



## THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY Chester Civic Trust awards 2021

Despite the restrictions that the pandemic has imposed the Judges were pleased to receive a similar number of nominations overall as in previous years. That said, there were fewer building projects nominated in the good category this year which may be reflective of the delays in construction work that the first lockdown brought. There are a number of developments likely to feature next year, including the Leadworks which was nominated this year but which the Judges have declined to consider until it is finished, though noting that it shows some promise.

### THE GOOD

The Chair's special award this year goes to the only project that won unanimous praise from the Judges without reservation; the Hoole Alexandra Park Insect Homes and Interpretation Boards.



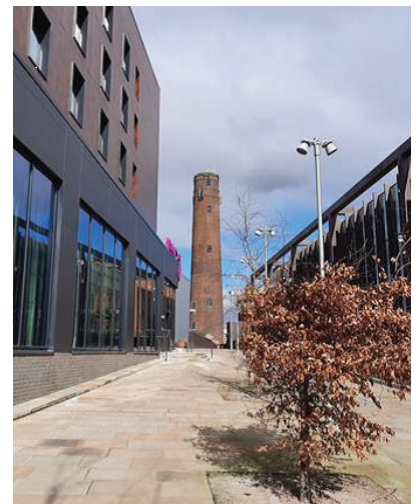
The panel felt this was a brilliantly conceived project that had been exceptionally well executed. The homes themselves are sculptural in design and provide a superb ecological and



educational resource that are a blueprint for what can be achieved in suburban parks. Place for the Arts, which uses empty shops to display the work of local artists, was also considered worthy of a good award, the Judges commenting that this was a good example of what can be achieved through a good idea, the drive to carry it through and local co-operation.

The final good award this year went to the way the Shot Tower is framed by the Moxy Hotel and Waitrose buildings when viewed from Boughton.

The view and perspective created is, in the view of the panel, tremendous though some criticism regarding lack of sense of place regarding the entrances to the two framing buildings was noted.

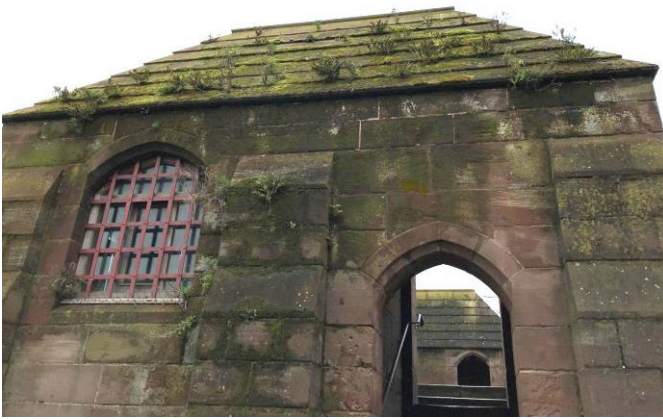


A Commendation was awarded to the renovation works on the City Walls at both the Northgate and the Watergate. The works have been completed to a high standard that is a credit to the Council though the delay in completing the work, while perhaps understandable in the current situation, is nonetheless regrettable. The judges also commended the Thomas Brassey Interpretation Panel at the railway station.



## THE BAD AND THE UGLY

Regrettably there were a good many nominations that the Judges agreed were bad and/or ugly. The most concerning trend that the judging panel particularly wishes to highlight is the general decline in maintenance of buildings in the City centre. This is something that has been noted before. Our hope in raising nominations in this category was that it would act as a prompt for improvement, but unfortunately things have got worse in this regard. The pandemic might be offered as the reason for some of the more recent neglect but whatever the cause, it is a situation that needs to be taken in hand quickly to avoid further deterioration which in turn makes the problem much harder to address.



The gateways into the City also remain of concern. Hoole bridge is very unattractive and the landscaping of the Sainsbury's hamburger junction lacks any design or imagination. The roundabout it replaced was home to mature trees and was attractive; not so its replacement. In addition, the multiplicity of traffic lights on nearly every approach is confusing and the proliferation of advice, warning and direction signs, together with lane signage, makes them effectively unreadable.

A third theme thrown up by this year's nominations was the arrival of gated communities in the City. The judges were referred to one such development, Alexandra Mews in Handbridge, and while the panel thought there were some particularly unfortunate design issues with that specific development (to the extent that it could be viewed from outside its gates), the general view was that gated communities were not in keeping with the area and are a trend to be discouraged, not least from the perspective of the potential harm to the sense of local community.

More particular nominations that the Judges consider worthy of mention include the removal of gardens in the area behind Bouverie Street, Denbigh Street and Cheyney Road. The gardens have been dug up to facilitate car parking. While there might be utility in that, the work has been executed poorly with the resulting areas looking unfinished and, frankly, an unpleasant mess.

The proliferation of anti terrorist barriers around the City were considered ugly, particularly the glut of signage around and about them. Likewise the south west porch entrance to the Cathedral was considered an unwelcome development though it is, we are told, temporary which slightly mitigated the panel's concerns.



The Judges considered that the shop frontage of Kingdom of Sweets richly deserved its multiple ugly nominations and the panel was left wondering how it was ever approved. The final Bad/Ugly award goes to the rear of the Grosvenor precinct facing Pepper Street. The building has never been what you might call attractive but the recent works seem to draw greater attention to that fact.



In addition to myself, the Judges this year were stalwarts Philip Harrison and Peter Hadfield and newcomers Jerry Spencer, Graham Catlin and Sarah Catlin. As always I would like to thank my fellow Judges for their time and commitment in assessing the nominations and providing intelligent and well considered feedback. It's always a pleasure to work with knowledgeable and committed people in whatever field and this is no exception.

**Nick Clarke**

# MAKING TRACKS

Postponed from last year, which was the 150th anniversary of Thomas Brassey's death, this model railway exhibition at Chester Cathedral will celebrate his remarkable achievements.

'Making Tracks' is part of the cathedral's reflection on journeys in life. It will be a 74 foot long model railway designed and built by Pete Waterman OBE, and friends. Details of the model remain a closely guarded secret, but we believe that it will include several distinctive features built by Brassey along the West Coast Main Line. The exhibition is due to open on 16th July and will run for at least six weeks.

Thomas Brassey was born near Aldford, six miles south of Chester in 1805. He was educated in Chester and then became a trainee land surveyor on Thomas Telford's Shrewsbury to Holyhead road. His "remarkable achievements" mentioned above include the construction of one third of all the railways in this country, three quarters of all the railways in France



and one in twenty miles of all those built throughout the world in the 19th century. Anyone who would like to find out more about Thomas Brassey and his Chester connections can contact me or look on the Thomas Brassey Society website: [www.thomasbrasseysociety.org](http://www.thomasbrasseysociety.org).

**Stephen Langtree**

# HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW THE FOREGATE STREET AREA?

**Five questions to test your local knowledge. Answers are to be found on page 7.**

1. In what street would you see this on the wall? For which organisation do the initials refer?
2. Where can you see this? What is the building?
3. Here is Prudence with her snake. On what building could you see her? Which organisation used her as its symbol?
4. Look at the gable of this building. The names of the cabinet makers, Lamont and Sons, can just be made out. They were important cabinet makers in Chester during the nineteenth century. What is the name of this building from where they worked?
5. Based on the ideas of the Improved Industrial Dwellings Company in London, where are these tenement buildings? Who was the architect?



1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



# LOCAL HERITAGE BUILDINGS LIST

Local Listing received an unexpected boost in 2020 when the Government announced additional funding of £700,000. This money was to be shared between 10 "countywide" applicants. In the event, however, there were so many applications that the funding had to be doubled to £1.5 Million which is now being shared between 22 successful applicants.

Cheshire West and Chester Council teamed up with Cheshire East and Halton Councils and, collectively, they have been awarded £70,000 - which is not a great deal for such a big task across a large area!

We understood that the plan was to employ an extra conservation officer on a fixed term contract, but these things take time and, in any case, there is a shortage of suitably qualified people. CW&C has therefore decided to use consultants for the first part of the job. They will adopt new digital software to establish a database linked to the Historic Environment Record. The database will make it easier for members of the public to nominate buildings and for everyone to access the information.

The Government has reiterated that the nomination process must involve the local community. Chester Civic Trust took the initiative seven years ago and

has already undertaken three pilot studies in Upton, Christleton, and Handbridge & Queen's Park. The last of these still needs a bit more work but, without adequate resources in the Council's conservation team, expansion into other areas has never been possible... until now.

Hopefully this extra funding will provide CW&C with a system which we, and many other groups around the borough, can interact with. We will continue to work in partnership with the Council and keep you posted.

**Stephen Langtree**



*Suitable for listing?*

## CHESTER TO BE A 'HERITAGE PORT'?

Chester Civic Trust is currently working with the Inland Waterways Association and Cheshire West and Chester council on an application to have the city's waterways designated a 'heritage port'. This scheme is promoted by the Maritime Heritage Trust and by allied organisations on the continent. Chester's port and waterway history goes back over 2000 years and many valuable elements of its trading heritage survive, but that heritage also faces many challenges. Designation as a Heritage Port would be a significant addition to the city's profile whilst also concentrating attention on those aspects of its waterways needing protection, conservation and sensitive development. Work on the designation document is well advanced and the application to the Maritime Heritage Trust should be submitted in the near future.

**John Herson**

*The Water Tower was built in the 14th century to defend the port of Chester and monitor shipping movements. Landlocked for years, it was again surrounded by water in January this year*

### **STOP PRESS:**

**The following has been received recently.**

"Chester Heritage Port nomination is fully accepted as the first Canal and River System Heritage Port and is now recognised by the Maritime Heritage Trust (MHT), National Historic Ships (NHS) and European Maritime Heritage (EMH). The ultimate designation of Heritage Harbours and Ports by Historic England has been delayed by the COVID lockdowns"



# New Works Committee

## WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR CHESTER'S SHOPPING STREETS

There are a number of recent trends in development that have caused the decline of retail trade in the high streets and town centres. Although this is a long term trend that began with the competition from out of town retail parks, the rapid rise in internet shopping, accelerated by the shutting of shops during the pandemic and the discovery by many households of the ease of delivery 'straight to the door' during the 'stay at home' lockdown has led to the closure of many traditional high street shops. Unfortunately this now includes Browns Department Store, part of the Debenham group that underpinned Chester's prime shopping area in Eastgate Street.



The Northgate Development may also attract shoppers away from Chester town centre's other traditional shopping streets and make the situation worse.

The Government's response unfortunately has been to exploit this trend to further their goal of loosening planning regulations and may only accelerate these trends. They have introduced a new use class (Use Class E. Commercial, businesses and services) that will enable changes of use from shops to many other business uses without planning permission. This is a radical departure from previous planning policy that sought to protect the integrity and viability of town centre and neighbourhood shopping parades by limiting the changes of use from shops to other business uses that do not sell the goods that meet the day to day needs of local people. They also protected the 'prime' shopping areas like Eastgate Street in Chester from dilution with ground floor business uses such as cafes and financial services that did not attract a steady flow of customers and sustain the high footfall needed for successful retail trading.

Civic Voice and the Chester Civic Trust objected recently to even more radical proposed changes to the use classes that would allow the change of use from the new Class E (Commercial, business and service) to residential without the need for planning permission. (MHCLG consultation on 'Supporting Housing delivery and public service infrastructure'. December 2020). The National Trust have also expressed strong opposition and The Royal Town Planning Institute has described the proposals as, 'a charter for unscrupulous developers'.

We fear that the loss of an active frontage due to a permitted change of use to residential from business use would rob the high street of its vibrancy and destroy the very concept of the 'high street' which has always been protected in development plan policies as the 'primary shopping area' through restrictions of non shop uses. 'Secondary shopping areas' that are part of the shopping centre but in more peripheral locations are normally designated for other town centre commerce uses but still to the exclusion of residential uses on the ground floor street level.

We are particularly concerned about the effect on town centres such as Chester that also coincide with Conservation Areas, where the uncontrolled changes of use of buildings and shops to residential and non retail business uses will fundamentally change the viability and uses of buildings that currently contribute to the dynamism and vitality of the town centre conservation area.

These changes have already begun to affect the vitality and viability of Chester's shopping streets. We recently considered a planning application at 15-23 Frodsham Street (previously a restaurant) for a change of use of the ground floor to Use Class E and subdivision to create 5 units (21/00497/FUL and 21/00498/LBC). The final uses of these units within class E will no longer require explicit planning permission so long as they are within this class, and subsequent changes will also be uncontrolled. These Class E uses are unlikely to sustain the viability of Frodsham Street as a vital part of the shopping centre although they will help to ensure the future of this listed building.

There are other changes that may bring new life to buildings which could increase the attractiveness of Chester for business and visitors. Applications for



hotel development are booming in Chester. We are currently considering an application for an 'aparthotel' including a rooftop swimming pool and restaurant at 26-28 Nicholas Street. This will involve the extension, alteration and conversion of former offices and building 2 new dwellings on a former car park. This application adds to a recent application for conversion of buildings at 2-8 Foregate Street to a hotel (20/03915/FUL) that thankfully retains retail uses on the ground floor.



15-23 Frodsham St. Photo by Chester Photographic Survey

It is feared that this loosening of planning controls does nothing to concentrate retail uses in the high street and may allow a dilution of shopping streets

into an amalgam of business, recreation and residential uses many of which do not attract customer footfall and present inactive and blank frontages at street level. If the government want to preserve the integrity, vibrancy and viability of high streets and town centres then a more holistic policy combining planning controls in development plans, town centre management, environmental and transport improvements, together with public support for new investment is required. Loosening of planning controls will only have a negative effect.

It is clear that these market forces and loosening of planning controls will continue to change Chester City Centre from a vibrant and regionally important shopping destination to some new role. But will it be able to ride these changes to create a place that will continue to attract people and visitors and serve residents with their services and shopping needs? Will market forces alone dictate this future or can the local authority together with the business community guide these changes to maintain the attraction of the city centre for visitors and residents alike?

**Andrew Pannell**

## CHESTER HERITAGE FESTIVAL 2021

### 'Telling the story of our city and its people'

In February 2020 our festival partnership was well on the way with plans for a programme of events which would be even bigger and better than 2019. Two months later, in the midst of the first 'lockdown', we bowed to the inevitable and cancelled CHF 2020.

By the autumn of last year there was still considerable uncertainty about live, participatory events taking place in June 2021. After looking at examples such as Gloucester History Festival, a decision was taken to organise a "virtual festival" in 2021.

This remains the case, but I think it's fair to say that it was easier said than done!

There has been no shortage of ideas. On the contrary, the steering group, now led by Cheshire West and Chester Council, has had to be very realistic about what is possible and affordable.

Marketing Cheshire and Destination Chester are playing a bigger role this year partly because a virtual festival could reach a very wide audience of potential

visitors to the city. That said, we remain committed to a programme of events that will be of interest to local people as well as to those who join us on-line anywhere in the world.

By the time you read this the festival website will have gone live and the homepage will direct you to everything we hope to include. This will consist of pre-recorded films, podcasts etc and live-streamed events during the festival between 18th and 28th June. If restrictions are lifted on 21st June and real, face-to-face events can go ahead we will use the website to give you as much notice as possible.

The range of topics and the numerous links to sources of further information will surprise you. So, please support our efforts and join us on-line at [chesterheritagefestival.co.uk](http://chesterheritagefestival.co.uk)

**Stephen Langtree**

# CIVIC AWARDS FOR DESIGN AND CONSERVATION 2021

The 'Cheshire West and Chester Civic Awards for Design and Conservation 2021' will celebrate the best examples of recent changes to the built environment.

Anyone can make a nomination for schemes large and small. There are separate categories for residential developments, commercial, retail, and industrial developments, and for the first time this year, a new category for projects which are low carbon and energy efficient.

Nominations are invited until the closing date on 30 June 2021. Eligible schemes must have been substantially completed between 1 June 2015 and 31 May 2021. Guidance notes and the nomination form can be found on the Chester Civic Trust website: <https://chestercivictrust.org.uk/civic-awards-for-design-and-conservation-2021/>.

Gemma Davies, Director for Economy and Housing at Cheshire West and Chester Council said: "Good design is at the very heart of making the Borough a great place to live, work and play. The Civic Awards for Design and Conservation represent a great opportunity to say well done to those developers, architects and contractors who have gone the extra mile to achieve high standards in their buildings and public realm projects."

Stephen Langtree, Chester Civic Trust added: "By rewarding the best architectural projects in the last six years this award scheme aims to stimulate interest in

traditional craft skills and contemporary design. We are grateful to Vinci Construction who have joined us as a sponsor this time."

The awards began in 1979 and have grown over the years into a partnership between the Council, Chester Civic Trust and the Cheshire Society of Architects. Since 2010, the five-yearly cycle of awards has covered the whole borough from Neston to Winsford, and from Frodsham to Malpas. The awards have been delayed a year due to Covid-19.

For questions about the nomination process email: [civicawards2021@gmail.com](mailto:civicawards2021@gmail.com).

**Stephen Langtree**



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## Answers to Foregate Street Area Quiz

1. Priory Place. The houses were built in 1898 by the Chester Cottage Improvement Company. A group of local philanthropists joined together to create model dwellings for working people. The City Council only began building Council housing after 1918.
2. This is in the recently created Queen's Place near to the canal. It forms part of the wall of Tesco's car park. It was the façade to the lecture theatre of the Congregational Church. The façade of the church now forms part of the Tesco Store. The architect of the lecture theatre is said to be Harrison, but it is not credited to him in John Champness Thomas Harrison.
3. Prudence is on the building on the corner of Foregate and Bath Street. It has Lombard House on it. The building was originally built in 1902 by John Douglas for Prudential Assurance Limited. The goddess, Prudence, was used as the symbol of the company from 1848.
4. It is on what is now the back of the large austere building next to Forest House. This was once the main building of the house. It was used by the cabinet makers.
5. The buildings are on the end of Foregate Street next to St Oswald's Way. John Douglas designed them for retired employees from the Grosvenor Estate. They are known as Parker Buildings.

**Thanks to Karen McKay, Val Shannon and Moira Rae Carter for compiling the quiz**

# LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Chester Civic Trust will soon be able to welcome you back to Bishop Lloyds Palace and to a diverse range of events and visits.

If you recall we promised you 'A Party' as soon as the Covid restrictions are lifted! As we go to print this should happen towards the end of June. We felt you may want to spend July and August catching up with friends and family or taking a long overdue holiday so we are planning to hold 'Welcome back to Bishop Lloyds Palace' social gatherings on Friday 10th and Saturday 11th September. These dates coincide with the start of national Heritage Open Days. Your invitation and details will be included in the next mail-out in August.

2020 was the year we had planned to hold a number of events to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of Chester Civic Trust. A number of the cancelled events are now being reorganised. . . .

**TEA at TATTON:** A private group tour of the Mansion at Tatton Park followed by high tea in the Gardeners Cottage has been provisionally booked for Tuesday 6th July. If the Trust retained your booking fee from 2020 you will be guaranteed a place. If you would like to register an interest in the visit ( the inclusive cost last year was £35 for National Trust members / £45 for non-members) please email [christinerussell4@icloud.com](mailto:christinerussell4@icloud.com) or call 01244 390686.

**DIAMOND JUBILEE ANNIVERSARY DINNER:** This has been provisionally re-booked for Friday 12th November at Chester Zoo. Details will be sent out in the August mail-out.

**CHESTER HERITAGE FESTIVAL:** Online activities between June 8th-18th. For further information please see article by Steve Langtree and website: [chesterheritagefestival.co.uk](http://chesterheritagefestival.co.uk)

**VISIT to the FENS:** The 5 day visit based in Kings Lynn with an itinerary including Derby, Wisbech, Ely and Newstead Abbey, planned for last April, was cancelled. The possibility of reorganising the visit for 28th September - 2nd October is being assessed. Please let me know if you are interested in this visit (my details above, or email Karen McKay, Chair of Events Committee [mckaykaren68@gmail.com](mailto:mckaykaren68@gmail.com)

**CORPORATE MEMBERS RECEPTION:** To be held on Wednesday 15th September and will be an opportunity for our Corporate Members to discuss matters of mutual interest with local decision makers.

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING:** To be held on Thursday 7th October at 7pm at St Mary's Creative Space on St Mary's Hill. The guest speaker will be ANDREW LEWIS, the Chief Executive of Cheshire West and Chester Council, on the theme of 'Whither Chester?'

## WINTER LECTURE SERIES

Dates have been booked for the season of Lectures at the Grosvenor Museum Lecture Theatre.

Wednesday 13th October - speaker to be confirmed.

Wednesday 10th November - Dr Elain Harwood from Historic England will talk about Post-War Architecture with particular reference to the Festival of Britain. Elain's book on the Festival of Britain will be relaunched to commemorate the 70th Anniversary of the Festival this year.

As we move closer to a semblance of normality I would like to thank all the volunteers who oversee the management, finances and communications of the Trust and those who lead and serve on committees and represent the Trust on a range of working parties and partnership organisations in Chester and wider afield.

Christine Russell



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STOWE FAMILY LAW, [www.stowefamilylaw.co.uk](http://www.stowefamilylaw.co.uk)

**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](mailto:nickclarke77@btinternet.com)**

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The newsletter is edited by Ann and Donal Farrell. They can be contacted on [annfarrell77@outlook.com](mailto:annfarrell77@outlook.com) and [donalmarrell@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:donalmarrell@yahoo.co.uk) Any comments can be addressed to the authors, or the Civic Trust, or the editors.