

Chester Archaeological Society



COMMENTS ON CHESTER HERITAGE AND VISUAL ARTS STRATEGY (JANUARY 2017)

- 1.0 As recommended by the CBA, an introductory page should be inserted which lists what the strategy does *not* do. It is not a heritage conservation strategy, nor is it an exhaustive statement of the importance of heritage to Chester” hence “minimise the potential for perceived omissions leading to harm to heritage assets.” This applies in particular to the protection of monuments and their settings, and all relevant policies should be cited. Views of the whole city, not just of individual monuments, are also crucial to its aesthetic appeal and historical intelligibility.
- 2.0 Provide clarity on the area covered by the strategy with a map showing the core city centre area and include suburbs (as does the Urban Archaeology Database) and ideally nearby villages.
- 3.0 Include a statement that it is essential to ensure the quality of new developments to avoid harm to the setting of important heritage assets in accordance with existing planning policies (in other words acknowledging the importance of these policies in avoiding threats to our heritage assets).
- 4.0 Add a section on ‘Heritage for the local community’ to provide balance to the tourist aspects. This section should promote understanding and research of Chester’s heritage through local groups.
- 5.0 Define much more clearly the concept for a new museum and outline a plan for implementation. We suggest that the concept should be ‘Telling the story of Chester over the millennia’, from prehistoric to recent times and placing the city in its regional, national and international setting. It would draw on archaeological artefacts, maps, paintings, historical documents etc. We consider that this would provide a major visitor attraction, promote local community interest and encourage return visits. Many of the ideas for a new Record Office (Strategy Action Plan item 7 (xii)) are equally applicable to a museum. This is ambitious in the current financial climate but many other cities have recently upgraded their museums and as we have seen in York, a major visitor attraction can also have a significant impact on the local economy.
- 6.0 The Cheshire Historic Environment Record (CHER) should be upgraded as a community resource using the latest intuitive and interactive graphical user interfaces (with the Bristol’s *Know Your Place* being a good model). We consider that this could well attract external funding. This, as you suggested, could be part of upgrading the Archives area for which your recent consultation document highlighted that more and more access to the archive is on line, with physical visits reducing.
- 7.0 The strategy should acknowledge importance of strengthening the foundation of knowledge that underpins our understanding Chester’s heritage by promoting

research and publication (e.g. outstanding excavation reports etc.). In particular, there is an urgent need to complete, publish and publicise the many years of excavations carried out by both commercial and in house archaeologists over recent decades.

- 8.0 Improve the publicity/promotion of new heritage discoveries from excavations/repair work/research using the latest technology . Seek to improve the profile of the city's heritage in the regional and national press. Create a blog, use Facebook and twitter more effectively.
- 9.0 State the necessity in the strategy to avoid "dumbing down" in the effort to engage a wider public in Chester's heritage; authenticity must be the watchword.
- 10.0 Establish a forum for local groups focused on Chester and its surroundings, where they can communicate, share expertise and promote activities both between groups and to the wider public. This may require at least initial stimulus from CWaC.

24 January 2017