

## CHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

### COMMENTS ON CWaC DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSAL 2013/14, ITEM Q

#### 1.0 The Proposal

##### *Q. Specialist Environmental Service*

'This proposal relates to the future delivery of the non-planning archaeology service. In much the same way as the subsidised services described in the previous section, the archaeology service is almost entirely subsidised by the taxpayer. Rather than simply discontinue the service, or see it progressively reduced, the proposal is for the service to cover all of its costs by 2017. This will be achieved by generating additional income and maximising external funding opportunities. This proposal aims to achieve annual savings of £70,000 from 2013/14, increasing to £110,000 of savings per year from 2015/16'.

#### 2.0 Comments

- 2.1.0 *The historic environment is recognised in CwaC's policies central to Chester's attractiveness and future. Understanding and presentation of it need to be continually updated. This requires a dedicated, multi-disciplinary team.*
- 2.1.1 The historic environment is recognised as central to Chester's character, attractiveness and future prosperity. For example, on page 4 of the *One City Plan* we find: 'Chester's .... development can be traced from the Roman era to the present day and it still retains some of the best Roman archaeology in the world. The unique recognisable Rows galleries are the envy of the world, and it retains an internationally significant circuit of City Walls'. On page 28 we find the aim: 'Respect, reveal and celebrate the city's rich historical heritage and architecture'. In all the word 'heritage' appears 27 times, and 'historic' 71 times in the *One City Plan*.
- 2.1.2 In the *Draft Local Plan Preferred Policy Directions*, PD 20, we find the more specific aims:
- promote the understanding and interpretation of historic assets;
  - protect, conserve, enhance and manage heritage assets and their setting avoiding adverse impacts;
  - enable a greater understanding and management of the heritage assets of the Borough including the unique significance of Chester.
- 2.1.3 Over four decades past and present members of the Historic Environment Team (under varying titles) have made major advances in the knowledge and understanding of the city's archaeology and history, many of them as essential parts of schemes of monument conservation and enhancement. These advances have been published in fifteen detailed excavation reports, five other books and numerous journal articles, and are presented in heritage information panels around the city. Thus the Historic Environment Team has been carrying out precisely the tasks now envisaged in the *Draft Local Plan*. It is essential that the advances in understanding made in the past continue in the future if Chester's heritage 'offer' is not to become stale. We therefore strongly welcome the commitment not to 'discontinue the service, or see it progressively reduced'. A complex historic environment such as Chester's can only be understood by the long-term efforts of a stable, multi-disciplinary team.

- 2.2.0 *Most of the work of the Historic Environment Team is devoted to providing advice to other departments of the council and to supporting corporate aims and projects rather than meeting the needs of individuals; this should continue to be the case in the future. The team should therefore continue to receive core funding from CWaC; the use of the word 'subsidised' is inappropriate..*
- 2.2.1 We dispute the use of the word 'subsidised'. As stated above, the bulk of the team's work is already directed towards corporate projects and aims, eg the publication of the 2004-6 amphitheatre excavations; the understanding of the City Walls as an essential part of their maintenance, and subsequent public interpretation; the redisplay of the Roman Gardens; and supporting the teaching of archaeology in Chester University. Only a small part of its work is devoted to meeting the needs of individuals or distinctive groups. We consider that the work that the team should focus on in the future also supports corporate aims, so there is no reason why CWaC funding should be withdrawn.
- 2.3.0 *In addition to possible new projects of monument enhancement and continued support of university teaching, the major task for the team in the foreseeable should be to deal with the huge legacy of important unpublished city-centre excavations. The team needs to maintain the size and skills needed to fulfil this task, and should not be distracted from it by a surfeit of new projects.*
- 2.3.1 It is easy to think of future high-profile schemes of monument enhancement that would benefit the city, in line with the aims of the *Draft Local Plan*, and the team would have a key role to play in these (the Roman 'Quay Wall' is only one obvious example); we also assume continued support of Chester University teaching. However, beyond these we consider that the major task of the team for the foreseeable future ought to be the full publication of the numerous important excavations carried out by the team and its predecessors since the late 1960s, many at the behest of previous councils on publicly owned sites. This fine-grained knowledge, if properly presented, eg through new museum displays, interpretation panels etc, would further enhance the reputation and distinctiveness of the city. It is ironic that, at a time when the redevelopment of the Northgate area is being debated, most of the archaeological work carried out there, in the heart of the Roman fortress, in the 1960s before the present buildings were constructed, still remains unpublished in detail. Consequently, not only is there a big gap in the stories that we can tell about a major period in Chester's past, but the archaeological constraints on the new development are less clear than they could be.
- 2.3.2 To a significant degree this backlog is the result of a failure by previous councils and senior managers to understand the team's core business, with the imposition of peripheral objectives and income targets that led to the neglect of that business. New projects and targets should be carefully balanced against inherited commitments.
- 2.3.3 Since 2008 the size of the team has fallen from ten to seven, with only four now engaged full-time on historic environment work. In addition, archaeology is extremely specialised, and this fall in numbers has resulted in an imbalance in the skills available within the remaining team. Finally, two members of staff are approaching retirement age, and we are not aware of any succession planning. There is a danger that these factors will reduce the ability of the team to complete the legacy projects described in paragraph 2.3.1, and we consider it highly unlikely that they will be finished by 2017.

2.4.0 *Outside funding should be sought vigorously and is to be welcomed if it can be obtained, but it should be in support of key tasks and should not be a substitute for core CWaC funding.*

2.4.1 We naturally welcome external funding. However, this funding needs to be relevant to the team's core tasks (eg EU money for the Portico project on the City Walls), not distract from them. In addition, external funding is unpredictable and is time-consuming to obtain. The survival of the team, with its deep understanding of Chester's historic environment and its experience of its preservation and presentation, all gained over many decades, is a matter of corporate importance and should therefore be underwritten by CWaC: it is too valuable a resource to be put at risk by the whims of external grant-givers.

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*For Chester Archaeological Society*  
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