

## CHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

### COMMENTS ON PROPOSED MOLLINGTON STUDENT VILLAGE (APPLICATION 12/03447/OUT)

#### SUMMARY

*The Society calls on CWaC to reject this application. The Student Village would intrude on a particularly sensitive area of Green Belt; thus, given that the Council is currently conducting its own Green Belt study, the application is particularly ill timed and prejudicial. It is not supported by Chester University, which has its own plans for student accommodation, and may well prove to be unnecessary. Access to local facilities, the University and the city centre would be poor. It is unlikely to result in improvements in those areas of the city currently occupied by students. We should like to see CwaC work vigorously with the university and developers to establish clear, agreed and achievable long-term plans for student accommodation and associated sporting facilities in Chester.*

#### DETAIL

1. The development would intrude on Green Belt areas 9 and 10 (as designated in CwaC's *Green Belt Study Area Maps and Tables*). These areas score highly in meeting the purposes for which Green Belts were established, especially 'To check unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas'; 'To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another'; 'To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns'; 'To provide opportunities for access to the open countryside for the urban population'; and 'To retain attractive landscapes and enhance landscapes, near to where people live'.
2. In particular the development would impair appreciation of the 'Deva Spillway' an important Ice Age channel now followed by the canal, which allows splendid views of the city centre; the proposed 'green wedge' along Parkgate Road would be a poor substitute. Although this wedge might have the result of separating the development slightly from Mollington, it would also make it appear visually an extension of the suburban sprawl of Blacon. It is therefore ironic that the development is in no way integrated into Blacon, but rather turns its back on it: it certainly would not make Blacon more 'outward facing', as is asserted. Finally, although the development contains some sporting and recreational facilities, it would be overwhelmingly residential: it would, therefore, not secure the Green Belt purpose 'To provide opportunities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation near urban areas'.
3. Chester University has its own, incremental, approach to student housing, as set out in its recent *Development Framework* (although this is by no means as specific as could be wished) and, crucially, has publicly distanced itself from the current proposal. The observations in the *Development Framework* that student numbers are not expected to increase significantly in the foreseeable future (and may even decline) and that students strongly prefer to live close to the Parkgate Road university site, should be noted. In this light, a dedicated, out-of-town student village appears unnecessary and may not even be wanted by students. Because of its age, Chester is a city-centre university (cf, on varying scales and in varying styles, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle upon Tyne, Durham, Oxford and Cambridge), and among these 'pepper-potting' of student accommodation is common. The situation with newer, out-of-town, campus-style, universities, eg York and Lancaster, is entirely different.

4. We are not convinced that transport and travel arrangements have been thought through. We are sceptical of the statement that the village would be within walking distance of the city, and the proposed cycleway route seems ill-conceived. Surely what would be needed would be a cycleway along the northern towpath of the canal, giving access directly to the university? Unless there were to be a frequent bus service between the city and the Student Village, running late into the night, a considerable increase in car usage must be expected.
5. The promoters assert that the construction of a student village would allow some houses currently in multiple occupation by students to be released for purchase by families and first-time buyers. However, it is entirely unclear how this would happen: they could as easily stand vacant and fall into disrepair, or, more likely, simply accommodate other transient populations, without any relief from the problems associated with excessive 'studentification'.
6. The promoters likewise assert that a student village of the proposed size is necessary to support the Redgrave Institute. However, Chester University have already offered part of its Glenesk site for this.
7. Finally, we are puzzled as to why a planning application which includes so much minute detail is classed as an outline application. This inevitably raises the suspicion that, if approved, the land might actually be developed for another purpose.
8. This application is particularly ill timed given that CwaC is carrying out its own Green Belt Study and, indeed, there is a danger of it compromising that study. We call on CwaC to work vigorously with the university and other parties to establish clear, agreed and achievable long-term plans for student accommodation and associated sporting facilities in Chester: at the moment too many of the basic facts are disputed.

P Carrington

*For Chester Archaeological Society*

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.