

CHESTER ONE CITY PLAN REVISION

CHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY RESPONSE: 'A WORTHWHILE PLAN, TO BE UPDATED AND ITS ASPIRATIONS IMPLEMENTED'

SUMMARY

The One City Plan was a worthwhile attempt to unify a variety of plans for Chester's future. Many of the aims of the original plan relating to heritage remain relevant but, despite welcome progress, much has not yet been achieved:

- There has been some admirable conservation work, but too many new developments are poor and detract from their surroundings. The latest government guidance should be followed to raise standards (D2.2). 'We need to create today's unique buildings for future generations'.*
- No progress has been made in traffic reduction or in capitalising on the city's potential to be more 'walkable', 'cyclable' and environmentally friendly. This is an area where there needs to be joined-up thinking. A network of cycleways should be created, the Inner Ring Road downgraded, and historic streets resurfaced and their coherence restored. (D.3.2).*
- Some progress has been made in creating new green space, but a major opportunity is being lost with the Northgate multi-storey car park. A downgraded Inner Ring Road would offer new chances for tree-planting (D.4.2).*
- Slow but welcome progress has been made in repairing some of the city's monuments, little on implementing the Interpretation Masterplan and there has been no investment in the Grosvenor Museum. There should be a new museum of international standing in the Castle that tells the fascinating story of Chester's long history, its development, surroundings and wider connections. The strategic objectives of the Plan for heritage should explicitly include improved understanding of the city's past (D.5.2).*
- Retail should capitalise on operating out of heritage premises.*

Prioritising these aims and objectives will go a long way to making Chester 'a distinctive and attractive city where people want to live, visit, work and study'. The English Heritage document Power of Place highlighted that people see the historic environment in its totality, rather than as a series of individual sites and buildings. This means that the quality of the public realm, especially historic streets, needs to be enhanced, and new development needs to be of the highest standard to give a 'quality feel'.

DETAIL

A. SCOPE AND STRUCTURE OF COMMENTS

- A.1 The *One City Plan* was a worthwhile attempt to unify a variety of plans for Chester's future. These comments focus on those sections that deal with heritage in its broadest sense and the overall attractiveness of the city to residents and visitors. We list the relevant aspirations, aims and objectives in the Plan, review achievements against them and make our recommendations for the future. Many of the views expressed have already been put forward in response to other consultations. We consider they remain cogent and offer a coherent vision for the future of the city.

B. CONTEXT OF REVIEW

B.1 The legislative framework and government guidance governing many of these matters has changed since 2012, with the advent of the *National Planning Policy Framework* (last revised in 2018), the *National Design Guide*, the *National Model Design Code* and *Cycle Infrastructure Design*, and further changes are foreshadowed in the *Planning for the Future* White Paper. In addition, numerous CWaC policies and strategies have been adopted since the Plan was published (listed on the [Chester One City Dashboard](#)). There have also been massive cuts in local government funding, although it still seems possible to find large amounts of money for favoured projects.

B.2 Circumstances have also changed, especially the need to take action on climate change and the coronavirus pandemic. Ways to react to the former in towns are still being debated, and it is uncertain whether the latter will have its own distinct impacts or act primarily as a catalyst for changes already taking place: eg more home working and a decline in the demand for office space; less traffic; an appreciation of local green space; a greater reliance on online shopping but also hints of a return to local, independent shops at the expense of chain stores. It remains to be seen if the numerous cafes will survive the enforced break in socialisation. Charting a way ahead at the moment is therefore particularly difficult.

C. THE ONE CITY PLAN: ASPIRATIONS, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- ... a distinctive city that makes its mark in the world. It is somewhere that people want to live, visit, work and study because they know that it is a city with a unique historic environment. (page 7)
- However, preservation alone risks ignoring the potential for creating truly world class experiences within the city's historic areas. (page 19)

4.1 Vision and Strategic Objectives

- Celebrating its long and varied history and heritage – protecting, promoting and utilising its assets, to enhance their settings and maximise their full potential. (page 27 Objective 4)
- Chester should focus on being a distinctive regional city with its own brand that exploits its unique heritage ... (page 27, ULI conclusion).
- Be accessible and easy to travel around and welcoming – encouraging and promoting sustainable travel and meeting the access needs of less mobile people. (page 28, Aim 6)
- Strive to be a sustainable city by promoting environmental best practice ... (page 28, Aim 7)
- Respect, reveal and celebrate the city's rich historical heritage and architecture – improving public realm and open spaces and encouraging developments of the highest standards. (page 28, Aim 8)

4.2 People and Communities

- Residents and visitors will also benefit from a more comprehensive, safer and higher quality network of pedestrian and cycle corridors into, and through, the city centre from surrounding neighbourhoods. Page 29, Action 2)

4.3 Business and Investment

- [Chester's] strengths do not lie in replicating the format in other regional cities, but in enhancing and celebrating the unique and distinctive retail environments that it has developed.

The existing retail offer will become further specialised with mechanisms explored to support niche, high value, local and independent retailers ... (page 35, Action 7)

4.4 Living City

- The city will implement a set of building design principles alongside using a design review panel to critically reflect on proposals, provide design advice and support the planning and delivery process for development including the public realm (in accordance with the city's *Public Realm Design Guide*).

New developments must be of a quality standard to sit proudly and comfortably within the city's sensitive archaeological and architectural environment. The *Historic Characterisation Study* will be a key tool to inform the historic importance of areas of the city. (page 37, Action 2)

- A wealth of irreplaceable archaeology and architecture survives within Chester including extensive buried remains as well as its City Walls, Rows, Amphitheatre, Roman Gardens, and Castle. These historic environments and assets underpin the city's character, individuality and unique identity and must play a driving role in Chester's future success and growth. This should include showing newly discovered archaeology as part of development schemes.

The city will ensure the upkeep and maximise the potential of its heritage assets, underpinned by a thorough analysis of their current condition and opportunities for their use.

[The city] will lever in public and private finance to create a well maintained and well utilised network (or 'trail') of historic places and spaces of international recognition. This network will provide a sustainable and exciting 'historic experience' (told in ways as directed in the *Interpretation Masterplan*) for the enjoyment and education of Chester's residents and visitors now and a legacy for generations to come. (page 38, Action 3)

- ... it will be important to enhance biodiversity in the city centre. This will be achieved through the delivery of new shared green spaces, ... (page 39, Action 4)

D. REVIEW

D.1 Specific Projects

D.1.1 Progress

Two specific, Council-led new-build projects listed in the *One City Plan* have come to fruition: the Gorse Stacks Bus Exchange (GS1) and the theatre/restaurant/library in the extended Odeon building ('Storyhouse') (H4). The former is undoubtedly further from the Cross, the traditional city centre, than the previous site on Princess Street, but whether that is a problem begs the question of travellers' destinations, bus routes (which can always be altered) and intermediate stops; the new Exchange is certainly well placed for access to the Inner Ring Road, and the amount of space required for, and traffic generated by, a bus station, are inappropriate to a densely built up historic city centre. Storyhouse as a theatre and art cinema has undoubtedly been successful, but the library, as we feared, is cramped and in part subordinate to the dining area. A third major project foreseen by the Plan – a conference centre on the Roodee (RC1) – has been granted planning permission.

D.1.2 Evaluation

Other specific projects foreseen by the Plan have not progressed:

- A 'centre for the visual arts' or 'events space' on the Little Roodee (page 64, CG1), which is also perhaps more sensibly envisaged as continuing to form part of a middle ring of parking (page 50); the contradiction is recognised on page 64.
- Investment in the Grosvenor Museum to 'secure its position as the flagship museum for telling the story of Chester's history'. (page 64, CG5)
- A 'heritage visitor attraction' at the Castle. (page 64, CG2)
- and a 'must-see historical, cultural and educational attraction' at the amphitheatre, Dee House and Roman Gardens (page 66, G2).

None of these projects were elaborated on.

D.2 'New developments must be of a quality standard to sit proudly and comfortably within the city's sensitive archaeological and architectural environment'

D.2.1 Progress

There have been a number of welcome conservation projects, notably the Town Hall refurbishment (H8), St Martin's Lodge (CG4), Grosvenor Park (G3), and City Baths (TB4), but CWaC too often fails in the aim of securing high quality new developments:

- The Bus Exchange (GS1) and Hotel Indigo on Grosvenor Park Road both show imaginative and appropriate design; and the form, scale and appearance of the student accommodation at Fontessa House (51-7 Upper Northgate Street) and on the former bus depot on Liverpool Road respect their contexts, as does the Lead Shot Tower development (BQ3).
- The restoration of the fine Art Deco Odeon building, which forms a landmark at the northern end of Town Hall Square, has been justifiably praised, but the external appearance of the Storyhouse extension (H4) could have been more refined.
- The Fountains Health Building is wholly out of place in form, scale (especially height (five stories) close to the City Walls, in an area where the *Chester Characterisation Study* (page 247) recommended two to three stories) and appearance, and shows no respect for the sloping topography; it would have been more appropriate in the Business Quarter. Together with the former Travelodge/Sumner House its long, high roofline completely spoils the key view of the city from Sealand Road (*Local Plan Part Two*, 24, 2.43, key view 10). These two buildings are now being used as a precedent for a proposed additional two stories to Royal House on the corner of Delamere Street and Upper Northgate Street, in total disregard for the Listed Buildings on the latter street.
- The refurbished Habitat building on Pepper Street (the so-called 'Dining Quarter') would be more appropriate in its appearance and materials to an out-of-town retail park than a conservation area in a historic city.
- Even when, in accordance with its own policies, the Council has rejected proposals for out-of-scale buildings, as at Tower Wharf (CP1), Hunter Street and on Black Diamond Street (all student accommodation), it has been overruled on appeal by government planning inspectors.

Many of these judgements have been echoed in the Chester Civic Trust's 'Good, Bad and Ugly' awards.

- The worst development in terms of inappropriate layout, form, scale (especially height), appearance, materials and accessibility is that currently under construction at Northgate Phase I (H1), which has been promoted by the Council itself in contravention of its own *Local Plan Part Two* policies (CH 5), the criteria set out for the area in the *Chester Characterisation Study* (page 104), and the judgement of its own Design Review Panel, who:

.... did warn against the overall impression of the scheme in terms of form, and material feeling like a 1990's shopping area. Within the context of localism, the panel would suggest further thought on how the scheme can be adjusted to reflect the locality more creatively.

The regrading involved in the scheme effectively destroys the medieval Princess Street, opposite the Abbey Gateway, and reduces accessibility by needlessly introducing steps; it will be difficult to undo this damage in the future. Functionally, the scheme fails to take the opportunity to bring the market to the Town Hall Square frontage, in the former library building, and reinvigorate the square and Northgate Street more generally. The spiralling costs of the scheme are depriving other projects of funding and condemn the site of the existing Forum complex to an uncertain future. For a summary of our views, see our paper [Rethinking Northgate](#). We discuss the multi-storey car park and loss of green space below.

We have commented on masterplans for the Cathedral and Commonhall Street areas (page 56, H3 and H5) (https://chesterarchaeolsoc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/CAS_PlanConsult13_CathedralMasterplan_PC_comments_V02_21-07-13.pdf; https://chesterarchaeolsoc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/CAS_PlanConsult17_CWaC_CommonhallStreetDevelopmentBriefReview_PC_comments_V01.pdf), but in neither area has there been significant progress; we had serious criticisms of the Cathedral masterplan. Student accommodation on the former Linenhall Stables site (page 58, H13) was approved but never implemented. A 2018 proposal for the Quicks Garage site on Lower Bridge Street (page 58, H9) was opposed by ourselves (https://chesterarchaeolsoc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/CAS_Plan_Conult19_LowerBridgeStreet_QuicksGarage_PC_Comments_V01.pdf) as well as by Historic England, CWaC's own Conservation Officers and the Chester Civic Trust on the grounds of form, height, appearance and disregard for context and is now dormant but shows the danger that development proposals can pose to the Conservation Area.

There has been no further major investment in the railway station building (page 62, BQ6). In our response to the original Plan we commented:

Despite the very valuable recent [2008] improvements, Chester station is still spoilt by redundant structural elements (brick arcades, iron girders) that used to support parts of a more extensive overall roof. In addition, the overall roof of the Manchester bay is separate from the rest. Thus, to an arriving traveller, the station still looks fragmented, even ruinous. These elements should be demolished or incorporated into new structures.

D.2.2 Recommendations

It is clear that the guidance in the *Chester Characterisation Study* and the policies in the *Local Plan Part Two* are inadequate to secure good quality, sympathetic design.

We have to agree with the statement in the government White Paper *Planning for the Future*, page 10:

Planning decisions are discretionary rather than rules-based: nearly all decisions to grant consent are undertaken on a case-by-case basis, rather than determined by clear rules for what can and cannot be done.

For the avoidance of doubt in the future as to what is acceptable, the provisions of the *National Model Design Code* and *National Design Guide* need to be implemented, especially the development of visual coordinating codes, even for quite small sites. For more detail on our views, see our response to the government's *Planning for the Future* White Paper '[Quis Custodiet Ipsos Custodes \(Who Will Inspect the Inspectors\)?](#)', sections 5.0 and 6.0. It is time for new developments to enhance the Conservation Area and the settings of monuments, not just – at best – do minor harm. The role of government planning inspectors needs to change, to upholding agreed local plans and driving up the standard of development

D.3 Be accessible and easy to travel around and welcoming – encouraging and promoting sustainable travel ...

D.3.1 Progress

A large part of the Plan is devoted to this subject. It recognises that the Inner Ring Road has become a barrier, especially to pedestrians and cyclists (page 24), severing the historic radial routes that join the city centre to its suburbs and dividing the walled city into three parts. It foresees traffic-calming measures along dualled sections of the road, the downgrading of the Grosvenor Park Road–Grosvenor Street section, especially past the amphitheatre, and a reduction in the number of vehicles seeking to park adjacent to the road (pages 50; 71, G5; 58, H11 and 78, GS4), together with the remodelling of the Grosvenor roundabout (64–6, CG6), Gorse Stacks and Northgate roundabouts (44 and 78, GS4), Bars gyratory (72–3, TB1), redesign of the Bridge Street/Pepper Street junction (page 58, H10) and pedestrian priority on Northgate Street (57, H7). Page 56, H2 foresees the enhancement of Town Hall Square.

With the exception of the current temporary one-way system around the Inner Ring Road and the recent bus-cum-cycle lanes on Boughton, the only progress in this area has been the semi-pedestrianisation of Frodsham Street (not mentioned in the *One City Plan*). This scheme fails to conform to the *Public Realm Design Guide* and one may question whether it is visually coherent or attractive, with seating placed in the middle of the bizarrely yellow-surfaced carriageway.

D.3.2 Recommendations

Streets are the durable skeletons that give form to cities, they are the viewpoint from which buildings are most commonly experienced and the place where people interact; they are not just traffic arteries. In the case of central Chester, they have developed over two millennia from the formal plan of the Roman legionary fortress. Despite the construction of the Inner Ring Road in the 1960s to facilitate motor traffic, the historic street plan survives remarkably well and is supposed to be protected by the *Local Plan*. Consequently, the city remains eminently compact and 'walkable', as the *One City Plan* recognises (page 3). This characteristic should be built on; future changes should be designed for people rather than vehicles, even electric ones, and mitigate the damage done to the grain of the historic city by twentieth-century road schemes.

We therefore support the principle of the proposals in the plan, but they need to be considered as a whole and linked to transport, parking, cycling, pedestrianisation and heritage strategies. If cycling is to be promoted for everyday use rather than just for leisure, then there needs to be a coherent network of direct, safe and attractive routes in accordance with the government document *Cycle Infrastructure Design*. In the interests of improving air quality and promoting active travel with its associated health benefits, these changes should be accorded a higher priority than they are accorded in the existing Plan.

In our response to the [Walk, Ride, Thrive](#) consultation we set out proposals to create cycleways between the suburbs and the city centre, simplify and reduce traffic within the walled city/Foregate Street area, reduce the throttling effect of the Inner Ring Road by reducing it to two lanes for motor vehicles (the others for cycles) and restore the primacy of the historical, radial access roads, reuniting the walled city and making the whole of the area easier and more attractive for people to explore and enjoy on foot or bicycle. The surfaces of historic streets within the City Walls should be enhanced in accordance with the *Public Realm Design Guide*. Watergate Street and Lower Watergate Street, and Foregate Street and Boughton, severed by the Inner Ring Road, should be visually reconnected, as the Plan recommends for Bridge Street and Lower Bridge Street. Town Hall Square should be uniformly paved in flagstones and St Werburgh Street should be narrowed where it sweeps around the south-western part of the Cathedral; at the moment the street: green space balance is unsatisfactory. Unnecessary street furniture should be removed.

Following the principle of minimising conflicting traffic movements (largely right-hand turns; where these remain there should be adequate filter lanes), our initial proposals could be developed further:

- Reduce the Grosvenor Park Road section of the Inner Ring Road to access only, as suggested by the Plan, page 45, or make it one way, westbound only; both would allow the creation of cycle lanes. Either choice would necessitate the dualled section of the Inner Ring Road remaining two way.
- Make Lower Bridge Street one way, inbound only, again allowing the creation of cycle lanes.
- Ideally roundabouts would be reduced to conventional, signalised junctions (Plan, pages 64, 72 and 78), especially at Cow Lane Bridge, which would allow improvement of the shattered southern end of Brook Street, and at the Bars. However, the possibility of the need to make U-turns should be borne in mind.

The expressed intention of making the new multi-storey car park on the Northgate site the prime visitor car park in the city runs counter to the aim in the Plan (page 50) of creating three rings of parking around the city in order to reduce the number of vehicles reaching the Inner Ring Road. This contrasts with the forward-looking thinking to be found in other cities: eg in Birmingham there is an aspiration to remove through traffic from the city centre and redevelop existing car parks (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-51088499>), and in Manchester there is discussion of removing half of central parking (<https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/end-driving-town-almost-half-18990496>). What is particularly ironic is that the latest government advice, in the *National Model Design Code*, page 17, envisages new city centre parking being semi-basement or underground – exactly what already exists on the Forum site!

If Chester wishes to be a ‘sustainable city ... promoting environmental best practice’, its inherited characteristic of being a potential ‘15-minute city’ should be reinforced and expanded. Recent decades have seen the ‘dis-integration’ of towns, with former central industrial (and now retail) areas being given over to residential use, and industry, commerce and retail being moved to separate out-of-town parks. This has increased the number, length and complexity of journeys required, which have to be made by car. Over time this process should be reversed so far as practical. Shops or supermarkets selling a wide range of good quality, affordable everyday necessities should be encouraged in suburbs, within walking distance or on well-established bus routes; see further our response to the Climate Emergency Response Draft Plan section 5.0 https://chesterarchaeolsoc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/CAS_consult20_CWaC_ClimateEmergencyResponsePlan_PC_Comments_V03.pdf.

D.4 ... it will be important to enhance biodiversity in the city centre. This will be achieved through the delivery of new shared green spaces, ...

D.4.1 *Progress*

There have been two welcome improvements to the public realm in the form of ‘pocket parks’, along side the canal near King Charles’ Tower and at George Street; both of these enhance the setting of the City Walls.

D.4.2 *Recommendations*

There may be scope to turn Boughton, City Road and dual-carriageway sections of the Inner Ring Road into tree-lined boulevards. Within the historic core of the city, with its medieval plan, opportunities for tree-planting should be sought in backlands, eg in the Volunteer Street –Steele Street and Commnhall Street areas.

Another downside to the multi-storey car park on the Northgate Site is that it involves the loss of a park in what was historically an open part of the city. This, again, runs counter to what is being planned in forward-looking cities. For example, at Stockton-on-Tees there is now a plan to demolish a 1970s shopping centre and multi-storey car park and replace them with a park, as well as to reduce the number of lanes on an adjacent urban motorway (<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2021/feb/11/is-this-the-future-for-britain-stockton-on-tees-park-high-street>).

D.5 ‘Safeguard and invest in Chester’s Rich History’

D.5.1 *Progress*

Repairs have been carried out to the Watergate, Bluecoat School and the Agricola Tower of Chester Castle (the last by English Heritage) and are underway at the Bridgegate. However, progress has been slow: Rock Lane/Prince Rupert’s Trench was closed for years before repairs were carried out; those to the Northgate Steps have only just been finished, and the retaining wall of St Olave’s Church remains propped up, as are the steps on the eastern side of St Martin’s Gate and the Recorder’s Steps. Work remains to be done on the Rows (H6), and especially the lanes leading from them.

On page 68 (G2), the Plan notes:

Dee House is a listed structure sitting over an ancient monument. This situation happens in many parts of the city. Consideration will need to take place to make the best use of Dee House to add to the potential vibrancy and appeal of the Amphitheatre project.

Despite this recognition, Dee House has been left to continue to deteriorate, leading to a campaign in 2015 to demolish it and excavate more of the amphitheatre. We are pleased that, ultimately in the face of pressure from Historic England but also in accordance with arguments advanced by this Society five years ago, CWaC have accepted the heritage value of the building and agreed to fund its stabilisation as a first step towards its restoration. However, the difficulty in gaining possession of Trident House to the rear severely limits the potential heritage uses of the amphitheatre site as a whole. Nevertheless, the amphitheatre, St John's Church and Dee House together should be enhanced and interpreted as a microcosm of the history and development of the city. The Society is represented on a sub-group monitoring progress on the stabilisation of Dee House and market testing its future use. We will continue to press for maintenance and enhancement of its architectural heritage value and setting and for well informed interpretation.

Despite it being a relatively high priority in the Plan (redevelopment within six years, i.e. by 2018), nothing has been done to invest in the Grosvenor Museum to 'secure its position as the flagship museum for telling the story of Chester's history' (page 64, CG5), either in terms of buildings or staff; indeed it has been stripped of most of its archaeological and historical expertise, and new exhibitions seem increasingly to rely on cooperation with the University of Chester – cooperation that in principle we strongly support, but the museum should not be dependent on it. With that expertise also went the in-house capacity to publish the results of major excavations carried out in the city between the 1960s and 1980s, especially in the Northgate area, that could tell us much more about the Roman fortress.

The origins of the interim display of the amphitheatre site, the Portico project for interpretation of the City Walls, and the redisplay of the Roman Gardens all pre-date the *One City Plan*. Improvements along the canal corridor and at Prince Rupert's Trench have been accompanied by new signage.

D.5.2 *Recommendations*

We understand that a study showed that it was perfectly feasible to create a museum in the Castle, but the results have never been made public. This could offer far more, accessible, space than the Grosvenor Museum and would make appropriate use of a historic building complex that ought to be a destination in its own right. The provision of a better museum was supported by the *Interpretation Masterplan* (page 32):

Chester clearly lacks a signature all-weather heritage attraction, and would arguably benefit from a single indoor focus for the telling of its story. Any such development would have a major impact on the destination management of the city.

We have consistently advocated the provision of a more comprehensive museum since 2015 and have set out what we consider should be its scope: not as a 'cabinet of curiosities' or a place that just regurgitates familiar but outworn stories, but as an stimulating, outward-looking place, that shows why heritage matters – because the past shapes our physical, social, intellectual and emotional worlds – and the strategic objectives of the Plan for heritage should explicitly include improved understanding of our past. It should be a place where the development over more than two thousand years of Chester's multi-layered urban environment and its rich, complex history as a borderland city – at a crossroads of the English Midlands and South, the upland areas of Wales and the North, the Irish Sea coastlands and Britain's Western

Seaways – can be explored in all their complexity. We believe that Chester’s unique history lends itself to a museum that should appeal to a wide variety of audiences from near and far; for more detail see our document [Towards a Heritage Strategy for Chester](#), para 7.3.3. Prof Catherine Clarke’s lighting project at St John’s Church, which projects historical texts relevant to the church and city in a variety of languages onto the ruins, and the short talk by Dr Katherine Wilson. ‘An International City: Chester in the Middle Ages’ (<https://www1.chester.ac.uk/global-history>) give a flavour of what could be achieved. The museum should be displaying the results of recent archaeological excavations; for example, those at the hillforts of the Cheshire Ridge and at the Chester Business Park, Puddington and Saighton, which have given us our first insights into Iron Age and Roman rural settlements close to the city; Saighton produced fascinating fragments of high-quality sculpture.

Money should be set aside to hire the necessary specialists to analyse and publish the results of the major excavations carried out in the city centre in the 1960s and 1970s, and thus update our understanding of Roman Chester, while people with first-hand knowledge of those excavations are still alive.

Significant parts of the signage scheme foreseen in the *Interpretation Masterplan* remain incomplete and should be revisited.

We agree that ‘preservation alone risks ignoring the potential for creating truly world class experiences within the city’s historic areas’. We shall not get best value out of the money spent on repairing the monuments listed above (D.5.1) unless their stories can be understood as part of a greater whole, and a new museum is the place where that can be done. Given the collapse of conventional ‘bricks and mortar’ retail, heritage is more important to the city’s future than ever before.

D.6 [Chester’s] strengths do not lie in replicating the format in other regional cities, but in enhancing and celebrating the unique and distinctive retail environments that it has developed.

4.6.1 *Progress*

This area is largely beyond our expertise but is relevant to our interests. The Plan foresaw the Northgate development as proving a complementary offer to traditional shops in Chester, crucially offering larger floorplates to tempt different retailers (page 35 and 56, H1). However, since the publication of the Plan, the Northgate scheme has been through three iterations, chasing changes in retail led by the switch to online shopping, and ultimately abandoning the retail element entirely. The coronavirus pandemic has accelerated these changes, symbolised by the collapse of the Debenhams chain, owners of Browns, Chester’s prime department store.

4.6.2 *Recommendations*

We no longer see Chester as a major shopping destination, although people who come for the sake of the city’s heritage may also do discretionary shopping if the ranges of goods are right. We agree that it should focus on independent, high-quality retailers, and the fact that they operate out of small shops, often with heritage architectural features, especially in the Rows (page 57, H6) should be seen as an attraction rather than a burden.

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For Chester Archaeological Society 3 March 2021