapel.
2. How much funding can reasonably be anticipated to achieve this.
3. Establish how much organisational time can be devoted to developing Chapel use. Can volunteers be used?
4. Develop information and tools for expanding awareness that can be made available for local organisations to promote. Look for social media opportunities.
5. Draw in as many local organisations as are willing to provide links, support, or sources of increased use.
6. Reinforce the Chapel role in Castle visits – consider small group use and visits.
7. There may well be limits on how far usage should be expanded – after all the Chapel is a small, secret place with its own distinctive character - we need to respect this. The Chapel is hidden heritage but how much should it remain so?