

CHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

COMMENTS ON NORTHGATE DEVELOPMENT (16/02282/OUT) – PART 1 SUPPLEMENT

SUMMARY

This document brings together a few points that the Society has made previously relating to transport and to the potential of the area in the wider interpretation of the city's heritage. It is likely that demand will emerge for buses to the market area, and capacity for this should be built in to the scheme. The removal of steps at the western end of Princess Street would also 'future proof' the scheme against changing transport demands. The development scheme also treats the area as a tabula rasa, without any heritage that needs to be taken into account. In fact, it forms an integral part of the historic city, and the integrating features need to be recognised and enhanced. It is regrettable that CWaC does not seem to have anybody whose job it is to understand and champion this aspect of Chester's heritage and thus broaden and deepen the city's attractiveness.

DETAIL

1.0 Steps, Buses and Vehicular Access

1.1 [Comments on Northgate Summary Masterplan Report 2015](#) para 6.1.10:

'The proposed insertion of steps at the western end of Princess Street] ... should also be avoided as a measure of future-proofing to permit vehicular traffic should that be thought desirable.'

1.2 [Comments on Northgate Development March 2016 Iteration](#) para 6.2.7:

'Bus stops adjacent to the Northgate development could instead [of in an undercroft of the hotel] be provided by lay-bys on either side of St Martins Way, with pedestrian crossings located appropriately. However, we judge that in time there could be public demand for bus access to the top end of the development, ie near the new market, and stops should be planned in that area.' (See also [Comments on CWaC Bus Exchange Consultation](#) para 4.2 for the same argument).

2.0 Heritage Enhancement

2.1 [Comments on Northgate Summary Masterplan Report 2015](#) Section 4.2:

'The encircling service road ... seems acceptable. However, it is important that in its southern sector [ie Edwards Street] it is visually subordinate to the historical north-south routes ...'

Section 8.8:

'A broad scheme of enhancement and interpretation to help people to appreciate and explore more of the totality* of Chester's authentic historical character, including:

8.8.2 Resurfacing Crook Street and Trinity Street [also Goss Street] in high-quality materials (eg setts), also Weaver Street, and promoting the Whitefriars-Trinity Street route as a heritage trail around part of the Roman fortress.

* 'Power of Place highlighted that people place a high value on the historic environment and see it in its totality, rather than as a series of individual sites and buildings'. (Quoted in [Sustainable Growth of Cathedral Cities and Historic Towns](#) page 53)

This would tie in with the regeneration of the Commonhall Street area. Interpretation should focus not just on evidential value – “this was the line of the Roman fortress defences”[†] – but on potential aesthetic/emotional value – “through the passage of time the stone walls are now “romantic ruins”: just bumps in the ground flanked by parallel roads but nevertheless still separating areas of the city that have different patterns of occupation.”

- 8.8.3 As part of 8.8.2, marking the line of the now-vanished Roman western and southern defences where they would have crossed Hunter Street and Princess Street, as well as that of the Roman west gate at the end of Watergate Street and the south gate at the end of Bridge Street. Note the symbolically significant location of the medieval churches of Holy Trinity and St Michael (and the now-vanished St Bridget, which stood opposite) at the sites of these gates.
- 8.8.4 Moving the obelisk commemorating Matthew Henry to Trinity Street. (Matthew Henry was a distinguished local late seventeenth-century non-conformist clergyman. His chapel, situated on the east side of Trinity Street, was one of the notable losses of the 1960s clearance of the area (see Cheshire Image Bank image [CH 3552](#)). An obelisk was erected in his honour in 1860 in St Bridget’s churchyard but as a result of the construction of the Inner Ring Road is now isolated in the middle of the Grosvenor roundabout, where it is largely unseen).’

- 2.2 [Comments on Northgate Development March 2016 Iteration](#) para 6.2.9: ‘Whatever buildings are constructed on the site [of the present hotel], we urge that those towards the south end of the service bay, towards the Guildhall, should be set back to afford views of that building from St Martins Gate. The Guildhall (formerly Holy Trinity) lies on the site of the west gate of the Roman fortress, while St Martins Gate is adjacent to the north-west corner of the fortress. The intervisibility of many of Chester’s historical landmarks is an important element in the intelligibility and appreciation of its heritage and should be enhanced (see [Towards a Heritage Strategy for Chester](#), 4.1.1).’

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[†] It should be emphasised that we do not support the crude idea of making the podia of the proposed hotel and department store along St Martins Way reminiscent of the Roman defences, eg by way of massive appearance. Defences are by definition made to exclude people, whereas the object should be to make the Northgate area as accessible as possible from the west. These podia, insofar as they are necessary, should be visually recessive features. The Conservation Area Advisory Panel will comment further on this subject.