

CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

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LECTURE

At our autumn Open Meeting **Martin Roberts** will give his annual illustrated lecture, this year entitled ‘**Landscapes of Supply: The Granges of Durham Cathedral Priory**’. The medieval cathedral, on its relatively unproductive peninsula, was sustained in food and building materials by a network of rural estates across the Palatinate. The lecture explores this network and what survives of them today. The lecture will be held on **Saturday, 27th October, at 2.15pm in Elvet Riverside 1**, in our usual room, **141**.

A NEW COUNTY HALL

The proposal for a new County Hall drew surprise, if not incredulity, from Trustees from several points of view. First, in January of this year a Cabinet paper identified two city centre options to be taken forward, with the one on the west bank demonstrated to be clearly better than that on the east. Then, in August, without any explanation, a planning application was submitted for the east bank or Sands Car Park site. A further surprise was that, even though the building was to be for the council and to be erected on council-owned land the application was in the name of a developer. (A far cry from the 1960s when the Authority had the initiative and confidence to design its own new County Hall.). The final surprise is that the location chosen is one which is difficult of access, in an area already having to cope with a multiplicity of users, and where the actual site (the Sands Car Park) will need flood precautions, besides removal of the city’s only coach park.

The actual planning application by Kier Property cannot surely gain approval from any impartial planning committee. It is in error over the critical use of the Development Plan, wrongly denying the value of saved policies from the Local Plan by misinterpreting national planning policy (NPPF). It fails to comply with NPPF recommendations on consultation, in that the public was suddenly presented with a fully worked-up scheme on 10-12th July, followed almost immediately (3rd August) by the submission of no fewer than 98 documents for full planning approval. (The Planning document claims that consultation was undertaken “during the design process.”)

The design itself, contrary to its claim, does not “embrace the character of the area”, nor “reflect the historic character of Durham City”. In fact, in both treatment and materials it contravenes saved local policies. If it relates to anything, it would appear to be Pennyferry Bridge. Increased air pollution from increased traffic is concealed by the survey of air quality extending across the whole city centre, with just the Sands Car Park itself providing the single reading for the area around. Thus the Claypath area receives no mention although already registering unsafe levels of pollution. Peak pollution occurs at the junction of Providence Row with Claypath, a steep road and signalised junction. The acknowledged increase in vehicles at this only egress from the area will now include at least a doubling of coach traffic, with the consequent increase in diesel fumes.

The application completely ignores the Authority's recent Conservation Area document, presumably because the proposal clashes with the acknowledged role of the 'green finger', which incorporates the coach park, encroaching towards the city centre. There is then what the applicants call 'planning balance', which purports to show a host of advantages which the project will bring. However, none - repeat, none - describes any intrinsic advantage adhering solely to the proposal: it is a catalogue of absolute values that one might expect to apply to any new proposal. For example, the boast is that an HQ at the Sands Car Park would release land for business use at Aykley Heads, provide hireable space and a cafe, there would be pride in the new building, it would encourage walking and cycling, there would be new trees and shrubs. Etc. Trustees submitted four pages arguing for the refusal of the application. In fact, so inept was the proposal and so inappropriate the site that Trustees requested the Authority to withdraw the application.

THE COUNTY PLAN

Before the sudden appearance of the planning application for a new County Hall, Trustees' attention had been focused on responding to the consultation on the Authority's *Preferred Options*. Although the approach second time round has benefited from the experience of the last EiP and Inspector's Report, the basic structure remains broadly the same.

The total housing need this time has been calculated using the Government's standardised approach and is therefore more realistic, although the County's projected population figure has since declined making the 'need' for housing lower than expected. Moreover, given an ageing population, there is a wide mismatch between a projected 87 per cent of extra households in the Plan period (to 2035) being in the 75+ years category, with only ten per cent of dwellings to be for this group.

Two sections of the City's Green Belt are retained for housing - Merryoaks is not included this time - which again are crucial for financing two proposed relief roads. The latter fact is ironic in that the Authority's pre-condition for a sustainable transport policy is to be dependent on the provision of new roads. Broadly, Trustees again argue that the traffic modelling of consultants employed by the Authority is not fit for purpose. Moreover, there is silence on the fact that the possible northern relief road was abandoned as recently as 2005-6 because it was judged not to be cost effective. Since that time traffic flows have actually declined, not least across Millburngate Bridge. The Trust summarises the western relief road as "a solution in search of a problem", whereas the County calculate that housing development at Sniperley "will justify" the road. (It will certainly be necessary to finance the road.) Both relief roads would have adverse environmental consequences, of course, while the western one traverses a historic battle field.

The University, justifiably, figures more prominently in this Plan. The County's recent policy on HMOs is included, along with one for PBSA. Although welcomed, both could be strengthened. In general, the Authority appears to grant favoured status to the University, referring to its "evolution". Trustees do not consider a 43 per cent planned increase in student numbers in ten years to be evolutionary. Given that Durham has the highest ratio of students-to-residents of any town in England, they have urged the Authority to adopt what is already planning policy in Oxford, namely, that managed accommodation be an enforceable pre-condition of any University application for additional academic or administrative floorspace. (Without such a policy, many more houses will be converted to student HMOs.)

ABOUT TOWN

Pride of place in Trustees' eyes was the return of a teapot. On the morning of 15th June the **Trust's golden teapot** was hoisted into position on the frontage of 73-74 Saddler Street, the new premises of Newcastle Building Society. The latter, as delighted as Trustees to see the glistening piece of street



Trust Teapot being hoisted into position

us by discovering that the pot had originally been golden-coloured, not black.) Thanks are also due to **WJM Quigley Ltd**, who fixed the teapot with a minimum of fuss or disruption to pedestrians and none to traffic. Finally, not least, Trustees' gratitude rests with colleague **Dennis Jones**, who took the initiative at all stages of the process.

The remaking of the **City centre** has continued apace throughout the summer. While residents have become accustomed to the disruption and inconvenience, for visitors one wonders the extent to which anticipation has been tempered by reality. 'Arrival shock' will have been greatest for those who dared to find their way into the ill-functioning car park beneath The Gates, followed by threading their way through the building site above ground. The succession of empty shops in Silver Street would hardly have lifted the spirits, while on the peninsula they may have encountered the disruption of roadworks in the Baileys or in the staggered programme of work in Owengate. Finally arriving at the cathedral, the north door has recently been boarded up, with directions to enter via the Galilee Chapel.

furniture in position, very kindly presented an iced cake, with teapot outlined, and coffee to Trustees and members. The honours were performed by **Kathryn McLaughlin** (head of corporate communications of the Society) who had been enthusiastically helpful from the beginning

Missing from the celebration, unfortunately, was the conservator, **Wendy Somerville-Woodiwis**, who went the extra mile in examining and conserving the item. (It was Wendy who surprised



Kathryn McLaughlin and Dennis Jones, with Teapot in position

The resurfacing of **Elvet Bridge**, restoring it to the design of Tony Scott, was completed in the late summer, eight years after the City centre remodelling, from which it was inexplicably omitted. One expected item which has not emerged concerns the **Archimedes' Screw**, which is related to the Passport Office. Originally an information board was expected explaining not only the working of the screw, but also referring to the Bishop's Mill which was demolished. Instead, the screw is boxed in and the area nearby used to store industrial-size waste bins.



Encased Archimedes' Screw and Bins, Freemans Place

structure in the middle of the housing project. Thus, the housing in 'Aykley Woods' is now well advanced, and the new police HQ was opened in 2014, but the mast is still in sections awaiting

Another feature which is still awaited is the re-erection of **Ove Arup's radio mast** at Aykley Heads beside the new police headquarters. Erected in 1968 beside the then new police HQ, and listed in 2003, the original intention was to demolish both building and structure, and sell the site to finance a modern headquarters. The mast, if left, would have sterilised part of the site to be sold for housing. The Trust objected to the demolition of the mast and Arups supplied plans for its dismantling and re-erection. The solution offered by Arups was then shown to be infinitely more cost effective than leaving the listed



Sections of Ove Arup's radio mast awaiting re-erection



River scene reflected in glass cladding to The Gates

erection next to the new headquarters. Why the delay? For reasons of maintenance and health and safety, we are informed.

The facing of the widened entrance into **The Gates** from Framwellgate Bridge with black marble - actually glass - provides a **perfect reflection** of the castle and cathedral rising above the riverbanks. An opportunity for an unusual selfie?

PERSONALIA

At their first meeting after the AGM Trustees elect the chairman for the ensuing year. This has for some time become a straight-forward decision, since **Roger Cornwell** has been the obvious choice. This year, however, with his election to the Town Council - and chair of the planning committee - he stepped down, but agreed to serve as vice-chairman. Our new chairman is **John Lowe**.

D.C.D.P.