

# CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

## BULLETIN

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### TRUST LECTURE

The Trust's spring lecture will again be 'on the road' and give members a chance to see and experience this year's winning architectural building from the inside. And to hear from the architects themselves, for we are privileged to have the architects responsible for the structure, **Paul Hopson and Neil Turner**, who will speak of their parts in *The Concept and Designing of the Science Learning Centre North East* on Saturday 24th March at 2.15pm. Ample car parking is available at the Centre, which is on Front Street, Pity Me (on the east, or right-hand side coming from the city centre).

### ARCHITECTURAL COMMENDATION OF THE YEAR

Four very different buildings were seriously considered for this year's award. Each is a worthy addition to the architectural stock of the City. The one which was

adjudged by Trustees to be the outright winner, the **Science Learning Centre North East**, responded best to a critical assessment of key factors - overall challenge, adaptation to site, unity of design, interplay of form and function and use and quality of materials and detailing.

The building is seen to best advantage from the footpath through the playing fields of Framwellgate School. From here a low, compact, predominantly white-faced building is seen perched on the edge of a small rise at the edge of the field. The pavilion nature of its central glazed rotunda, capped by a smaller flat-topped version, gives it an almost maritime air, set as on a raised beach above a calm green sea. What could be a flag pole, however, proves to be a wind turbine - a marker of its science credentials. (It functions as a training and curriculum-updating conference venue for science teachers.) Appropriately, photo-voltaic cells, solar panels and even an electric car hook-up point are incorporated.



Science Learning Centre North East - from the east (D. Jones)

Inside, the flexibility of sound-proof dividers between laboratories is supplemented by equipment which is as mobile as conventional furniture. In contrast to specialist laboratories and seminar rooms, the light and spacious rotunda constitutes architectural space of the highest order. Allusion to its science pedigree is subtly suggested by a unique, interactive sculpture in the ceiling rotunda and, underfoot, by liqui-floor circles inserted in the laminate surface. To refer to this space as a café, because of the provision of drink-making facilities, is to grossly undersell its design quality.



Science Learning Centre - from the south (D.Jones)

The Centre evolved through a 'design and build' contract. The initial conceptual drawings and sketches were by Dennis Findley and Stuart Fisher in the Building and Design section of Corporate Services in County Hall. Critically, these were then given definitive form and detail by Neil Turner of the Howarth-Litchfield Partnership of Durham. The contractors were Surgo Construction, under the leadership of Brian Reston.

**The Josephine Butler College**, the latest - and last - University college, represents the most dramatic addition. A central earth mound is a distinctive landscape marker, while the raw nature of any landscaping for the South Road Park and Ride facility currently lends increased visibility. The architect of the drama is David



Looking from mound over reception buildings of Josephine Butler College (D.Jones)

Allsop of Gotch, Saunders and Surridge of Northampton, the contractors, Laing-Orouke.

The approach road aims directly for the mound. In the opposite direction, from the top of the mound, the road can be seen to be aligned to the tower of the cathedral. The angle of the slope of the mound is the same as that of the flat roofs of the two prominent reception buildings. (Consequently, the latter's grass roofs cannot be appreciated - except, perhaps, from the cathedral tower.) The two buildings are the social hub, with reception office, meeting rooms, bar, shop, laundry, etc for Josephine Butler and also for the adjacent Ustinov College. The three residential units - inflated domestic villas in brick and render - form part of a semi-circle around the far side of the mound, the semi-circle being completed by identical villas for Ustinov College. (The architect would have preferred at least a change in brick, but uniformity was the decision of the City's planners.) Overall, therefore, the undoubtedly dramatic landscape statement of the project contrasts with a certain lack of clarity in its social functioning.



Rivergreen Centre - from the east (D.Jones)

**The Rivergreen Centre**, located at the far end of the northern service road at Aykley Heads, is a large two-storey office development designed by David Kendall of Jane Darbyshire and David Kendall of Newcastle. (Any structure associated with this practice and Rivergreen merits attention.) The Centre's own literature accurately describes it as "a low impact, environmentally sensitive building". Solar panels, 'windcatchers' for ventilation, wood-pellet burning boilers, sedum blankets (slow-growing succulents) on the roof, recycled rainwater, fully justify the description. A naturally-lit interior of high quality is arranged in radiating wings which look out onto informal landscaping.

With a high degree of timber in its construction, and sited as if emerging from the young woodland, the low building has a distinct Scandinavian aura. It sits naturally in the landscape, an impressive essay in informality. The

same informality, however, is at the expense of a certain order and legibility. Thus, its front elevation is much subdivided, such that the main entrance is not immediately evident. The accompanying roofline is similarly broken by an informal arrangement of several different pitches of varying angles. Informality even extends to the layout and 'green' nature of the area devoted to the parking of vehicles.

**23 a,b,c Neville Street** present an exemplary piece of domestic infill in the centre of the City. Coursed rubble walls, stone lintels to doors and windows, and with brick chimneys rising above reclaimed slate roofs, the buildings complete perfectly the continuity of the streetscape of the mid-19th century terrace lining the steeply rising street. The previous recessed, flat-roofed offices are already forgotten: their exact position in the terrace is only detectable to the inquisitive by the numbering attached to the doors. The architect, Jason Gibbons, of the Hope-Howe Partnership in Newcastle, has done everything right and is to be congratulated.

## **KASCADA (ICE RINK) : INSPECTOR'S REPORT**

The Inspector's Report of the called-in Inquiry into proposals for the former Ice Rink site was released in late October. The Trust's case, summarised in Bulletin 61, and summarised below in bold type, was comprehensively vindicated. The following quotations from the Report will show the extent to which the Inspector rejected the case put by the City Authority and for the developers.

### **1. There was a Surplus of Housing:**

"There is an overprovision of housing in relation to the requirements of the Local Plan and Regional Spatial Strategy" (para 76). "There is no need for the housing proposed." (para 80)

### **2. The proposed Building was inappropriate for the site:**

"...given its scale and massing in particular, the proposed development would not be of high quality, would not integrate with the existing urban form of the area or with the natural or built environment" (para 79).

"...given their height and scale relative to the Walkergate complex, their proximity to the river bank, and the uncomplementary north elevation, the proposed apartment buildings would be prominent and intrusive in views from Millburngate Bridge, from Penny Ferry Bridge, from the north of the site and from Framwellgate Waterside" (para 68).

### **3. The proposed Development was unsympathetic to the Conservation Area and to the World Heritage Site:**

"The proposed development would harm the character and appearance of the Durham Conservation Area....and would

harm the setting of the World Heritage Site and the important listed buildings" (para 77).

### **4. The iconic View from Prebends' Bridge would be seriously harmed:**

"The apartment building would....be more prominent and intrusive in the view from Prebends' Bridge than the existing building....In any event, harmful development elsewhere does not provide justification for allowing a proposed development that would intrude to a greater extent than the existing building and would seriously detract from the view north from Prebends' Bridge" (para 74).

### **5. Bishop's Mill should, and could, be conserved:**

"The mill building may well be a replacement for one or more earlier buildings and it does, in this regard, serve as a reminder of the gradual development of the settlement. However, the historical associations have been undermined by previous alterations and extensions" (para 70). "If it were retained and renovated for re-use it is likely that future frequent flooding would result in the building being vacated and becoming quickly dilapidated and unattractive" (para 71).

Only with regard to Bishop's Mill, then, did the Inspector (and Secretary of State) disagree with the Trust's case. Overall, given his comprehensive disapproval of the project, one is surely justified in querying the judgement of the Planning Officer, who had instructed the Development Control Committee that " a refusal could not in the circumstances be reasonably upheld."

The reaction of the Leader of the Council, both in the local press and in Council-produced literature, was that it "cost us in excess of £30,000 for the public inquiry." Such comment also deserves a response. Leaving aside any reference to democratic processes, and responding solely on cost, the overall cost of the Inquiry could have been considerably lower had the Planning Officer, given his confidence in the scheme, - or another member of his staff - presented evidence at the Inquiry. (Instead, a consultant from Manchester argued the planning merits for the Authority - at a cost, it is reported, at £700 per day.) An even greater cost saving would have accrued if the Authority's case had been led by a member of its own legal department, and not by an outside barrister. (The Trust dispensed with legal representation, English Heritage employed a solicitor.)

## **HOUSING SURPLUS**

For some years Trustees have included in their objection to major residential developments the fact that the Authority is considerably in excess of its total housing allocation for the 15 year period of the County Structure Plan. No response to this specific comment was ever received. Now, at last, there is every sign that the

Authority will have to draw back from its apparent policy of disregarding the allocation from a higher body.

The expired or expiring Local Plan is being replaced by the Local Development Framework, in which the housing allocation for the next 15 years is to be determined by the Regional Spatial Strategy. There is also one further crucial difference from the Local Plan process. Although the latter concluded with a public inquiry before an appointed Inspector, the Report consisted solely of recommendations, on which the Local Authority then had the final say. (Thus, for instance, 148 houses have been built on the Recreation Ground, a greenfield site, at Ushaw Moor, despite the Inspector recommending that the proposal be deleted from the Local Plan.) Now, at the end of the new Local Development Framework process, the Inspector's Report of a public inquiry will go to the Secretary of State for a binding decision.

We are currently two-thirds of the way through the LDF process with the production of, and comments already submitted on, the Authority's *Planning for Housing* and subsequent *Preferred Options for Housing*. Curiously, housing numbers were omitted from the first document, but the second admitted a 41% overshoot of the Structure Plan allocation and then, without comment, proposed to continue the same policy which it ingenuously termed 'Regeneration and Affordable Housing and Limited Growth.' In view of the likely Regional Spatial Strategy allocation, Trustees calculated that the overshoot this time could be 100% in excess of the Authority's projected estimate.

Fortunately, Government Office North East, for the Secretary of State, agreed with the Trust's view. Its comments were severely critical, describing the Authority's Housing Document as having "serious shortcomings", disagreeing with the calculations and reminding the Authority that if alterations were not made, it could lead to the Document being withdrawn by the Secretary of State.

The third and final Document, the *Submission Draft* is awaited.

## STUDENT HOUSING BUBBLE BURST

An important component in housing demand in the last two decades has been the conversion of City centre properties from family homes to rented, multiple occupancy for students. The inevitable social, economic and townscape repercussions on neighbourhoods has been mentioned in past Bulletins. Now, with undergraduate numbers having levelled out and with the opening of a new college, demand has plummeted, and landlords, not least a few big organisations, find themselves in unprecedented times.

Just how different are the times is to be seen in the 150 or so premises with estate agent's poles advertising student properties to let. It is not a feature which improves the streetscape. One company even attached 5 metre-long advertising banners to several of its properties. Fortunately, they immediately disappeared when threatened with legal action. In addition to estate agents' poles, numerous front windows display notice 'to let'. In any other year notices in the same windows would have announced that the property was already let for the following session.

## A TALE OF TWO CITIES

Wigan: Developers of a three-and-a-half storey block of apartments have been ordered to demolish the structure because it was erected 1.57 metres higher than that for which planning permission was given. (An appeal was rejected.) The chairman of the Wigan council's planning committee remarked, "Developers cannot ride roughshod over the wishes of local authorities."

Durham: After much prodding by Trustees, the developers of Walkergate admitted their structure exceeded the permitted height by 2 metres. When Trustees asked for it to be lowered - not demolished - the Planning Officer declared it to be "a completely unreasonable request" and, instead, accepted a retrospective plan from the developers adjusted for the additional height.

## RECOGNITION OF THE TRUST

The Trust has been invited to nominate a representative to sit on the Co-ordinating Committee of Durham's World Heritage Site. This follows a long interest in the WHS culminating in what One North East considered "significant interest in the development of the Management Plan." Trustees were gratified at the recognition, and nominated your Secretary as the representative.

## NORTHERN RELIEF ROAD UPDATE

Members will know that the Northern Relief Road is hardly northern and will not bring relief, but, instead, threatens huge environmental damage to the green inner perimeter of the City by the imposition of an outdated and discredited solution.

The project emerged 'out of the blue' in the County's Local Transport Plan 2 for 2006-11. When given a cool response from Government Office North East, the Authority applied successfully for monies from the Transport Innovation Fund, a fund concerned with traffic management, not new roads (infrastructure).

It seems, however, that the County feels neither thwarted nor constrained. In January of this year Roger Elphick,

Head of Highway Management, wrote that the County was "testing the impact of various options, including congestion charging and infrastructure provision." The Northern Relief Road is infrastructure.

Further, it would seem that reasoned criticism is met by Alice-like logic. For instance, take two replies of Councillor Pendlebury, the County's Cabinet Member for Transport and Sustainability, at a public meeting last November in County Hall. One question related to the Authority's about-turn on the projected safety of the new road. In December 2004 the County's consultants, Capita Symonds, demonstrated there would be an increase in fatalities or serious accidents. But, within a year the County's Local Transport Plan submission claimed the reverse: there would be fewer accidents. The answer was:

Capita Symonds' work "was a factual report from the output of a computer analysis, and the consultants subsequently agreed with the Council's officers that generally new road schemes and reduced traffic on existing congested networks improve road safety."

Again, asked why other transport consultants, JMP, had scored 'heritage' at zero, meaning the Northern Relief Road would have no impact on Crook Hall or Kepier Hospital, although running through their grounds, Councillor Pendlebury replied:

"...whilst the road scheme would have some negative cultural/historic impact on the city, this was balanced out by the benefits that would be achieved by the removal of traffic from existing roads nearer to the peninsula."

Most recently, Mr Elphick has been quoted in *Transport Times* for 2nd February that "There is now public acceptance of the need for action in Durham." To use Councillor Pendlebury's logic, this unsupported assertion presumably needs no "factual" evidence.

If they have not already done so and have the facility, Members are urged to visit the website of the Northern Relief Road Action Group. ([www.savethevalley.org.uk](http://www.savethevalley.org.uk))

D.C.D.P.

## FOOTNOTE

At the end of 2006, membership of the Trust reached 492. The trend is upward and any day we may reach 500. Those figures are very encouraging. They are

probably the largest since our foundation in 1942 and we remain among the largest civic amenity societies in the country.

From this extensive membership base we are always looking for active Trustees to emerge. The current band of 15 is able and enthusiastic, but we would like to recruit up to five newcomers, especially from a younger age group, to bring us up to the full complement permitted by the Trust's constitution. Do consider putting yourself or a friend forward for nomination. Any of the Trustees would be happy to describe what is involved.

The Trust's address is:

City of Durham Trust,  
c/o Blackett, Hart and Pratt,  
Kepier House,  
Belmont Business Park,  
Durham.  
DH1 1TW.

M.E.S

## PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE FOR CONSULTATION

Listed below are publications received by the Trust in recent months. Members wishing to borrow any title should telephone Mary Sales on 378 1703.

Campaign to protect Rural England  
*Voice* Autumn 2006  
*Fieldwork* December 2006.

Civic Trust  
*Green Flag Award Winners* 2006-7.

Friends of Durham Cathedral  
*Newsletter* No 33 Autumn 2006.

Inverness Civic Trust  
*Newsletter* October 2006.

D. Lock Associates  
*Durham City Vision 2020*  
(Executive Summary) August 2006.

Planning Inspectorate  
*Report* to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government recommending refusal of conservation area consent and planning permission for the proposed re-development at the Kascada (former Ice Rink) site, Walkergate. August 2006.

M.E.S

**T**HE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST is a society set up in 1942 by local people who saw the need to conserve and encourage the appreciation of the historic City of Durham and its surroundings.

Our members are people who take a keen interest in what goes on in Durham City. They appreciate the role the Trust plays as a strong independent voice, free from party political agendas, that can put their concerns forward.

This leaflet tells you more about the Trust and how you can become a member.

### What do we do?

Most people first hear of the Trust because of the campaigns we run, for example to save Brown's Boathouse, to oppose the growth of large pubs in the City centre, and to get a Green Belt for the City.

Behind this lies a solid body of work: around 1200 planning applications are made to Durham City Council each year and the Trust reviews them all, and makes representations where appropriate. Once or twice a year we will put our views at a Public Inquiry. We also have input into the County Structure Plan and City Local Plan, which set the planning policies in the longer term. We also make representations to the Licensing Justices about new pubs and clubs.

We restored the statue of Neptune in the Market Place and the teapot in Saddler Street. We make annual awards to the architects and clients of the best new or restored buildings. The Trust has placed plaques on buildings of interest, and provided trees for sites such as Stockton Road and Old Durham Gardens.

The Trust keeps its members and the wider public informed by holding public meetings and lectures, by publishing Annual Reports, Bulletins, books, and leaflets about the City (see back of the membership form), and via its web site ([www.DurhamCity.org](http://www.DurhamCity.org)).

We co-operate with other City organisations and pressure groups. We have joined other bodies like ourselves by affiliating to the Civic Trust. We also consult with national bodies such as English Heritage.

### How do we do it?

The Trust is managed by its Trustees, up to 20 in number, who are elected from the membership by the members. There are no paid employees. The work of running the Trust is carried out by the Honorary Secretary, the Trustees, and other members who are able to give their time and expertise to the Trust. The Trustees meet monthly in Alington House, North Bailey. Members are welcome to attend these meetings, and may speak with the agreement of the chair. But if members want to bring anything to the attention of the Trust, they are encouraged to approach any Trustee, all of whom live in or around the City.

### So why not join us?

The effectiveness of the Trust depends on the support and size of its membership. We hope you will want to help the work we are doing by becoming a member. Please fill in the membership form (attached) and send it to:

**The Honorary Secretary,  
City of Durham Trust,  
c/o Blackett, Hart and Pratt,  
Kepier House,  
Belmont Business Park,  
Durham DH1 1TW**

## APPLICATION FORM

I/We wish to become a member of the City of Durham Trust and I/We enclose cash I standing order I a cheque payable to The City of Durham Trust.

Full Name & Address (capitals) Dr/Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms .....

.....(postcode) .....

Tel. No. ....

Email. ....

**GiftAid:** I pay income tax and, unless I cease to do so and notify the Trust, I would like the tax on my subscriptions and any donations to be reclaimed by the Trust.

Signed.....Date .....

.....**Current minimum annual membership subscriptions:**

Please tick *Please Tick*  
Ordinary .....£5   
Joint (couple).....£7   
Senior (over 60).....£2   
Joint senior (both over 60) .....£4   
Student.....£2   
Dependent solely on State Benefit...£2   
Life.....£100

Completion of the following Standing Order form will enable your bank to make the payment now for this year and on 1 January of each subsequent year. Most members pay by this method which is convenient for them and for the Trust.

### STANDING ORDER

To:.....(Your bank's name)

(address) .....

Please pay to the Co-operative Bank plc, 29 High Street, Durham DH1 3PL from 1 January 20....., and on 1st January in each year until further notice, the sum of: .....

£.....For the credit of the 'City of Durham Trust' (A/c number 50410022, sort code 08-90-70) and debit my account; number.....

Signed.....Date .....

Name (*capitals*) .....

Address (*capitals*).....

.....(postcode) .....