

## **NEW WORKS COMMITTEE**

The Trust's New Works Committee continues to monitor all planning applications and development proposals that affect the urban area of Chester and particularly the historic town centre. We criticise and object to planning applications on both policy and design grounds if we feel that the scheme does not achieve a high standard or threatens the quality of the city's environment and setting. We also support many schemes, but only submit comments where we wish to see refusal of planning permission or can suggest improvements to design. We have been involved in the discussion of several significant development schemes over the last 12 months, some of which have been reported in recent newsletters.

We were invited to attend the CWaC Planning Committee on 23<sup>rd</sup> January and 4<sup>th</sup> February to speak on behalf of the Civic Trust against the planning officer's recommendations for approval of two schemes. These were the proposed student accommodation at Tower Wharf (Ref: 13/03922/Ful) overlooking the historic canal basin and blocks of flats and houses beside the River Dee on the former bank headquarters building at Queens Park Road. (Ref: 13/04048/Ful). Both these schemes were refused planning permission by the committee against the planning officer's recommendations. The Civic Trust's and other objectors' contributions to the debate helped to sway the councillors towards refusal. Unfortunately, an appeal has now been lodged by the developers of the Tower Wharf scheme against the refusal of planning permission. The Civic Trust will be making representations to the planning inspector to support the reasons for refusal.

The application to convert the historic Backford Hall and outbuildings into dwellings and to build an additional 45 dwellings in the grounds involved development in the Green Belt. We objected on the grounds that some new dwellings would be built on previously undeveloped parts of the hall's grounds and this would erode the openness of the Green Belt. Despite our objections and those of others, the Strategic Planning Committee gave planning permission for the development. The officer's report argued that the total footprint of the new residential buildings would be no more than that of some modern buildings which were to be demolished. Despite the obvious expansion of the total urban area by housing, gardens, driveways and roads across the site, the report stated that 'the proposal would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt'. So you win some, you lose some.

The issue of student accommodation refuses to go away and the spread of student housing continues unabated and unguided by any planning policy. The council have recognised that a policy is needed and the Civic Trust and others were invited to contribute to the CWaC group on student accommodation on the 18<sup>th</sup> March; our full submission is on the CCT website. However despite this initiative, no policy has emerged to date and the issue of how to effectively plan for the rise in demand has not gone away.

Lastly, the planning application for the change of use of the former Grade II listed Odeon cinema to a cultural centre has now been submitted. We have already spent some time understanding, interpreting and considering the complex plans of this exciting new initiative and will be submitting our formal comments in due course. The emerging theatre scheme has already been described in the CCT June newsletter. Our initial impressions about the design are very good and we hope that the finished product will be a building of which Chester can be proud.

**Andrew D Pannell.**

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