

CHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

COMMENTS ON CHESTER TRANSPORT STRATEGY

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Much of the content of the strategy lies beyond the Society's remit. Here we concentrate on matters that directly affect the historic environment of the city centre and its commercial viability.

2.0 Public Realm Improvements

- 2.1 We strongly support the proposed public realm enhancements (basically improved surfacing) in Northgate Street, Town Hall Square, St Werburgh Street, Eastgate Street and Vicars Lane (including the creation of 'shared space' around the amphitheatre), also the enhancement of the Bridge Street/Lower Bridge Street junction to reunify the two halves of the street.
- 2.2 However, the new 'York stone' paving does seem very prone to breakage. This is supposedly the result of lorries parking on it to offload. Either they need to be 'persuaded' not to do so, or more loading bays need to be provided.
- 2.3 When resurfacing is carried out, it should be remembered that internationally or nationally significant archaeology (eg the remains of Roman buildings and drains) may be found at a very high level, especially in the Northgate area. The City Archaeologist, Mike Morris, should be consulted at an early stage in planning any work.
- 2.4 Access to the new school in Abbey Square *via* the Kaleyards rather than Northgate Street must not imply demolition of the Grade 1 Listed/Scheduled Kaleyard Gate.

3.0 Proposed Hoole Road Park & Ride Terminus

- 3.1 The creation of a large car park at the end of the proposed route is likely to have implications for buried archaeology, which should be addressed in the same way as for other developments; again consult the City Archaeologist, Mike Morris. It should also be remembered that this site lies in the Green Belt, and the possible creation of a park & ride terminus there should not be seen as a springboard for further development.

4.0 Western Relief Road

- 4.1 In principle we strongly support the construction of this road, in order to reduce the weight of through traffic on the western section of the Inner Ring Road and especially on Lower Watergate Street, which is currently a 'dead area'. However, we do not consider that either of the proposed routes is satisfactory. The original route (Option 1) is in theory far better, in that it would connect Liverpool Road, Parkgate Road and Sealand Road directly with the A483. However, much of the route, formed by Bumpers Lane and the 'Link Road', is heavily built up with industrial premises and the Greyhound Park and is badly congested at peak times; it would need to be substantially upgraded, with attendant disruption to adjoining properties. Option 2 only connects with Sealand Road; traffic from Liverpool Road and Parkgate Road would

have to backtrack using Sealand Road – also badly congested at many times – and could well continue to use the Inner Ring Road. If any alternative routes are considered, it should be remembered that the ‘Blacon Meadows’ and the adjacent escarpment representing the old bank of the Dee are important to the setting of that part of the city and are classed as part of the ‘Urban Corridor’ and a ‘Feature of Local Importance’ in the existing Chester District Local Plan; the temptation to build further roads across them should be resisted.

5.0 Removal of Bus Exchange to Gorse Stacks

- 5.1 We accept that the construction of the Northgate Development will necessitate the construction of a bus exchange on another site. However, it is essential that, so far as practical, buses continue to serve the historic core of the city as well as they do at present. We suggest that serious consideration be given to the possibility of all local services (including park & ride) making a circuit of the Inner Ring Road plus the railway station (eg with stops at Upper Northgate Street, St Martin’s Way/Hunter Street, Grosvenor Street, Pepper Street, Foregate Street, Railway Station and Gorse Stacks).
- 5.2 A customer-focussed, integrated public transport network will only be achieved if CWaC takes a co-ordinating role; it cannot be left to private operators.

6.0 Access to the City Centre by Private Cars and Links with Edge-of-Centre Retail Parks

- 6.1 We support the improvement of a) public transport to provide services that are frequent, convenient and cheap and b) the cycling infrastructure. However, we also consider that a more positive view needs to be taken of the use of private cars. Cf the government’s *Planning Guidance* on ‘Ensuring the vitality of town centres’:

‘This (town-centre first) approach should include seeking to improve the quality of parking in town centres (in line with the *National Planning Policy Framework*) and, where it is necessary to ensure the vitality of town centres, the quantity too. Local planning authorities should set appropriate parking charges that do not undermine the vitality of town centres and parking enforcement should be proportionate, avoiding unfairly penalising drivers’.

<http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/ensuring-the-vitality-of-town-centres/what-does-the-national-planning-policy-framework-say-about-planning-for-town-centres/>; accessed 26-09-13).

- 6.2 As is now belatedly recognised, Chester city centre is suffering serious competition both from Cheshire Oaks, which is gaining some of the characteristics of a town in its multiplicity of functions, and from closer edge-of-centre developments such as the Greyhound Park, and is currently on a downward spiral. To reverse this trend will require a vast improvement in the content of what the city centre has to offer, but accessibility is also important.
- 6.3 To state the obvious, in out-of-town and edge-of-centre shopping developments, parking is plentiful and free: in Chester city centre it is expensive, and the Transport Strategy proposes to restrict car movements even more than at present. In accordance with the *Planning Guidance* quoted above, we suggest that a more nuanced view of car use should be taken, for example:

- 6.3.1 Public transport, including park& ride services, should meet the needs of tourists and workers in the city, to minimise their reliance on cars.
- 6.3.2 Those who want to come into the city centre for shopping (perhaps combined with a trip to an edge-of-centre retail park) should be able to find parking (for, say, 2 hours) for a minimal price. The example of the Frodsham Street Tesco supermarket, which offers progressively discounted parking charges in return for various levels of expenditure, is a model that might also be explored.
- 6.3.3 Access to city-centre streets by car should continue to be allowed for residents, businesses and shoppers needing to collect bulky goods.
- 6.4 Conversely, links between residential suburbs, edge-of-centre retail parks and the city centre by public transport should also be improved. *National Planning Policy Framework* para 24 specifically states that edge-of-centre developments should be well connected to town centres.

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