

CHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY COMMENTS

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Chester Archaeological Society is grateful for the opportunity to take part in these discussions and is supportive of the objectives and many of the specific proposals put forward. We have respected the requested confidentiality of the emerging proposals while feeling free to set on public record the Society's own views on this important subject.

I came to know too well the boa-constrictor hug of the ring road; the cracked concrete, puddles and pornographic scribbles of the subways; ...

Keeping and understanding the past ... makes for creativity, in devising ways of altering and adding to towns It is hard to believe that those who made the running in English towns in the 1950s and 1960s would have done what they did if they had known more about them.

Mark Girouard, *The English Town*, 1994, 7–8

- 1.2 The small-scale, tightly knit form of the centre of Chester, of Roman and medieval origin, and of its Georgian–Victorian suburbs, which is a major factor in their heritage value, have long been at risk from inappropriate development aimed at accommodating motor vehicles. Measures to tackle climate change, by promoting the use of public transport and active travel, should restore and build on the city's inherited qualities of 'walkability' and 'cyclability'. 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. Nevertheless, people who *need* to drive to or around the city should be able to do so easily and without unnecessary complications.

More specifically, our objectives are to:

- Protect the built historic environment and buried archaeology from damage or destruction by transport infrastructure.
- 'Restitch' the historical city centre torn apart by roads and reduce motor traffic to permit a better appreciation of built heritage and recreate urban grain on a human scale. The Inner Ring Road was necessary to divert traffic from the medieval streets converging on the Cross, but the price paid in demolished historical buildings and pedestrian isolation was high.
- Put an end to the waste of land caused by the construction of car-dependent out-of-town retail parks, to the detriment of the viability of Chester as a 'central place' that is potentially more easily accessible by public transport and active travel.
- Emphasise the need to integrate roads and transport into the planning of new developments, which should include everyday public facilities, green spaces, street trees and cycleways.

- 1.3 The suggestions below are made constructively and in good faith. However, we have to note that some recent and current developments led by CWaC can be seen as hostile to the aims of the strategy; these include the seven-storey MSCP as part of

the Chester Northgate Phase I development, attracting car drivers to the city centre, and, further afield, the similarly car-focused, retail park-like redevelopment of Winsford town centre. In addition, ill-considered actions (eg the abortive bus-cum-cycle lanes along Boughton and Liverpool Road) have wasted money and inevitably created cynicism. Imminent decisions on whether to approve an application to reuse Quick's Garage on Lower Bridge Street (26/01689/FUL) for public parking and for a local centre at the Kings Moat development off Wrexham Road, adjacent to a new primary school, that includes eighty-five parking spaces to service just four shops (25/04012/FUL) will give a clearer indication of whether strategies such as the current one are likely to be translated into reality.

2.0 Structure

- 2.1 The presentation to the workshop was structured as follows: Summary of Stakeholder Feedback, Key Conclusions, Vision, Objectives, Long List of Investment Opportunities, Map. In the interests of clarity, the various investment opportunities could have been more tightly linked to the relevant objectives, and none of the text referred to the map. We are concerned that this apparent 'bittiness' may reflect a lack of joined-up thinking – especially necessary in transport planning.

3.0 Suggested Approach

- 3.1 Explicitly define and justify the geographical area covered by the strategy. Chester's continuous built-up area extends from Blacon and a small part of Saltney in the west to Great Boughton in the east, and from Upton Heath in the north to the Wrexham Road Business Park in the south (defined in part by the A41 and A55). However, this core area is closely surrounded by villages such as Saughall, Mollington, Guilden Sutton, Christleton, Waverton and Eccleston, and the Airbus factory at Broughton, and their transport needs and their impact on the city need to be considered.
- 3.2 It may also be useful to define road traffic as within/across Chester (car/van but potentially more bus, cycle and walking); to/from Chester (residents and visitors/workers; car/van/lorry but potentially more bus and train); through traffic (car/van/lorry, potentially to be diverted around the city).
- 3.3 Given that any strategy will have to be implemented incrementally, we suggest the following approach:
- 3.3.1 *Buses*
- 3.3.1a Improvements to bus services should be a high priority, as they have the potential to substantially reduce the number of private vehicle movements across and into the city by making car travel less attractive. They would go a long way to meeting Chester Movement Strategy (CMS) objectives 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 and should free up road space for an active travel (ie cycle) network.
- 3.3.1b Increase bus routes, frequency (never less than half-hourly; quarter-hourly through business hours) and reliability, linking residential areas and local centres not only to the city centre but also providing through services across the city, without the need to change, to Chester railway station, the hospital/Bache station, perhaps the University Parkgate Road campus, and especially the Wrexham Road and Sealand Road employment and retail parks, and ultimately Airbus. Not only would such services have the potential to reduce motor vehicle use but they could reduce isolation from

employment, retail and other opportunities. There needs to be consultation with residents on the details of routes and times.

- 3.3.1c Dedicated bus services from Chester station around the Inner Ring Road may serve the needs of visitors to the city, but suburban bus services should have the station integrated into their routes. To increase routing options, there needs to be **investment** in a bus turning circle at the station (closer than the present roundabout on Station Road); the need for this should be considered in connection with the proposed development on the Anfield site (24/02465/FUL).
- 3.3.1d P&R services are important in allowing people who live outside Chester to leave their cars on the outskirts of the city. They could be integrated into suburban services and should not run purely to the Bus Interchange but continue to important edge-of-town destinations.
- 3.3.1e **Invest** in an A56/M56 P&R car park and reinstate the Sealand Road P&R service.
- 3.3.1f Define a travel zone with a maximum fare per day (with reduction for families) and simplified payment, eg 'Tap on-Tap off'; fares need to be low enough to provide an attractive alternative to car use. There needs to be a single 'go-to' mobile phone timetable that displays real-time information on delays and cancellations; this information should also be displayed at bus stops.
- 3.3.1g Introduce electric buses.
- 3.3.1h We are unclear as to the meaning of 'bus priority measures'. We oppose the introduction of bus-only lanes, absent the introduction of improbably high-frequency services (eg every five minutes). Logically, improved bus services should lead to a reduction in the number of other vehicles competing for road space, so there should be no need to prioritise buses. Where there is road space for such lanes, it would be better used for cycleways. We have to note that the Sealand Road bus lane has been out of use for about five years.
- 3.3.1i Chester used to have a tram service between the (General) Station and Saltney, and one was contemplated along what is now the Millennium Greenway. Has the desirability of (a) tram route(s) been considered as part of the present exercise?
- 3.3.2 *Parking*
 - 3.3.2a Restrictions on parking will reduce the incentive to drive into the city centre; they are the 'stick' to the 'carrot' of improved bus services, but they should not have the perverse result of encouraging people to drive to other places instead, eg Cheshire Oaks or Broughton; they need to be implemented across the borough (and preferably beyond, eg across Cheshire and Warrington and into Flintshire and Wrexham).
 - 3.3.2b However, in recent years, CWaC has chosen to increase the amount of parking in the city centre by constructing the seven-storey Northgate MSCP and, as noted above, is now being asked to approve the conversion of the disused Quick's Garage on Lower Bridge Street into another MSCP (26/01689/FUL), despite the fact that there are already two MSCPs on Pepper Street and the Little Roodee surface car park nearby. The amount of city-centre parking should be gradually reduced, not increased.

- 3.3.2c Parking in the Chester station area needs to be the subject of a masterplan. As we pointed out in our [response](#) to the Chester Gateway SRF consultation, C.1: 'There needs to be parking for the hotels on City Road; long-stay station parking; station drop-off (and pick-up) parking; taxi parking; parking for Brook Street shops; and residents parking both in the St Anne Street and Queens Road areas, and these are likely to need to be on separate sites'.
- 3.3.2d Public parking across the city centre needs to be the subject of a strategic review. There is arguably too much within and adjacent to the City Walls but perhaps not enough close to St Oswald's Way.
- 3.3.2e About half of the space in edge-of-town retail parks is devoted to parking. In the case of some shops this may be justified (eg DIY stores) but many others could be adequately served by buses and the land better used.
- 3.3.2f 'Dynamic pricing' of parking already exists in the form of cheaper rates in the evening; any modifications should be simple to understand and memorise. Is CWaC able to impose these changes on private car-park operators as well as implement them in its own car parks?
- 3.3.2g It is as important to ensure that EV charging is easily available in surrounding villages as in city car parks, given that greater private car use is unavoidable in the countryside. Charging should be as rapid and cheap as possible.
- 3.3.2h On-street parking is an increasing problem in residential areas and may obstruct not only the carriageway but also pavements and destroy grass verges. It creates problems for the free flow of motor vehicles and reduces the space available for cyclists and pedestrians. For the moment we draw attention to the problem without being able to suggest an answer.
- 3.3.3 *Strategic Corridors*
- 3.3.3a Chester only provides a bypass for through traffic on its eastern side (A55/A41); the absence of a bypass on the western side reflects the city's historical location at the lowest easy crossing point of the River Dee. Consequently there is a heavy flow of traffic along the increasingly built-up Wrexham Road, Hough Green, Grosvenor Road, the western sector of the Inner Ring Road and Lower Watergate Street to Sealand Road. This is dangerous, creates air pollution and detracts from enjoyment of Chester's built environment.
- 3.3.3b We advocate **investment** in two river crossings: from River Lane, Saltney, to Bumpers Lane (connecting with the Sealand Road–Liverpool Road Link Road), essentially keeping local cross-river traffic out of the city centre; and a more ambitious one, from near the A483/A55 junction via Airbus (the old Mold Junction site) to Blacon Point on Sealand Road, to allow through traffic from the A483 to pass west of the centre (CMS Objective 9).
- 3.3.4 *People-Friendly Streets, Active Travel Network, Protecting and Enhancing Chester's Historic Environment, Green Corridors and Street Trees*
- 3.3.4a As stated in the Introduction, our aims are to 're-stitch' the city centre, specifically by reducing the physical and psychological impact of the Inner Ring Road and its feeders, and to simplify and reduce motor vehicle movements within the ring road.

- 3.3.4b Reducing the amount of motor traffic in Chester by providing attractive bus services should by itself make streets more people-friendly and allow them to appreciate the city's historic environment (CMS Objective 1); it will also free up road space for cyclists to get 'from anywhere to everywhere' (CMS Objective 2) and for planting street trees. As any reduction in road space for motor vehicles will undoubtedly be contentious, we therefore consider that this should be implemented after people have been given other alternatives to car travel.
- 3.3.4c We work on the basis that cycle lanes/segregated tracks need to be at least 1.5m wide in each direction and should be safe, direct, continuous and attractive. In urban areas they should be on street wherever possible (because that is where journeys start and end), allow two-way movement even when motor traffic is one way, and unidirectional so that cyclists do not have to cross roads unnecessarily and can easily merge with other traffic when necessary. It goes without saying that the cycle lanes/tracks will need to be maintained to high standards to reduce the risk of accidents. In the interests of safety we do not favour combined cycle/motorcycle/taxi/bus lanes. A change in the behaviour of many cyclists is needed: they should not use pavements (except perhaps young children) and should be reminded to respect pedestrians and other road users.
- 3.3.4d We have already advocated many of the following, all of which require **investment**:
- *Restore motor access to Frodsham Street from the Cow Lane Bridge roundabout and reverse the traffic flow along Northgate Street and Hunter Street.*
This would take unnecessary traffic off Delamere Street, George Street and Gorse Stacks. Currently drivers wishing to get to Northgate Street or Frodsham Street have to navigate the Delamere Street–Northgate Street loop, wholly unnecessarily. Delamere Street is the site of an important bus stop for the Fountains Health Centre and city centre but is often difficult to cross for pedestrians.
 - *Make Grosvenor Street/Union Street/Vicars Lane/Little St John Street one way only (westbound) for motor vehicles, introduce cycle lanes, reverse the traffic flow on St John Street (northbound) and remove the unsightly chicane outside the Eastgate, with eastbound return from Grosvenor Street etc and Eastgate Street via Foregate Street.*
This would improve pedestrian access to the Grosvenor Park, St John's Church and the Roman amphitheatre – an aspiration already expressed in the first version of the *One City Plan*. Grosvenor Street, Pepper Street and Little St John Street as far as the St John Street junction would remain two way, but with cycle lanes, to permit easy access to and from the Pepper Street car parks. The result would be to turn the current southern arm of the Inner Ring Road into a local access road, with signage directing through traffic to use the dual-carriageway sections of the ring road.
 - *Widen Grosvenor Bridge.*
As it stands, the bridge is not wide enough for two lanes of motor traffic, two cycle lanes, and two pavements. Could not the current pavements be turned into cycle tracks, and pedestrian walkways be cantilevered out from the current structure?

- *Make Lower Watergate Street one way only, westbound only; introduce cycle lanes.*

Lower Watergate Street is one of Chester's historical, potentially attractive, streets but is dominated by traffic (much of it heavy, to and from Sealand Road) and so cannot be appreciated by pedestrians; note the contrast in usage with the upper part of the street, within the Inner Ring Road. Motor traffic between the Inner Ring Road and Sealand Road should be encouraged to use the Link Road.

- *Reduce dual-carriageway sections of the Inner Ring Road and its feeders (Boughton, New Crane Street and Hoole Way) to a single lane in each direction for motor vehicles, leaving the inner lane for segregated cycle tracks and trees. City Road appears to be wide enough for two-way motor traffic, two cycle lanes, plus lines of trees interspersed with one line of parking.*

This would improve air quality, provide simple routes for cyclists wishing to get around the city without having to mingle with pedestrians in the centre, and turn these monuments of the motor age, with their negative impacts aesthetically, psychologically and in terms of social isolation, into positive, attractive 'green corridors' that would offer shade to these broad streets. Upper Northgate Street and parts of Grosvenor Road would also benefit from trees. We suggest retaining the rusticated concrete crash barriers on the central reservation of St Oswald's Way as an example of Brutalism.

- *Plant trees in backlands in the city centre and to demarcate and enhance local centres and green spaces.*

Street trees can serve multiple purposes in urban and suburban contexts: having a psychologically calming effect on traffic; 'signalling' important locations; and providing shade and thus creating pleasant places for people to meet. The area of shops on Christleton Road would benefit from tree-planting for all of these reasons. Blacon South has a lot of open green space that would benefit from trees.

- *Streets within the City Walls/Inner Ring Road should be shared space (ie pedestrians, cyclists, specific categories of motor vehicle, eg residents, businesses/deliveries, disabled drivers, emergency vehicles).*
- *Consider routing buses along St Oswald's Way instead of Frodsham Street, perhaps looping back around Grosvenor Park Road and Love Street to reach a stop on Foregate Street if desired.*

Frodsham Street is aesthetically bizarre with its yellow surfacing and functionally unsatisfactory given the amount of traffic that it carries, with an ambiguous zone between the still-narrow pavements and the bollard-delimited carriageway; a more conventional remodelling with wider pavements and a clearly defined, narrower carriageway would have been preferable. It would help if the frequent, east-bound buses were routed along St Oswald's Way, leaving Frodsham Street free for pedestrians, cyclists and necessary motor vehicles.

- *An active travel bridge over the railway on Hoole Road is a priority, but it needs on-street cycle lanes or tracks at both ends to join on to. There may be a case for replacing the two pavements on the existing bridge with a single segregated cycle track on its west side, so that outward-bound cyclists do not have to cross the road unnecessarily, with all pedestrians and inward-bound cyclists using a new bridge east of the existing.*

- *We support the creation of an extension from the Millennium Greenway, north of the train depot, to Hoole Road. If possible there should also be a more direct route from the Greenway to Victoria Road near the Brook Lane junction.*
- *The Greenway does not fulfil its potential in Blacon; additional access points are needed from Blacon Hall Road and the east end of Westbourne Road near the canal crossing.*
- *If cycles are to be used for everyday purposes, there need to be adequate secure lockers in the city centre and at local centres.*

3.3.4e We have not yet found a way of easily creating space for cycle lanes/tracks along Parkgate and Liverpool Roads, or along Boughton and Tarvin Road between the Hoole Lane junction and the Aldi supermarket. It would be difficult to create cycle lanes along Hoole Road without banning on-street parking. How best to route cyclists around roundabouts remains to be decided; pedestrians should certainly be able to cross them at street level, and perhaps some underpasses could be used for cycles. The Grosvenor, Northgate, Cow Lane Bridge and Bars roundabouts serve an important function in allowing drivers to reverse direction (eg traffic from Nun's Road wishing to head west over the Grosvenor Bridge). However, perhaps the western arm of the Bars roundabout could be reduced to one lane, purely for traffic leaving Foregate Street and for other vehicles needing to reverse direction, with most traffic being routed around its north and east sides.

3.3.5 *Forward Planning*

3.3.5a Transport is a fundamental element of masterplanning. It needs to be ensured that the need to travel is minimised and that necessary movement across and to city extensions and new settlements is sustainable. This includes not only operational matters such as the routes and frequency of bus services and the design of transport infrastructure but also the location and layout of settlements and the siting of public facilities: workplaces, schools, healthcare, shops etc. It does, in fact, require a return to proactive *planning* as seen in the immediate post-war years rather than reactive *development 'control'*.

3.3.5b We consider that it is appropriate to repeat previous warnings that permitting increased residential development in the centre of Chester should not result in businesses moving to out-of-town locations, consequently increasing the need to travel in a variety of directions. A polycentric approach is good insofar as it involves the location of everyday facilities in residential areas, but it should not result in Chester (and other towns) losing their role as central places.

Dr P Carrington FSA

Chair, Chester Archaeological Society

23 July 2026

