CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

BULLETIN

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TRUST OPEN MEETING

The spring open meeting will be held in the Calman Learning Centre, on the University Science Site, South Road, on Saturday 15th March at 2.15pm. The University has kindly agreed to open the building, which has won the Trust's architectural award for 2007. It will be a unique opportunity to look over this impressive structure in the company of Trevor Armour, the University's project manager for the scheme. We will assemble in the foyer of building at 2.15pm. Certificates and plaque will be handed over during the meeting. Do come!

(**The University is offering free parking to members. Enter from Stockton Road, at the barrier by the blue control box press assistance button and announce yourself as a Trust member; on raising of bar proceed to car park 200 yards ahead on the right-hand side)**

TRUST'S ARCHITECTURAL AWARD OF THE YEAR

Unconventional or modern architecture in Durham has to be both in the appropriate location and of the highest standard in order to gain acceptance in our historic city. The University achieved this with Dunelm House, which guards the river gorge and forms a single composition with Kingsgate Bridge. This year the **Calman Learning Centre,** on the University's Science Site, has passed the same test and is well deserving of the Trust's award for the best building constructed or restored in Durham District.

The prominent four-storey building is the focus, not only for the recent Earth Sciences building, from which it springs, but for the whole of the Science Site. In fact, it can be said to preside less over the Science Site than over Science City, for it is a place-making structure, one which creates its own context.

The design is at once both simple yet sophisticated, striking by day, stunning at night. Its innovative round façade of zinc panelling and coloured glazing of varying width stands in contrast to its surrounding neighbours, which are conventionally rectilinear and brick- built. On the top floor the panelling gives way to full glazing, with a surrounding outside verandah sheltered by the circular protruding flat roof. From the verandah is a view of the cathedral comparable to that seen from Mount Joy – if one can avert the eye from straying downwards to the tangle of pipes and flues on the laboratory roofs in the near foreground. Immediately below, however, in front of the building commendable attention has been paid to paved routes and landscaping.

The Calman Learning Centre (Photo: Dennis Jones)

Inside, the round structure lends itself to a series of tiered lecture theatres, the largest seating 400, each named after a distinguished University scholar. Appropriately for the Science Site, also, are the suites of computer terminals – and a 'technocrat café.'

The impressive structure emanates from Building Design Partnership, winners of the University competition in 2005. Within BDP the design credit belongs initially to John McManus, director of architecture in their Glasgow office. All other aspects were shared by BDP offices. The contractors were Laing O'Rourke of Newcastle, with John Osborne the project manager.

The **Clubhouse of Durham Amateur Rowing Club,** at the end of Green Lane, was also completed in the year and is a second building which has added positively to the architectural stock of the City. Although more capacious than the original clubhouse, which it replaced, an imposed condition was that it retained a similar profile. Its architects, Jane Darbyshire and David Kendall, may have designed with more panache elsewhere, but here, in a sylvan setting, it is entirely appropriate. Low and compact, with a monopitch roof, a prominent round window by the entrance alludes to its water or nautical connection. It was built by Dorin Construction, with BDN the lead consultants.

Inside, besides changing rooms, gymnasium and fitness centre and, of course bar and facility room, is an IT

Clubhouse of Durham Amateur Rowing Club (Photo: Denis Jones)

suite. The last-named is connected with outreach to schools, part of the government's 'Playing for Success' scheme, and indicative of the Club's wider role in the community. The whole project was aided by funds from various sources, including the Lottery and Sport England.

Hawthorn House, a new respite/short break centre at Newton Hall for adults with learning difficulties, is an exemplary example of interior behavioural design. The architect, Ian Scott (of Nixon Architects, Darlington), working collaboratively with the staff, has produced an environment appreciated by all. It is not too much to say that, throughout, there is a pervading atmosphere of a welcoming hotel – light and warmth, en suite units, fittings and furnishings. Nothing could be more removed from the original Hawthorn House in Pity Me, which it replaces.

It is a County Council project, founded through the sale of the former Pity Me premises. Perhaps the limited budget explains the generally disappointing external appearance. The minimalist projecting metal canopy at the entrance, not least, is an opportunity lost to signal arrival at somewhere exciting.

ELVET WATERSIDE: CALL FOR A CALL- IN

Now that the planning application for Elvet Waterside scheme has been submitted, Trustees have asked Government Office for the North East to issue an Article 14 with a view to calling it in for independent adjudication. It is a large and complex application, of more than local or regional significance, on a site partly owned by the Local Authority in a sensitive location within the City's Central Conservation Area and with implications for the World Heritage Site.

Trustees do not object to redevelopment on most of the site, but have serious reservations regarding several major aspects of the present scheme. In broad terms:

1. Views of the World Heritage Site will be impoverished, while the computer-generated images of all the views are poor productions and misleading.

2. The foundation for this new quarter of the City is to be a 'raft', raised two metres above the present flood plain. Apart from the logistics of importing a vast quantity of earth/rubble, repercussions on the appearance of both the bounding edge, especially that facing the Race Course, and townscape require close examination. The bulk of the development is to be housing, which will rise 3-4 storeys on the raised platform. (This compares with the present units which are almost all single storey.) Raising of the site level will also mean that many of the existing trees will be lost.

3. The development, on an area of high flood risk, is to balanced by a "compensatory flood storage site" upstream. The efficacy of flood amelioration, as well as downstream consequences, is not clear.

4. Durham City Council is joint owner of the site. There is thus a coincidence of interest, with the Local Authority being both judge and jury. This has already brought controversy, when the Council persuaded the University to revoke its covenant on the former bowling green, thus permitting it to be added to the area for housing. (In the Local Plan the bowling green area is shown within the Area of High Landscape Value.)

Source: Durham City Newsletter, October, 2006

DRYBURN PARK HOUSE PUBLIC INQUIRY: "OUTRAGEOUS BEHAVIOUR"?

A Public Inquiry was held in early January as a result of an appeal by Taylor Wimpey against the refusal of planning permission for 42 dwellings on the Dryburn Park House site. The application had actually been recommended for approval by the Planning Officer but was voted down by the Development Control Committee. (The latter reflected the public opposition to the scheme, including that of the Trust.)

Having rejected the application, it was disappointing to see the Local Authority put up such a weak defence or justification for its action. No outside expert planning witness was engaged and neither head, nor deputy head, of Planning Services appeared. Instead, the officer's contribution was left to the Case Officer who had recommended approval of the scheme to the Development Control Committee. Not surprisingly therefore, under cross-examination, the Officer admitted that his professional opinion was that the Taylor Wimpey project remained acceptable.

The councillors, having exercised their democratic right to reject the application, had a moral duty to present the Council's case at the Inquiry. But, despite apparently having received official written invitations, none appeared. The upshot at the end of the Inquiry was that the appellant's barrister applied for costs from the Local Authority for what he asserted was "outrageous behaviour."

Councillor Wilkes spoke, emphasising that his comments were on behalf of ward residents, not for the Authority; four separate residents also contributed. Your Secretary presented evidence on behalf of the Trust. One of his key 'shots' however proved to be a dud. Taylor Wimpey's Pre-Inquiry Statement – a required document outlining the points which would be argued – claimed their case would show their scheme contributed to the City's need of affordable housing. Accordingly, evidence was accumulated which would refute the claim. But, at the Inquiry, the appellant's barrister remarked that this part of their Pre-Inquiry Statement had been a mistake, and that under the reserved matters application, now being argued, no affordable housing was necessary.

The Inspector's decision, announced just before the Bulletin went to press, was to allow the appeal by Taylor Wimpey. He considered that the Local Authority had acted unreasonably and awarded costs to the appellants.

20/20 VISION CONSULTATION: A WASTE OF TIME?

The *Durham City Centre Masterplan* is a crucially important document. Its role is nothing less than to "provide a context for new policies and proposals….The vision will guide the production of statutory policies… that will be adopted by the Local Development Framework" (Introduction, p.10).

The exercise began with the issue of a *Draft Durham City Vision for Public Consultation* in August 2006. The Trust, which submitted a five-page response, was but one of many who responded to the invitation to comment on the draft version during the consultation period. In early 2007, in a letter sent to all respondents thanking them for their views, there was the comment " The responses that have been received following public consultation have been instrumental in shaping the final version of the *Vision*." The Authority had apparently been responsive to public opinion.

Imagine the surprise, therefore, when a close reading of draft and final version reveals them to be near-identical documents. The only two significant additions – nothing was removed – were one paragraph on knowledge economy and four additional mentions of the World Heritage Site. Trustees were driven to ask for a list of alterations which had apparently been made. After five months, following a reminder, a 'list' came back identical to that detected by Trustees: essentially two "major" amendments. Two changes hardly justify the statement that "the responses …have been instrumental in shaping the final version."

Public consultation, like public participation, comes in different guises, is accorded varying attention and thereby achieves varying success. In this instance, where the final version is 99.5% identical to the draft, one must assume (a) that the Local Authority got it exactly right first time, and/or (b) that the public suggested no better or preferable alternative on any of the numerous elements and proposals. Trustees do not accept the first and do not believe the second.

20/20 VISION AND THE MARKET PLACE

The Vision *Masterplan* is quite emphatic that 'time is up' for the Market Place as we know it, being variously described in the document as "anywhereville", "a service yard for adjoining shops", "cluttered with street furniture", and "with poorly conceived hard landscape layout". (Most recently a press statement on the redesign of the Market Place, mentioning the possibility of removing the statues of Lord Londonderry and Neptune, was only repeating the past oral comments of officers concerned with the Vision programme.) Such a condition "demands a fresh start for the Market Place secured through an international landscape design competition."

A drastic programme, which appears imminent, requires a serious response. Several points may be made.

(1) A belittling of the existing compared with what is promised leads to a questioning of the judgement of those in charge. Such comments are certainly less than professional.

(2) An international design competition is unnecessary – laughable almost. The basics are already in place: one is not starting with a carte blanche, as was the case, say, with the open car park at the foot of Claypath, now occupied by

a competition-winning Millennium Place. (Outside consultants have a role to play when a particular expertise is lacking locally, as in the City's *Lighting and Darkness Strategy,* but, surely not for the Market Place.)

(3) The obvious time for a competition here was immediately following pedestrianisation in the mid-1970s. Even then a competition was eschewed, and a highly appropriate floorscaping scheme designed by the City's own Planning Officer, Anthony Scott. He had the initiative to turn away from a simple 'paving and planter' solution, as almost universally applied elsewhere, and reconstructed a street scene and Market Place entirely befitting our historic city with its northern, no-nonsense quality.

(4) Finally, a detail for those who have difficulty with the cobbles. Again, an appropriate resolution is at hand and need not mean replacement. Proper binding in the interstices between the cobbles is the answer – along with proper maintenance, of course. Hundreds of (tourist) towns throughout mainland Europe illustrate what can be achieved but, even in our own city, the example of the surface of South Street suggests what might be achieved.

DURHAM BROADCAST

The Durham Difference: the Story of Durham University (James & James, London, 2007), by Nigel Watson, is a readable volume on the evolution of our University. The high proportion of illustrations, including several of the city in general, give the impression of a coffee table book, while the author does not pretend it to be the definitive work on the topic. That said, the quality of the text and its broad focus – academic, college and student life – constitute an satisfying overview. A disproportionate time is devoted to growth since the second world war, but, then, since that time the institution has increased more than twenty-fold. Moreover, the earlier period has already been covered in some detail by JT Fowler (1904) and CE whiting (1932).

In *Durham City Past and Present* (Breedon Books, Derby, 2007), Michael Richardson has moved from publishing volumes of past pictures of the city to comparing these scenes with their modern equivalent. Illustrations are arranged according to six different sections of the city. The depicted past – Durham as it was – varies in time: the earliest date from 1870-80; those with shop frontages prominent are often about the time of the first world war; the dramatic townscape repercussions of the 1960s changes, not least those related to the 'through-road', are strongly represented. The last group is of particular interest in that, for many, they record scenes remembered by today's citizens.

Selection from among nearly two hundred 'then' and 'now' comparisons in this unique collection will be a personal matter. That said, attention may be drawn to one photograph which in fact captures the changelessness at the heart of the city. As befits the special scene before the camera, 'Durham Cathedral and Fulling Mill from South Street Mill c.1875' by Thomas Heaviside is as much an evocation as a record. By placing a reflective gentleman and captivated child in the foreground, the photograph depicts what in the art world would be termed a mood landscape.

OBITUARIES

Enid Hart died in early October. A Trustee from 1992-2003, Enid brought a combination of realism and historical perspective to our table. We respected her appreciation of Durham, but her historical prowess and distinction were widely acknowledged far beyond the City. In the early 1960s she accompanied Rosemary Cramp on the latter's earliest excavations at Wearmouth and Jarrow. Later she became the first lady president of the Society of Antiquities of Newcastle upon Tyne. She was also membership secretary and Trustee of the Durham Victoria County History Trust. In short, one of those to whom many have been indebted.

Dr Kenneth Ashby died in early January of this year. Ken was a giant in environmental matters and a tireless campaigner for the community good. He was a Trustee for 47 years, our longest serving member. He was equally active in the Campaign to Protect Rural England, serving as county president for many years, and also in the Ramblers' Association, where he was the local chairman and in 1976 elected its national chairman.

In a life devoted to the public good, his greatest triumph was Flass Vale, both in the campaign to save it – developers had begun tree-felling – and in getting it registered as common land. He was prominent in many a public inquiry, as well as at examinations in public of both County Structure Plans and the City's Local Plans. In later years he remained equally driven to environmental debate, despite the obvious fact that it was at considerable personal cost as movement became increasingly difficult. When in 2004 he finally had to concede defeat, he was made an honorary life member of the Trust, only the second in our history.

An era has passed, and in acknowledging our debt to Ken, it would be proper to send with our condolences to his wife, Gwladwyn, our gratitude for her effective local 'research' which at times provided key evidence to support her husband's arguments.

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