CWaC 'WALK, RIDE, THRIVE' CONSULTATION

CHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY RESPONSE

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Chester Archaeological Society welcomes this consultation, which allows it the opportunity to restate and develop suggestions that it has been making for some time, as a contribution to medium- to long-term changes. Of necessity, most of our comments are restricted to Chester city centre

1.2 We particularly welcome CWaC's recognition of the health benefits of fewer motor vehicles and less pollution. Our response concerns the ways in which actions in support of these benefits can enhance the historical character of the city and make it safer, healthier and more attractive for everyone.

1.3 In our response to the 'Play your Part' consultation, we wrote:

> 3.1 Chester's small-scale, tightly knit urban form of medieval origin, which is a major factor in its heritage value, is at risk from inappropriate development aimed at accommodating motor vehicles. Measures to tackle climate change, by promoting the use of public transport … and making future developments more 'walkable', would have the welcome side-effect of strengthening the city's historic character. Specifically:
>
> > 3.1.1 Personal motor vehicle use in and through the city needs to be reduced. It leads to ever-increasing demands for road-widening and extra parking capacity, which destroy the urban grain as well as causing congestion, air pollution, noise and danger to other road users. Electric vehicles are not a panacea; ultimately the number of vehicles on the road needs to be reduced.

1.4 Here we develop our ideas on how the city can be made more 'walkable' (and 'cyclable'), to improve health as well as combat climate change. Our suggestions are aimed at 1) simplifying and reducing motor traffic in the city, in favour of pedestrians and cyclists; 2) removing infrastructure aimed at motor vehicles that discourages pedestrians and cyclists and damages the city's heritage; 3) recreating and enhancing damaged historic routes to make walking and cycling more attractive and enjoyable.

1.5 As a principle, all shared routes should reflect the hierarchy of pedestrians first/ cyclists/ /service vehicles/ public transport/private motor vehicles last. Residents' and essential vehicles should be carefully regulated and controlled.

1.6 Traffic flows are liable to be changed every decade. Carriageways, junctions and islands should be designed with this in mind, and options should be kept open for the future, to avoid expensive, botched and unsightly modifications.

1.7 Many of the ideas here are informed by the *One City Plan*, especially section 4.0 'City of the Future', with details in the *Chester Public Realm Design Guide* (*see* section 8.0 *below*). These are well considered documents, and their ideas and guidance should

be heeded. Conservation officers need to have a decisive input into any schemes that emerge.

2.0 Beyond the City Centre

2.1 Measures to encourage walking and cycling in the city centre will not succeed if they are not supported by the creation, improvement and maintenance of routes in the suburbs. This will involve, among other things, a recognition that cycleways need to be continuous and that pedestrians and cyclists do not always mix well, especially on canal towpaths of limited width. The link between the Millennium Greenway and the city centre is poor and could be improved by a ramp up to Victoria Road.

3.0 Within the Inner Ring Road

3.1 Within the Inner Ring Road motor vehicle movements should be simplified and reduced.

- The Northgate development, Northgate Street (north and south), the Cathedral, St Werburgh Street and Eastgate Street should be accessed from St Martin's Way *via* Princess Street (involving some rethinking of the Northgate development); traffic for the new market and Storyhouse would exit *via* Hunter Street, that for Northgate Street (north) *via* the Northgate, that for other streets *via* the Eastgate and Foregate Street. (Alternatively traffic for the St Werburgh Street–Eastgate Street (west)–Northgate Street triangle could exit *via* the Northgate).
- The unsightly chicane between St John Street and Frodsham Street would need to be removed.
- The Bridge Street–Watergate Street loop would continue to operate as at present, but with a contingency link at the Cross to Eastgate Street.
- The direction of traffic on St John Street could be reversed, entering from Little St John Street and leaving *via* Foregate Street. This would allow service vehicles to avoid the city centre.
- Frodsham Street could remain open to southbound traffic and should be accessible from the Inner Ring Road at the Cow Lane Bridge junction to take unnecessary traffic off Delamere Street and Gorse Stacks.

3.2 In this area, the only vehicles permitted would be deliveries and other services (within defined, off-peak hours), residents, disabled people (with parking spaces to be defined) and emergencies. Thus there would be no buses or taxis, although a minibus service on the Princess Street–Hunter Street loop could be contemplated, and the north end of Frodsham Street should be two-way to allow entry to/egress from the public and supermarket car parks. A barrier may be necessary on Princess Street to prevent 'rat-running' through the city centre.

3.3 On Northgate Street, St Werburgh Street, Eastgate Street, Watergate Street and Bridge Street, it should be considered whether defined cycle lanes are necessary or whether a shared space system with other vehicles would suffice. However, on these streets, pedestrians should take priority and cyclists should be encouraged to leave their cycles at racks on each of the streets and walk to their final destinations. Along Foregate Street defined cycle lanes would be desirable.

3.4 Carriageways on Northgate Street, St Werburgh Street, Eastgate Street, Watergate Street and Bridge Street should be uniformly surfaced in setts flanked by wide, flagged pavements, with low kerbs that follow the building line and articulate the street and with flat crossing points where appropriate. This includes the lower third of Bridge Street, which is currently surfaced in asphalt. This quality of surfacing would be a visual 'signature' of the streets of the medieval city and should extend just outside the gateways in the City Walls. . The use of setts would, it is hoped, discourage speeding by cyclists.

3.5 The paving at the Cross should be redesigned to use this monument as its central reference point and also allow a contingency road link from Bridge Street to Eastgate Street. The middle section of St Werburgh Street should be re-envisaged as a cathedral square, with the width of the carriageway being minimised. Outside the Eastgate the traditional kerb line should be restored to indicate the continuity of Eastgate Street–Foregate Street (*see* Illus 1 *at end*).

3.6 Abbey Square and Abbey Street could be part of the prime route from the Cross/Town Hall Square to the bus interchange and railway station. The present surface of rounded river cobbles is picturesque but rather impractical. It should be considered whether this could be remedied by additional wheelers. Alternatively, as has been tried on the Continent, the cobbles could be lifted, split and replaced flat side up.

3.7 The eastern steps of St Martin's Gate could be removed and the end of Water Tower Street unblocked to create a cycling route around the western side of the city from the Northgate to the Bridgegate (*see* Illus 2 *at end*).

4.0 The Inner Ring Road

4.1 'Taming' the Inner Ring Road is key to improving the accessibility of the city centre from the suburbs and beyond, by foot and bicycle, as well as to improving air quality. Since it has been constructed, it has severed the traditional radial routes and divided and imprisoned the city; it needs to be re-thought to be subordinate to and link these routes.

- Two lanes of dual carriageway sections of the Inner Ring Road, plus Hoole Way, should be converted into cycleways and greened; the remaining traffic lanes could continue to be two-way or converted to a one-way system; the latter would simplify junctions (*see* Illus 3 *at end* for a parallel at Utrecht). Trials could be carried out to test the impact of these recommendations.
- Demarcated cycle lanes should also be established on Grosvenor Road, Grosvenor Street, City Road and along Boughton.
- The Little St John Street section of the southern arm of the Inner Ring Road is probably too narrow to accommodate cycle lanes (unless it is made one-way), and perhaps cyclists emerging from the Newgate should be directed up St John Street to Foregate Street.
- As long discussed, Hoole Road Bridge should be widened to allow room for cycle lanes, and the same should be considered for the Grosvenor Bridge.

- Roundabouts should be re-engineered as conventional junctions to make them more attractive to pedestrians and cyclists. For example, the brutal severing of Brook Street from the Cow Lane Bridge area could be healed.
- There needs to be a more attractive pedestrian/cycle link from St Anne Street (and Victoria Road) to the stub of St Anne Street within the Inner Ring Road.
- At the Bars, the gyratory should be abolished and the primacy of the straight course of Foregate Street re-established, with separate junctions for City Road and St Oswald's Way.

4.2 It should be noted that the number of lanes on Vicar's Cross Road has already been reduced without causing congestion.

4.3 Over time, traffic on the Inner Ring Road, especially the western section, should be lessened by reducing the amount of parking available. At the remaining car parks, alternative means of transport will need to be available for those who need it.

5.0 Between the Inner Ring Road and the City Walls

5.1 Traffic on Lower Bridge Street is comparatively light and there seems to be little to be gained by making any changes to the current two-way flow, although this may preclude defined cycle lanes.

5.2 Lower Watergate Street carries an inappropriate amount of traffic for a historic route of high architectural quality within the City Walls. Air quality is poor; it is dangerous for cyclists and unpleasant for pedestrians. The best solution to traffic problems in the area would be the construction of the Western Relief Road. For the moment, we recommend that the street is made one-way, outward bound only, with inbound traffic from Sealand Road being diverted to Parkgate Road *via* the Deva Link Road. With a narrower carriageway, cycle lanes could then be introduced.

5.3 On both Lower Bridge Street and Lower Watergate Street the carriageway should be again surfaced in setts, flanked by wide, flagged pavements, with low kerbs that follow the building line and articulate the street, and flat crossing points where appropriate, as within the Inner Ring Road. This surfacing should extend just outside the gateways, as recommended for the Northgate and Eastgate. It should be continuous across the Inner Ring Road, linking up with Bridge Street and Watergate Street respectively. This would visually reunify these outer areas of the medieval walled city with the core (*see* Illus 4 *at end*).

6.0 Other improvements

6.1 Other historic lanes in the city should be improved with high-quality surfacing, to make them more attractive to explore, as is already the case with Whitefriars and King Street. These include: Goss Street, Crook Street, Hamilton Place, Weaver Street, Trinity Street, Princess Street, Bedward Row, Blackfriars and Castle Street.

6.2 The city centre would be improved by the removal of unnecessary signage.

7.0 Summary of Improved Connections

- Between Blacon, Newtown and the city centre by bicycle and on foot *via* Northgate and/or Victoria Road/St Anne Street.

- Between the eastern suburbs and the centre, primarily by bicycle, *via* Foregate Street and Boughton.
- Between Eccleston, Handbridge and the centre by bicycle and on foot *via* Lower Bridge Street.
- Between the Westminster Park/Wrexham Road area and the centre, primarily by bicycle, *via* the Duke's Drive, Grosvenor Bridge and Grosvenor Street.
- Between the Cross, the bus exchange and the railway station on foot *via* Abbey Square, Abbey Street, Frodsham Street and Brook Street.
- Between the Cross and the railway station by bicycle *via* Foregate Street and City Road.
- Between the Cross and Hoole/Newton by bicycle and on foot *via* Frodsham Street, Hoole Way and Hoole Road Bridge.
- Around the city by bicycle and on foot *via* the Inner Ring Road.

All these improvements are dependent on changes to the Inner Ring Road. A reduction in capacity needs to be balanced, not only by the improvements suggested here, but also by considerable improvements in public transport and a wider change in attitudes.

8.0 The *One City Plan* and *Chester Public Realm Design Guide*

8.1 *The One City Plan*

The strategy should be to reduce the actual volume of private cars entering the city centre while ensuring that the number of people coming increases by making alternative modes more accessible and attractive. (p 42)

ACTION 5: Within the city centre the key pedestrian footfall streets and corridors must have priority, be well signed, accessible and exemplary in nature (p 42)

ACTION 7: Address parts of the inner ring road at key pedestrian and public transport crossing points. While the need for traffic access and movement around the city centre using the IRR will remain, it must be altered at the key pedestrian and public transport crossing points. The aim will be to make crossing of the IRR by pedestrians and cyclists more direct, quicker and safer. (p 43)

1. Current Ring Road

The current Ring Road acts as a barrier to pedestrians. It is critical to improve the ability for non-car users to cross this car-dominated corridor at appropriate points on the radial network. At present these are second place in the hierarchy. In future pedestrian and cycle movement must be equal in status – a delicate balance to achieve. (p 44)

3. Pepper Street and Bridge Street

It is not just around the Amphitheatre where the negative environment of the southern section of the ring road has an impact. Pepper Street's junction with Bridge Street is a strong example of where current traffic volumes lead to the pedestrian priority being low. Significant wider benefit to the public realm and 'experience' of the city would occur by redesigning the junction with an extension to the pedestrianised area of Bridge Street and introducing high quality materials. (p 46)

Car Parking Strategy
It is vital to offer a choice of how far into the city drivers wish to go depending upon their needs, but also to have taken a significant amount of Chester-bound traffic off the network prior to its arrival at the Inner Ring Road (IRR). (p 50)

CG6: Grosvenor Roundabout
The Grosvenor Bridge and route to and from North Wales contributes to almost a quarter of Chester's daily trips into the city. The Castle Gateway has the potential to become a network hub. A large obstacle affecting linkages with the historic core is the barrier created by Grosvenor Street and Nicholas Street and the connecting roundabout. In the future down-grading this road system and reordering the roundabout into a four-way junction could connect the Castle Gateway to the Commonhall Street area and Rows in a more significant way (pp 64–6).

Note that the maps on pages 46–51 show 'traffic-calming measures' on many dual-carriageway sections of the Inner Ring Road and along Boughton. It should also be noted that the Air Quality Management Area covers the area within the Inner Ring Road, with extensions down Lower Watergate Street, along Houle Way and Boughton.

8.2 *Chester Public Realm Design Guide*

8.2.1 This document aims to:

- Provide a coherent approach to improving connections across the city centre, particularly between severed parts of the public realm;
- Improve the physical and visual quality of streets for the benefit of residents and visitors, and in turn the city's economy;
- Reinforce Chester's distinctiveness throughout its public realm; and
- Redress the balance within the city centre between vehicles and pedestrians/cyclists, such that street design enables civil and social interaction between the two.

8.2.2 It is only practical to pull out a few points from this very detailed document:

2.7 key points

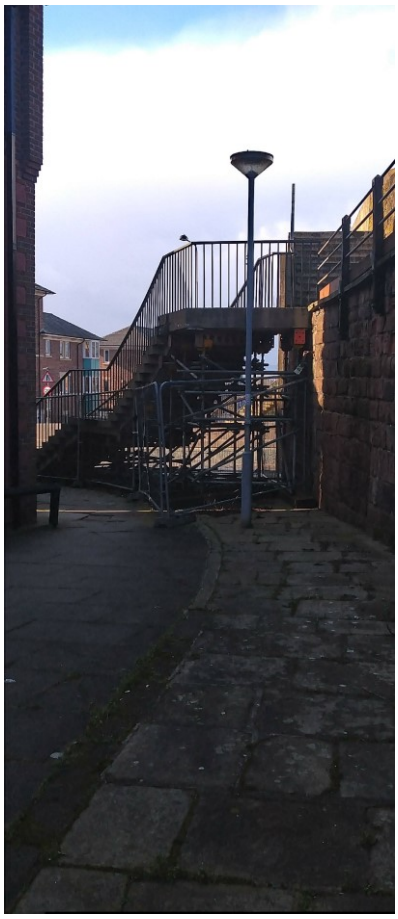
- The aim should be to extend the quality of the public realm beyond The Cross to at least meet the City Walls with greater and more consistent use of natural stone surfacing. …
- The basic vernacular palette of natural stone materials in Chester should continue to be replicated in the design of Chester's principal streets, as well as preserved and maintained on the historic minor streets in which they are currently found.

3.4 sets out detailed design guidance for pavements, kerbs and carriageways. 1b foresees the resurfacing of Lower Bridge Street and Lower Watergate Street in setts

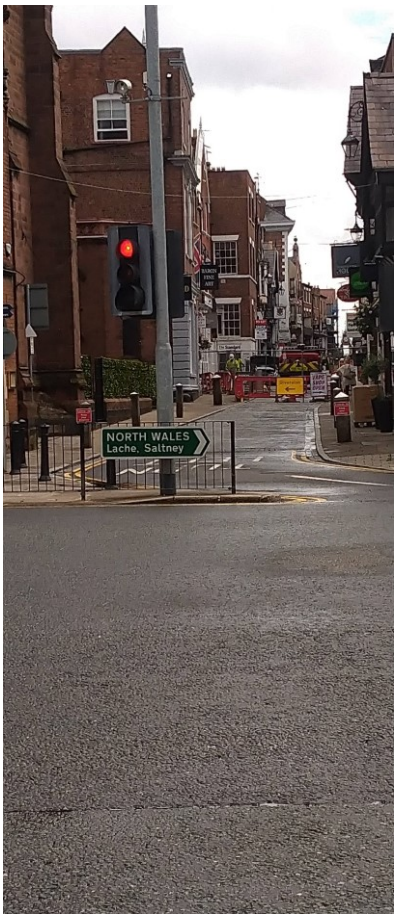
8.3 foresees the creation of cycle lanes along the Inner Ring Road.

P Carrington
For Chester Archaeological Society
20-06-2020

Illus 1 The ‘second cross’ outside the Eastgate. An example of unsightly modifications that put vehicles first.



Illus 2 The W end of Water Tower Street, blocked by unneeded steps.



Illus 4 The W end of Watergate Street, completely severed from the lower part of the street by traffic infrastructure.

Two views of Blaukapelseweg in Utrecht, before and after the introduction of cycleways and trees. (From a tweet by Edwin Lucas @edwinlucas 17 June 2020. © E Lucas)