

## CHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

### LEADWORKS DEVELOPMENT (APPLICATION NO 12/01543/FUL): FURTHER COMMENTS

In the light of recent representations concerning this application, we wish to submit the following additional comments.

1. The applicant seems to think it strange that the Chester Archaeological Society should concern itself with matters that are not strictly archaeological. Our members are and always have been local people with a long-term commitment to their city, and in fact the Society has concerned itself with the quality of new developments for over 150 years.
2. We fail to understand the logic behind the statement by the Chairman of Chester Renaissance that 'the scheme is a vital part of the transformation of the area to the east of the railway station into a vibrant and distinctive new Business Quarter in one of the most sustainable locations in the region .... [which] will guide investment and development activity in the city centre'.

We fully support the thinking behind the creation of the proposed Central Business Quarter', and certainly the Leadworks site occupies a key position in that area of the city, but we do not see how a primarily residential redevelopment will contribute to the success of the Quarter. That has to be a matter for argument: assertion will not do.

3. English Heritage approval for the proposed demolition and redevelopment seems to us to be reluctant and equivocal. Regarding retention they say: 'We are still of the opinion that this [reuse of the original buildings] could be achieved but accept that it will be difficult to incorporate this in the current design concept at the same time as keeping the financial viability in the current economic climate'. *A propos* the new design: 'The design, scale, mass and materials proposed in the new elements of the site are of an industrial character, characteristic of the history of the site. The quality and details and methods used will be critical for a successful outcome. ... We also recommend the local authority to consider paragraph 56 of the NPPF which talks about the importance of good design as a key concept of sustainable development and how it should contribute positively to making places better for people'. Thus the detailed design is specifically not endorsed, and responsibility for it is thrown back to the LPA. The 'design, scale, mass and materials proposed in the new elements of the site are of an industrial character, characteristic of the history of the site' - but what is now proposed is a residential building, not an industrial one.
4. We note the comments of the CwaC Landscape Team regarding the oppressive nature of the cantilever over the canal towpath, the lack of permeability of the courtyard as a through route and the effect on the courtyard of the landing of the proposed bridge from Waitrose: these echo our own concerns.
5. We reiterate our other objections, which we are pleased to see are shared by local residents. In an era of supposed 'localism' it is extremely disappointing that the applicant has not sought fit to address these. Given the involvement of CDHT in these proposals, and their support for them, one cannot avoid contrasting this insensitivity with the 'listening' attitude displayed by CDHT regarding the redevelopment of the Parade in Blacon. Furthermore, too often the applicant has fallen back on the argument

that architectural taste is subjective. In fact, there are 'rules of thumb' or 'good manners' that result in satisfactory buildings.

6. The applicant emphasises the need for any scheme to be financially viable; nobody would dispute that. However, the Council has set out the standards by which it wishes to be judged in terms of the architectural quality of new developments, in the *One City Plan* (May 2011 edition), p 20: 'New developments must be of a quality standard to sit proudly and comfortably within the city's sensitive archeological and architectural environment'.

The test of the Council's credibility in these matters will lie not in fine aspirations or commissioning architectural studies, but in only approving schemes that are up to standard, rather than accepting poor-quality buildings just to give the impression of 'getting things done' and appearing 'pro-business', or 'pro-development': it certainly does need to 'get things done', but to a good standard, and new construction in other towns shows that this can be done.

Thus the question that the Council has to answer is whether it wishes to try to live up to its aspirations or whether it will accept the construction on a landmark site of a widely criticised building that will be with us for generations because it is desperate to show that it is 'getting things done' at a difficult financial time

P Carrington  
*Chester Archaeological Society*

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