

January 2021



Chester Civic Trust News

THINGS CAN ONLY GET BETTER!?

A message from the Chair....

I hope this message finds you well in these challenging times. A number of you will have already received your first COVID jab by the time this Newsletter arrives through your letterbox. We must all hope that there is no delay in the rollout of the vaccination and life, as we all remember it, will soon be restored to normal.

Meanwhile the core work of Chester Civic Trust continues unabated. Members of the New Works Committee carry on championing good architecture, planning and design. Our representations to Cheshire West and Chester Council on significant local planning applications are posted on our website - www.chestercivictrust.org.uk. Other members are engaged with campaigns to promote and protect Chester's cultural heritage.

We are immensely grateful to all the individual and corporate members who continue to support us. The COVID restrictions mean that we have lost all our income from letting out rooms in BLP and from fund-raising events. This means that we have been entirely dependent on your membership subscriptions to fund the upkeep of BLP as well as covering administrative expenses. THANK YOU!

You may remember that 2020 was the Diamond Jubilee year of Chester Civic Trust. As the pandemic took hold well-laid plans for celebratory events had to be abandoned. However I would like to assure you that events like 'Tea at Tatton' and the 5 day visit to the Fens will be rearranged as soon it is safe to do so. Priority bookings will be allocated to members who signed up for the visits last year. The lockdown has not prevented planning for future events! Speakers have been lined up for lectures and BLP social events. A 7 day visit to

UNESCO World Heritage destinations in Saxony and Western Poland based in Leipzig and Wroclaw has been researched. And a belated Diamond Jubilee Anniversary Dinner will be held whenever people feel it is safe to socialise together once again.

Please don't forget to let us have your nominations for the 2020 GOOD BAD and UGLY AWARDS. Last year's overall winner was the revitalised Chester Market followed by Deewater Grange care home, Hotel Indigo, St Mary's Centre in Handbridge and the George Street Pocket Park. Put on your thinking caps and let us know what's impressed you - and depressed you - as you've ventured out on your 'permitted' walkabouts.

Chester Civic Trust is still open for business!
EMAILS to admin@chestercivictrust.org.uk are checked every day.
TELEPHONE 01244 318415 answerphone and the LETTERBOX at Bishop Lloyd's Palace are checked regularly.
Please stay in touch and let us know if you have any queries or concerns.

All best wishes,

Christine
(Christine Russell : Chair Chester Civic Trust)



REVITALISING THE Hi!STREET

CHESTER HIGH STREET HERITAGE ACTION ZONE

Last year Chester became one of Historic England's High Street Heritage Action Zones (HAZ), an initiative to revitalise historic high streets which will bring investment into one of our most historic assets, the Rows. Despite the struggles of the High Street over the last year, positive progress has been made with the programme which began in April 2020 and will run until 2024.

Improvements to the walkways and stall areas of the Rows will be undertaken to complement the creation of a new boutique hotel at 2-8 Bridge Street. The programme will also deliver a new Shop Front Grant Scheme which will launch in April 2021. The HAZ will offer an 80% grant to eligible businesses to repair, restore or enhance shop frontages, in turn providing a lasting impact on the quality of Chester's historic fabric.

Email cgp@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk for further information.



The University is planning to open a vacant shop as a Media and Journalism Hub in Watergate Street. Place for the Arts Chester have already established 2 pop-up units on Bridge Street and Northgate Street and feasibility work is ongoing to explore the development of further pop-up units.



The installation of digital interpretation cases to tell the story of the Rows is under consideration. During February and March, the Chester Business Improvement District (BID) will be consulting with businesses on the Rows through a survey to investigate the understanding of heritage obligations and opportunities. This is intended to inform the development of a Business Guide.

Chester Civic Trust is one of the partner organisations for the HAZ. We are promoting the concept of an 'Urban Room'. This would be a space, perhaps an empty shop unit in Watergate Street, where major city development schemes could be displayed and meetings held with community and business groups. Watch this space! Volunteering opportunities for Civic Trust members may follow!

Christine Russell

RECENT PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Since the last newsletter in October and the continuation of remote working, the New Works Committee has continued to monitor and comment on planning applications in Chester to ensure that high standards of quality, design and sustainability are upheld.

HOTEL DEVELOPMENT AT 2-8 FOREGATE STREET

The most significant development, (application reference 20/03915/FUL), is a proposal to create a new hotel in buildings on the corner of Foregate Street and St. John's Street by converting the upper floors of the Lloyds Bank and adjoining retail premises at 2-8 Foregate Street, which are both listed buildings. The more functional buildings to the rear, accessed from St. John's Street and adjoining the city walls will be demolished and replaced with new buildings to accommodate hotel rooms and a restaurant/bar on the ground floor with access to outside patio seating areas. The existing shop units on Foregate Street will be refurbished.

Historic England supports the scheme and in particular has raised no fundamental objection to the demolition of the rear buildings. The council's Design and Review Panel support the scheme but are concerned about the economic viability of the hotel and the need to ensure the design enables the building to adapt to new uses should the hotel use cease thereby ensuring the future of the listed building.

The Civic Trust supports the scheme in particular the demolition of the rear buildings as a fair price to be paid for a viable hotel development that will ensure the future of the remaining listed buildings, the retention of vibrant retail uses on the street level and its contribution to the health of the city centre as a whole.

The comments made by the Civic Trust on the planning application are as follows:

'The Civic Trust welcomes the retention and refurbishment of the retail units facing Foregate Street and support the view of the Design and Review Panel that the development should be future proofed against the oversupply of hotel accommodation in the city.

However, the requirement for vehicle access to the electricity substation off St. John's Street compromises the design with an unattractive new entrance which disrupts the street scene.

Overall, the development will be a positive contribution to the conservation area with sympathetic new buildings and new life for the existing listed buildings on Foregate Street.'

WALMOOR HOUSE

Another application (ref: 20/3796/LBC) that has drawn our attention concerns a proposal to add a ground floor extension to Walmoor House, a grade 2* listed building which sits above Sandy Lane overlooking the River Dee in a prominent position within the Dee Banks Conservation Area.

Walmoor House is a building of national significance, representing in design terms the culmination of John Douglas's career as one of the most influential and distinctive architects working in the area during the 19th century.



Decisions on extensions to any listed building always have to weigh whether it is best to either replicate the materials and style of the original building, design a high-quality modern addition that complements and enhances the original or whether the need to protect the building is such that no addition should be allowed at all.

In this case we consider that the proposed extension at the lower ground floor does not tip the balance in favour of an addition, however much careful thought has gone into the proposal. We have objected on the grounds of it being an unsympathetic addition to this essentially unified and high-quality structure.

Debates about whether a listed building alteration or extension complements or conflicts with the integrity and character of a building were a common feature of New Works Committee meetings in pre-pandemic days when we could meet up in person. We look forward to meeting together soon when it is safe to do so.

Andrew Pannell



involved professional help in the production of a local Design Code and a Housing Needs Assessment.

The draft plan is now ready to enter its final public consultation, which will run

For the past six years, Civic Trust members Jean and David Evans have been part of the steering group developing a Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) for Upton, Bache and Moston on behalf of Upton Parish Council.

As a Parish Councillor, Jean has been chairing the group and David has been a community representative. An NDP gives local communities the opportunity to influence planning and development decisions in their area. Once adopted it has to be taken into account in determining all development control applications in the neighbourhood, so the process for approving one is stringent. Because Upton is a large suburban community (population 8,000+) that includes a major hospital, zoo and army base, producing a draft plan has been a complex process with efforts at community engagement – some more successful than others - throughout. It has also

from 8th February to the 22nd March. In the current circumstances many traditional means of consultation are not possible, so the main focus has to be online engagement, whilst not forgetting the needs of less “digitally connected” residents.

We anticipate that Civic Trust members generally, especially those living in and around Upton, may be interested in the consultation. From 8th February onwards the relevant materials will be available via the Upton Parish Council website at:

<https://www.uptonbychester.org.uk/consultation-information--plan.html>

Hard copy materials will also be available from Upton Branch Library (Covid-19 regulations permitting) or by contacting the NDP team by phone or text on **07734-768147**.

THOMAS BRASSEY – Local Hero

Amidst all the trials and tribulations of the past 10 months, there is some good news to report on behalf of the Thomas Brassey Society.

A new interpretation panel was unveiled outside Chester railway station on 8th December. It celebrates the life and achievements of Chester’s “unsung hero”, Thomas Brassey who died exactly 150 years ago on 8th December 1870.

Brassey was born at Buerton, Aldford a few miles south of Chester in 1805. His career began as a trainee surveyor on Thomas Telford’s Shrewsbury to Holyhead road through North Wales. He learned a lot about civil engineering, became a quarry manager on the Wirral and then set up his own business as a railway contractor. This coincided with the start of ‘railway mania’, and Brassey was at the forefront, building one third of all the railways in the country during his lifetime.

Thomas Brassey’s enterprising business was not confined to Great Britain. He quite literally built railways all over the world, on almost every continent, and at the height of his career he employed an estimated 80,000 men in his global workforce.

The new interpretation panel was funded initially by donations from Civic Trust members and then subsequently by the Thomas Brassey Society and

the Tyrer Charitable Trust. Its design and installation, however, is the result of a close collaboration with Network Rail, Transport for Wales and especially Jane Hebblewhite of Cheshire West and Chester Council.

The Thomas Brassey Society was inaugurated a year ago although some of its members have been lifelong Brassey enthusiasts. As many of you will know, the Society’s ambitions do not end with the panel. There are statues of Stephenson, Brunel, Gresley and Locke around the country and we think Brassey deserves his own bronze sculpture here in Chester. The fundraising campaign will start in earnest next month.

For further information please visit www.thomasbrasseysociety.org or contact me via the Civic Trust office.

Stephen Langtree, Chairman TBS



Cllr Samantha Dixon unveiling the panel watched by John Whittingham (dressed as Thomas Brassey) and Steve Langtree

CHESTER'S NEW HOUSING ESTATES

- What do you think?

On the outskirts of Chester hundreds of new dwellings have been built or are under construction on 3 major new estates. The final number of housing units is likely to exceed 2500. During the second lockdown we, Karen Mckay and Christine Russell, put on our wellies and did walkabouts around the 3 sites. We have avoided in this article giving our personal views on the individual estates. Rather we thought you may like to consider visiting the Saighton Camp development in Huntington, Upton Dene off Liverpool Road or the Wrexham Road development with a view to making a nomination for the Trust's '2020 'Good, Bad and Ugly Awards' ?



SAIGHTON

The land at Saighton Camp was sequestered from a local farmer for a military training camp in the late 1930s. In the early 1980s the camp became the centre for the Royal Army Medical Corps before being declared surplus to requirements by the MOD and sold to developers.

The development is almost complete and consists of around 1000 dwellings. The initial development was Crown Fields by Taylor Wimpey, followed by three Redrow schemes. The houses are varied in design, using different

coloured bricks and mixed rendered and non-rendered facades. The styles are modern Georgian and revived Arts and Crafts.

A new Huntington Primary School was built on the former playing fields of the army camp. The Cooperative Society has a supermarket at the entrance to the new estate.

UPTON DENE

This development is on land that was formerly the grounds of the Deva Hospital that was opened in 1829. The 1890s Italianate-style water tower is retained at the heart of the development. The developer is Morris Homes of Wilmslow. There is a public house and the Upton Dene Residential and Nursing Home at the entrance off Liverpool Road.

The dwellings are predominantly in redbrick with limestone dressings to reflect the original hospital buildings. The styles are modern Georgian and revived Arts and Crafts. There is a delightful neo-Georgian crescent of three-storey townhouses facing the 'dene'. Weaver Vale Housing Trust has work in progress on a development of 22 affordable homes on the site.



WREXHAM ROAD

The most recent development that is still under construction is for around 1,300 housing units on former green belt farmland off Wrexham Road. Taylor Wimpey is building apartments and houses, while Redrow is building three and four bedroomed houses. The houses appear to be varied externally with a preponderance of revived Arts and Crafts designs.

The developers have made funding available for the provision of a primary school, health facilities and local centre.

Karen Mckay and Christine Russell



CHESTER CITY GATEWAY

Chester Civic Trust has long campaigned for improved safety measures on Hoole Bridge for walkers and cyclists, better pedestrian access to the Station from Hoole Road and from the city centre; and improved links between the Station and the Bus Exchange.

Cheshire West and Chester Council in collaboration with Network Rail and London and Continental

Railways (the commercial property arm of Network Rail) have appointed a design team, 5th Studio, in partnership with engineering consultants, Arup, to create a Chester City Gateway masterplan for improvements to the rail infrastructure to enable more rail services to come to and through Chester plus ideas for the regeneration of the land around the Station for housing and employment opportunities.



The Civic Trust was pleased to be given the opportunity to put forward our views to the consultants on the priorities for inclusion in the masterplan. The first phase of the work has now been completed and recommendations will shortly be submitted to the local authority followed by public consultation.

Christine Russell



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The Civic Trust is grateful for the support of its Corporate Members.

Corporate Membership is available to professional practices, institutions, colleges, schools and businesses of all types in the Chester area.

Visit our website or contact Nick Clarke, nickclarke77@btinternet.com

Registered Charity number 504634

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