

DEMOLITION OF 4, 4A AND 4B HUNTER STREET AND ERECTION OF APARTMENTS (26/01658/FUL)

CHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY COMMENTS

Summary

The archaeology on this site is likely to be predominantly Roman and to belong to a poorly understood and unusual part of the legionary fortress that has the potential to affect national and even international perspectives. If well preserved it should be left *in situ* as far as possible. Kirton House is a building listed as of townscape merit which contributes positively to the City Centre Conservation Area and was supposed to have been respected by the design of the Northgate Phase 1 development. Instead, it has become surrounded by much larger, unsympathetic buildings so that it now appears out of place. The requested demolition would be an example of 'bad buildings driving out good'. No buildings of the style proposed for the site featured in the CWaC design code vision engagement consultation. The council needs to set an example in implementing design policies, especially those intended to protect conservation areas, more rigorously, or those areas are in grave danger of being eroded.

Detail

1.0 Archaeology

- 1.1 This area lies in the northern half of Character Zone 4 of the *Chester Archaeological Plan*. Hunter Street was laid out at the end of the nineteenth century, opening up for development an area that seems to have been largely open space since Saxon times. The most robust archaeological remains are likely to belong to the Roman fortress: well-preserved remains of a granary were found at the west end of Hunter Street in 1983, while the badly robbed north end of a 'stores depot', with small buildings to its north, were excavated on the Odeon and Commerce House sites (now Storyhouse) in 2014. Some of these buildings, and their layout, are unusual and could influence our understanding of the Roman fortress on a national or even international level.
- 1.2 The present development site lies between the granary and the buildings under Storyhouse, and any archaeological information gained there could fill out our knowledge of this part of the Roman fortress. Remains from later periods seem likely to be slight but invaluable in advancing our poor understanding of the development of this part of Chester. In general, archaeological remains in the area are believed to lie 0.1-0.5m below present ground level. We do not have any information on whether any of the present buildings have basements or on any other significant modern ground disturbance. If well-preserved, significant archaeological remains should be left *in situ*, in accordance with the *Chester Archaeological Plan*, and foundations and underground services designed accordingly. The Archaeological Planning Advisory Service should be consulted at an early stage and their conditions followed regarding mitigation.

2.0 Design

- 2.1 No 4 Hunter Street (Kirton House) and No 6 are listed in the *Chester Characterisation Study* as of townscape merit and, among other buildings, should have been respected by the Northgate Phase 1 development (pages 93 and 104 respectively). This has clearly not been the case, and consequently, as admitted in the Heritage Statement, page 49:

The domestic scale of the street has long gone. The development will integrate successfully into its setting, and rather incongruously, it is the domestic houses on Hunter Street that presently do not.

- 2.2 The Storyhouse extension to the Odeon was admitted to be 'disappointing' when the design was first revealed; the student accommodation on Hunter Street was rejected by Planning Committee because of its unsatisfactory height, scale and massing and only allowed on appeal; and the Northgate MSCP was stated by the then CWaC conservation officer to harm the City Centre Conservation Area. In combination, the blank walls of the Northgate Phase I development (market and MSCP) and Storyhouse now reduce Hunter Street to a most unattractive. 'dead' street' without any active frontages; instead, the Hunter Street villas could have faced the 'pocket park' retained for the benefit of residents of the Northgate Phase II development (see our consultation response of [11 July 2019](#), 1.4 and 4.5, where we foresaw the present outcome).
- 2.3 CWaC are now being asked to move on from consenting new unsatisfactory buildings that harm the conservation area to actually demolishing buildings of recognised merit that contribute positively to that area and are an intrinsic part of it. This would be an example of 'bad buildings driving out good'. The council needs to set an example in implementing design policies, especially those intended to protect conservation areas, more rigorously, or those areas are in grave danger of being eroded.
- 2.4 We also note that no buildings of the style proposed for the site were offered in the CWaC design code vision engagement consultation. This illustrates the weakness – to which we have pointed before – of trying to produce a popularly approved design code for the whole borough rather than for particular streets or sites.

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