

# CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

## BULLETIN

Number 84

Spring 2018

Registered Office: c/o Blackett Hart & Pratt, LLP  
Aire House, Mandale Business Park, Durham. DH1 1TH  
Website address: [www.durhamcity.org](http://www.durhamcity.org)

---

### LECTURE

At our spring Open Meeting **David Butler** will give an illustrated lecture entitled '**Durham and its Turnpikes**'. The speaker is a distinguished historian who has written and lectured for many years on a variety of aspects on the city and environs, largely focussing on the 19th century. To many he will be known from a series of highly informative local walks. His lecture to the Trust will be on the development of Turnpike roads in the county and their impact on the city. It will be held on **Saturday, 24th February, at 2.15pm** in Elvet Riverside 1, in our usual room, 141.

### TRUST TEAPOT

Members will have noticed the disappearance of the Trust's teapot from the frontage of 73-75 Saddler Street. Advantage was taken from the extensive refurbishment of the premises on change of occupants to remove the teapot in September for a close-up examination of its condition. (It was last examined in 2009.) A York-based conservator has supplied a detailed and encouraging report, along with an estimate of repair, which Trustees have accepted. The new occupants of the premises, Newcastle Building Society, have been extremely supportive throughout, even to the extent of generously contributing to the refurbishment, for which we are most grateful. We expect that the teapot will return to Durham and 73-74 Saddler Street in March, after which it would not be inappropriate to hold a tea party. Do look out for further information – on the Trust's website ([www.durhamcity.org](http://www.durhamcity.org)) and the local press.

### NEW ARCHITECTURE IN DURHAM IN 2017

Trustees review of significant new architecture in 2017 concentrated on three privately-built student blocks – Ustinov College at Sheraton Park, Kepier House off Claypath and Ernest Place at Gilesgate. Although none merited the Trust's annual award, the first-named held considerable interest and merit as the focal point of the newly created environment of Sheraton Park.



Ustinov College, approach through Faraday Crescent.



Ustinov College Sheraton House.

**Ustinov College** consists of a restored neo-Georgian Neville House with a rear extension and a demolished and rebuilt Sheraton House, which face each other across a wide green focussed on a central mature cedar. Even without the plaque explaining three sculptures in what it calls an international sculpture garden, it constitutes a civilised urban space. The whole is completed by its setting, cocooned within a crescent of three-storey town houses forming what might be termed a distinctive ‘character area’. (It is an uplifting experience to approach through the footpath enclosed between the perimeter housing of Faraday Crescent, at the end of which the green with flanking halls open out.)

In terms of architecture, as opposed to townscape, Sheraton House, although making reference in contemporary idiom to Neville House in scale and mass, is less successful in its detailing. Thus, there is an exaggerated emphasis on the fenestration surrounds, a feature emphasised by the biscuit-coloured tiling. Much less obvious is the fact that the rear extension to Neville House uncomfortably approaches very close to (pre-existing) housing at its western end. Moreover, challenge, which is one of the assessment criteria, was effectively absent, since the existing relative positioning of the two houses, with a courtyard lawn between, determined the layout of the project.

**Kepier House** is an essay in brick, render and cladding, the layout of which is determined by its steeply sloping site. Its public face, along Bakehouse Lane and Mayorswell Close may be described as domestic in intention, for its scale is shown to be much larger when seen in comparison to adjacent family dwellings. (The architect doubtless was bolstered by knowledge of the comments of a past planning



**Kepier House from Bakehouse Lane**



**Kepier House: North residential blocks**

inspector.) Restoration of the former penitentiary at the end of the entrance courtyard, and its use for communal facilities, is welcome, although the challenging site makes it difficult to detect a ‘heart’ to the whole. The rear garden and steps drop steeply to the bottom, which is halted by a tall block running across the site, where the uneasy play of flat and mono-pitch roofs is exposed to full view.



**Ernest Place from Renny's Lane**



**Ernest Place rising above Tesco**

Of all the PDSA projects built thus far, **Ernest Place** is the most appropriately described by the term ‘student block’. At the planning stage - when the project was known as Renny’s Court - the County Conservation Officer’s wrote that location gave “freedom of aesthetic”. Situated between Tesco and a trading estate, the chosen aesthetic is a not inappropriate four-storey block, with much modular cladding, extending back from Renny’s Lane. As a consequence of building right up to narrow Renny’s Lane, it is impossible for the entrance to draw attention to itself until one’s very arrival. (Perhaps that explains an A-board on the pavement by the entry.)

## COUNTY PLAN

In November the County Authority at last published the proposed timetable for its County Plan. The *Preferred Options* will be published and consultation held in summer/autumn of 2018, and the *Pre-Submission Draft* in winter/spring 2019; submission to central government will then follow in summer 2019, followed by the Examination in Public in autumn 2019 and spring 2020. Thus, summer 2020 should see adoption of the Plan – ten years after the beginning of the process.

From the first stage of the revised Plan, *Options and Issues* in 2016, it is evident that Durham City will again figure large. Within this, the role of Aykley Heads is destined to be the major catalyst as a high class business park. It was so under the last, withdrawn Plan - 6,000 employees and all - the difference this time being that its importance has been announced in advance - and in hyperbolic terms, its proposals being described as a “world class vision”. In acknowledging and accepting the potential, Trustees note that Green Belt land is avoided until a subsequent, third phase timed for the mid 2030s, beyond the time frame of the Plan which is now to emerge. During the second phase, Trustees note that the proposed demolition of County Hall and erection of a new headquarters in the city centre is to cost an estimated £50M.

## DUNELM HOUSE

Members will be aware that in March 2016 the University applied for a certificate of immunity from listing (COIL) for this distinctive building, leaving it exposed to the University’s wish to demolish it as part of a new Master Plan. When the Secretary of State announced she was “minded to approve”, it brought forth a host of submissions from distinguished architects, civic leaders and societies, including the Trust, of course. Historic England was commissioned by the Secretary of State to assess the building for listing, and reported in August 2017 that “it fully merits its place on the List at Grade 2.” (As English Heritage, it had assessed the building as list-worthy in 1995, but for some reason it was not registered.) In late October, despite this advice, the Secretary of State astonishingly concluded that Dunelm House did not reach the level to merit listing, and repeated that she was “minded to issue” a COIL. However, this was again “subject of any requests for a review of this decision within 28 days.”

Despite the double rebuttal, we still remain hopeful of a successful outcome. The October Conference on ‘Caring for Brutalism’, co-sponsored by the Trust, was a decidedly encouraging gathering, where, from the point of view of Dunelm House, its repair and refurbishment was considered by experts to be a decidedly viable course of action. Such views have since been submitted to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). Trustees sent in a five pages refuting the points listed by the consultant’s report submitted on behalf of the University, concluding with a summary emphasising the importance of the critical symbiotic relationship of Dunelm House and Kingsgate Bridge: the two structures form a single townscape composition, such that the loss of one would be severely damaging to the other, whether Dunelm House or Kingsgate Bridge.

More recently, a Crowdfunder Campaign has been started on line to bring together Newcastle School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape with engineers and others to test viable alternatives of repair and modernisation. .... And then, most recently, perhaps we might note that the January Cabinet reshuffle included the appointment of a new Secretary of State for DCMS.

## MAIDEN CASTLE

The University sports field on the Green Belt at Maiden Castle is an integral part of the University's new Master Plan. Trustees have been concerned, not only by the proposals, but also frustrated by the piece-meal nature of its submissions. Thus an application for artificial pitches made no reference to flood-lighting, which duly followed in a separate application immediately following approval of the first. Again, the major application currently submitted begins by reminding the Authority that "a planning application has already been approved for the first phase." The implication for the 'second phase' is obvious.

Amendments, some of them late are also cause of frustration. The current application must have set some sort of a record: no fewer than 89 items were submitted in June (and responded to by Trustees); then, presumably as a result of County Authority advice, another 79 amended documents appeared in early December (again responded to within the 28 days permitted); then, in early January yet a further nine amendments arrived. (The Authority itself may find it difficult to 'keep up' judging by the fact that at the time of writing two of its consultants had yet to respond to the December tranche of amendments.)

At the heart of the present proposal is a near-doubling in the floorspace of existing and new building; it will also be significantly higher. However, such building on Green Belt is justified by the University claiming that the "severity of harm will be diluted by the presence of existing building...the site already reads as developed .... therefore its essential character will not be changed." The University does however acknowledge its proposal to be "inappropriate development" as defined in Green Belt in the National Planning Policy Framework, but rests its case on what it perceives to be a loop hole in the Policy. Namely, that "in very special circumstances" the potential harm to Green Belt may be "clearly outweighed by other considerations."

The very special circumstances claimed by the University? - 1. The need for student sporting experience to be the best in Europe. (An aspiration, not need, surely. Durham is not a specialist sports college. Its current world-ranking is based on its academic record, not sporting prowess.) 2. Durham would lose students without improved sports facilities. (Current surveys report students to be highly satisfied with the facilities. In more than twenty years teaching at the University your secretary never met a single student who had chosen Durham because of its sports facilities. There is certainly no difficulty in recruiting highly qualified students.) 3. Absence of alternative sites. ( This claim was exposed as hollow with regard to the large tennis hall proposed in the June application: withdrawn when the Authority advised against its inclusion, the University quickly pencilled in an alternative site, away from Maiden Castle. Trustees pointed to further dispersed sites.) 4. Facilitate community sports provision. (A worthy aim, though among the "key benefits" to make it more attractive is an 1800-seat hall which could host events "which are not sport specific.") 5. Supporting testimonies from a host of sporting associations and clubs. (Presumably solicited; none made reference to "very special circumstances", presumably being unaware.)

## GENEROUS GIFTS TO THE TRUST

Last, but very certainly not least, Trustees wish to express their extreme gratitude for two recent generous donations. In the autumn there arrived an anonymous gift of £5,000. Even the postmark gave no clue as to its provenance, and so we must use this Bulletin to express our sincere thanks. The second came through a generous bequest from the will of Mrs Ella Wright. The link with Mrs Wright and her late husband, Richard, goes back to the 1950s, a few years after the formation of the Trust. Again, we express our sincere thanks.

**D.C.D.P.**