

## CHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

### FURTHER COMMENTS ON PROPOSALS FOR NORTHGATE DEVELOPMENT

#### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Chester Archaeological Society was founded in 1849. Among its objects is 'the preservation of archaeological sites, ancient monuments, historic buildings and other antiquities located/discovered in or connected with Chester, Cheshire and North Wales', and from its inception it has campaigned not only for the proper care of archives, archaeology, and historic buildings but for sympathetic, high-quality modern design.
- 1.2 The Society first commented on the Northgate development on 31 January 2011 (see [http://www.chesterarchaeolsoc.org.uk/CAS\\_plan\\_consult11\\_NorthgateDevelopment\\_PC\\_comments\\_V02\\_31-01-11.pdf](http://www.chesterarchaeolsoc.org.uk/CAS_plan_consult11_NorthgateDevelopment_PC_comments_V02_31-01-11.pdf)). In the light of the announcement by CwaC on 15 February 2012 that it intended to take back control of the Northgate development from ING, the Society's Council considered the matter further.

#### 2.0 The Revised Proposals

We note that the following elements are now envisaged:

- Greater leisure content, including a multiplex cinema and more restaurants.
- A central market and new, improved library.
- Substantial major store units, in a range of 'higher end' unit sizes – avoiding competition with existing unit sizes-including a full line department store and food and beverage space.
- A new approach to bus provision.
- A high quality city centre parking – both underground and multi-story.
- Underground servicing allowing greater planning design flexibility.

The following comments are written on the assumption that the announcement does indeed represent CwaC's intentions and is not merely a ploy in negotiations with ING.

#### 3.0 Comments

- 3.1 We strongly welcome the diversity of functions listed here; these seem more likely to regenerate the Northgate area as 'the heart of the city' than would have a purely retail scheme. In particular a centrally located cinema (complementing the adaptation of the Odeon building to a theatre, on which CWaC has again shown a welcome lead), improved library and rebuilt market would certainly respond to many of our earlier concerns and, we think, those of many other citizens.
- 3.2 We are pleased to see that, in planning for new major stores, the intention (in theory at least) is to avoid competition with existing unit sizes: we have already drawn attention to the run-down state of retail areas such as Foregate Street. The retention of the market in the development area would likewise complement the recent revival of locally run shops on Northgate Street. However, in the same vein, we have to question the proposal to include more restaurants in the Northgate area when existing establishments (sometimes full of character and of high quality) are closing.
- 3.3 Re: bus provision, we wait to see the details of new proposals.

- 3.4 It is important that underground parking and servicing should so far as possible reuse the existing facilities to minimise further damage to buried archaeological remains. Extremely well preserved remains, self-evidently worthy of preservation and display, were ruthlessly destroyed in the 1960s to make way for the present Forum development: two thousand years of history were destroyed to make way for buildings that will have lasted for a little over a generation.
- 3.5 In terms of design, we wish to repeat the points made in our earlier submission:
- 3.5.1 Goss Street, Crook Street, Trinity Street and Princess Street are historic streets and should be retained. Indeed, until the 1960s Crook Street continued north to join Princess Street; ideally this link would be restored. 'Streets' should remain at ground level and not be converted into elevated passages within shopping centres (*cf* the effective disappearance of Newgate Street, again in the 1960s).
- 3.5.2 At the moment there are good views of the Welsh hills from Princess Street and Hunter Street; these enable people to locate Chester within the wider landscape and every effort should be made to retain them.
- 3.5.3 The historic core of Chester is very small and fine-grained. Large buildings, uniform developments and flat roofs detract from its character. We would hope to see well proportioned, small-looking buildings, with a varied roofscape, in a variety of sympathetic constructional styles, using high quality materials with a local 'feel', and appropriate detailing (see Insall's *Manifesto for Modern Design*). It is unfortunate that, because negotiations were already under way, no guidance on the redevelopment of the area was given in the recent *Chester City Centre and Approaches Characterisation Study*.
- 3.5.4 This is *the* development where the CWaC's stated aspirations in terms of design (*One City Plan*, p20) will be put to the test. In recent months CWaC has admittedly rejected the proposal for a multi-storey car park by Chester station (although we note that English Heritage threatened to appeal over this issue), but it has also approved the plans for the integrated health centre building on Delamere Street, opposed by English Heritage, The Chester Civic Trust, this Society and many others on the grounds of its crude design and excessive size, and more recently plans for student accommodation on the campus of Chester University that CwaC's own spatial panning team clearly found disappointing. Thus, while in terms of the overall concept for the development we are pleased that CWaC appears to be 'doing the right thing', we still have concerns as to whether it will 'do it right'.

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For Chester Archaeological Society  
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