

UPTON-BY-CHESTER HIGH SCHOOL NEW BUILD: PRE-APPLICATION CONSULTATION

CHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY COMMENTS

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Chester Archaeological Society supports the principle of this rebuilding. The present buildings are a hotch-potch erected over the decades and have little architectural merit, and the proposal to replace them by a single unified building is attractive. More detailed and informed comments will doubtless be made by those involved with the school on a daily basis. Nevertheless, we do have some suggestions and reservations.

2.0 Access

2.1 As with many schools, dropping off and collecting pupils by car causes congestion, in this case along St James's Avenue, inconveniencing local residents. This problem is unlikely to go away. An alternative site for drop-off and pick-up parking should be found; this may require direct access from the A41.

3.0 Capacity

3.1 Does the proposed building have the capacity to cope with any reasonably foreseeable increase in pupil numbers? If in the future an additional building had to be constructed, is the proposed configuration of the site such as to allow it to be integrated in a logical way?

4.0 Environmental issues

4.1 We welcome the proposals to install a green roof and solar panels. However, we wonder if green roofs might be more appropriately installed on the bicycle sheds, where they would tend to merge visually with the surrounding playing fields and other green space, allowing a larger number of solar panels to be installed on the roof of the main building, where they would be out of site behind the parapet. Might the opportunity of such a large-scale rebuilding be taken to install the network of pipes for a ground-source heat pump?

5.0 Architectural design

5.1 The scale, layout and form of the proposed building do not cause us any problems. However, we consider that the appearance could be improved in terms of materials, colour, articulation and detailing. In the context of the emerging design code being worked on by CWaC and Create Streets to improve the standard of development in the borough, we would urge that efforts be made to achieve a landmark building.

5.2 The building appears to be of brick with metal cladding between the windows and over the stairwells. The dominant colour is yellow/cream, with accents of blue, reflecting the present school colours, and a chevron pattern in a variety of colours on the parapet, perhaps drawing inspiration from the diaper work found on Arts and Crafts-style buildings in Chester.

5.3 We consider that the overall effect is monochromatic and bland, and the cladding of the stairwells in particular looks utilitarian. School colours are liable to change every generation – far shorter than a reasonable life for the building – and too much effort need not therefore be made to incorporate them. The relationship between the chevron pattern and diaper work is so distant that we doubt that it will be recognised;

it must be judged in isolation on its own merits. The subdivision of the windows results in unhappy proportions. The roughly central doorway on the west façade is weak.

- 5.4 Without changing the structure or the internal subdivision of the proposed building, or detracting from a generally 'cheerful' aspect, we suggest that some variety and contrast should be introduced into the colours of the brickwork and cladding. The cladding of the stairwells should be reconsidered. The chevron decoration may benefit from being less prominent. The subdivision of the windows should be reconsidered to achieve more satisfying proportions; we have previously commended this aspect of the design of Blacon High School. The bay containing the central doorway on the west façade should be emphasised, eg through the use of a distinctive colour.

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For Chester Archaeological Society

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