



The Chester Civic Trust

Mr Gerald Meehan
Chief Executive
Cheshire West and Chester Council

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Dear Mr Meehan

Future of Chester Roman Amphitheatre and Dee House

The Executive of Chester Civic Trust considered this matter at its meeting on 6th September 2016 in the light of current public concern about proposals to dispose of Dee House to a commercial buyer on a lease of 150 years.

Chester Civic Trust is opposed to this course of action because it would remove from public ownership and control a potentially important asset for the citizens of Chester. For the foreseeable future the use and development of the site would be primarily determined by commercial considerations rather than the benefit of the city. The purchase of Dee House by the previous council was in order to ensure that the site would be used for public benefit and we believe that this intention should be honoured.

The Civic Trust has consistently opposed the demolition of Dee House. The building is itself an important part of the history of Chester and of the site. Chester's Roman history is important, but it is only part of the 2000 year history of building in the city. The amphitheatre is part of an area that includes, for example, Chester's original cathedral and the section of walls breached in the Civil War, and it needs to be interpreted in this context. In any case, because of the cellars beneath Dee House, it is unlikely that any part of the amphitheatre remains beneath it.

We recognise that some commercial use of Dee House will be part of any viable solution but we believe that a substantial portion of the site must be accessible to the public and that it should house an interpretative centre that makes use of the latest technology to tell the story of the amphitheatre and the surrounding area. We believe that this will only be ensured if the control of the site rests with the local authority. The council has rightly put developing Chester's cultural offer at the centre of its strategy for the city's economic development. Now that the "Storyhouse" centre is nearing completion, this should be the next major cultural project.

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In the “Manifesto” that the Civic Trust published prior to the 2015 elections, our main demand was that the council should focus on public participation – not merely consultation – in important decisions. Sadly, the approach taken in this matter has been the opposite. Any meaningful discussion has been rejected under the cloak of “commercial confidentiality” until plans have reached their final stage and options are restricted to “take it or leave it”. We believe that the level of public concern, indeed anger, which is now being expressed is a direct consequence of this secretive approach. We hope that the council will learn lessons from this and be ready to involve the people of Chester in a positive way when decisions of this importance are being taken in future.

Yours sincerely



Professor David Evans

Hon Secretary – Chester Civic Trust

cc: Cllr Louise Gittins
Chris Matheson, M.P.