

The Chester Civic Trust

August 2011

Newsletter

STEPHEN LANGTREE MBE

Stephen Langtree, Vice-President of Chester Civic Trust, was awarded an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List of June 2011, for services to the community in Cheshire. The nomination was prepared by Trust Members Peter Bingham, Ian Lawrence and Greg Yates, with the full support of chairman David Evans. Graham Fisher has written the following tribute.

The honour is in recognition of Steve's strong commitment to the environment of Chester and its surrounding area, his always practical approach extending to active involvement in the city's cultural life. Central to his achievement has been close on three decades of round-the-clock work for Chester Civic Trust, the result of which has seen the Trust recognised as one of the most significant in the U.K.

Steve has had substantial periods as our Hon Secretary, Vice-Chairman and Chairman. He has effectively chaired various sub-committees including New Works, Urban Development and Publicity, while making contributions to the Trust's considerable printed output. Outside of Chester he was instrumental in setting up the North West Regional Association of Civic Societies, becoming its first chairman for a five-year period. Alongside this, he has been a founder member (and chairman) of Chester in Concert and Art for Art's Sake, as well as maintaining practical links with the Buildings Preservation Trust and the Chester Photographic Survey.

This phenomenal voluntary activity may give the impression that Steve is super-human, with little time for mere mortals. I can vouch that this is anything but the case. It was into my first year as Chairman that Steve became Hon Secretary of the Trust: from the outset he was co-operative and constructive. I was always impressed by the time he would take, with his civil engineering background, to explain complex issues to unpractical types like myself. This was allied to a basic patience he needed to assimilate written material, given his genetic eyesight impairment.

At the end of the 1980s, Steve demonstrated his very positive approach to development issues. Following the Insall report, the City had become a national leader in conservation-consciousness: now twenty years later we were threatened by the over-scaled High Cross

scheme. Steve worked with a group of Trust members to contact every City Council member, MP and newspapers to voice our concerns. But far from being negative, Steve co-ordinated the Trust's own 'Draft Planning Brief for Commonhall Street'. The development proposals were rejected and Steve received an encouraging letter from Prince Charles.



Steve's impact had much to do with the Trust being awarded first place in the North West Civic Trust 1989 'Places for People' award scheme. All this set a pattern of formidable enterprise, much of it aided and abetted by his late wife Suzie, over the subsequent years. Almost at random we can select the '2000 Years of Building' projects, with accompanying book, lecture series and Millennium Trail; the establishment of Bishop Lloyd's Palace as a permanent headquarters for Chester Civic Trust; the Chester Architectural Lighting scheme; the New Year Honours 'Good, Bad & Ugly' presentations, bringing together so many in the local community.

Steve would be the first to say that he didn't do all this alone, but there's no doubt that it is his enthusiasm and energy that has successfully given confidence and motivation to others. He has been especially good at involving outside groups - voluntary organisations and public bodies - in achieving awareness of and improvements to Chester's unique environment. And I think we all know how within the Trust he has encouraged links and visits (often reciprocal) to towns in Britain and Europe. We are all beneficiaries: thank you, Steve!

Graham Fisher

HERITAGE OPEN DAYS 8th to 11th September 2011

THE ONE CITY PLAN IS PUBLISHED



A vision of the Chester Central business quarter.

Chester Renaissance has published the draft One City Plan (OCP), with residents being encouraged to get involved and have their say in taking the Plan forward. The objective of the OCP is to draw together and rationalise the many strands of current proposals and to set out a coherent and consistent approach for the City's future regeneration and development, and thereby establish an overall vision for Chester over the next 15 years. It provides a convincing narrative of 'where are we now' and goes on to look at what actions are required to achieve its vision of a prosperous and thriving city in 2027.

The OCP starts with a survey of some of the problems that the present day Chester faces; these are described under the heading City of Now. It goes on to present a vision of the City of the Future and to give a sense of purpose and direction for the revival and growth of Chester city centre during the next 15 years. It looks at what actions are required to achieve the vision of a prosperous and thriving city and puts flesh on the planning bones by ending with a 'Day in the Life' of two Chester families in 2027.

The One City Plan is subdivided into four key themes:

PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

By addressing the issues identified in the City of Now, and producing an effective response to the opportunities to drive Chester forward, the City of the Future has the potential to deliver the next successful chapter in Chester's history.

BUSINESS AND INVESTMENT

Chester will improve and enhance its role as a knowledge-based, high value business hub:- growing enterprise within the city centre and establish the reputation of Chester as a place 'open for business'.

LIVING CITY

Chester must stand apart from its regional and closest comparable competitors. The city has its own unique identity, which it must grow to flourish and realise its potential as a home, an international visitor destination, a place to study and a regional business hub.

MOVEMENT AND ACCESSIBILITY

The City of the Future will result in the need to cater for more people wanting to both access and move around the city centre. The priority is for this to be achieved with a real choice of mode being offered, and to reduce the volume of vehicular traffic entering the city centre, while ensuring that the number of people increases.

However, whatever else the OCP may be, it is certainly not yet a 'Plan' - more a set of co-ordinated aspirations. Issues like the Northgate Development, the Theatre and the Market are left in the air for future

determination. Although it is clear that the draft OCP has taken on board some of the Urban Land Institute (ULI) recommendations, there is little evidence that this extends to their suggested retail strategy. Of particular interest is the Movement and Accessibility strategy, because it has become clear to us, as we have discussed the various development proposals in the city centre, that such a strategy is a pre-requisite to making any real progress on many of the individual development components of the OCP. As indicated above, there are hopeful signs that such a strategy is being progressed, but long experience tells us that the clarification of aspirations is very much the easy bit; translating these into a feasible scheme is very much harder. I am very fond of the phrase 'the devil is in the detail'! There are a number of drop in sessions and workshops organised over the coming weeks, details of which can be accessed via the Chester Renaissance web-site -together with copies of the draft OCP and background documents:

http://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/microsites/chester_renaissance/a_changing_city/one_city_plan.aspx

Public consultation ends on 8th September 2011.

Elsewhere on the city centre scene, the presentation of an outline proposal for the Northgate Development by ING and a Council decision on the site of the new theatre have both been postponed yet again - until September 2011. Likewise on the site of the Market, where the decision-making process is particularly obscure!

The bookshelves at Bishop Lloyd's Palace are full of grand 'plans' for Chester - with millions of marvellous words and hundreds of splendid aspirations that were never translated into tangible action on the ground. Will the One City Plan be any different? It is also

important to remind ourselves that the One City Plan is not a statutory document - in other words, its conclusions are not binding on the Council. The statutory bit will come when it is translated into the Local Development Framework (which may have reverted back to being called a Local Plan by then) - with further public consultation and a local Enquiry. So there is still a long way to go before anything is finally settled!

In the meantime, Chester Renaissance is revamping their Board, starting with the appointment of the former head of the North West Development Agency, Steven Broomhead, as the new Chairman. To quote the Chester Renaissance website:

We are seeking experienced private, public and third sector individuals with commercial experience and an

appreciation of and an ability to work with, diverse stakeholders, to join this Board. Prospective Board Members must be able to demonstrate resilience, diplomacy and influencing skills and share our ambition for a vibrant and successful City.

This might be your big chance!

Peter Cocker

At a full council meeting on 28 July, Cheshire West & Chester Council approved a plan to buy Chester's former Odeon Cinema. Council Leader Mike Jones said: 'The Odeon's position in the Chester city centre means that the building will have an important role in the development of the all-important One City Plan'.

THE HOLE IN THE GROUND

When the Delamere Street Bus station was demolished, work started on a major development to deliver apartments shops and restaurants. The framework for the 400-space underground car park had already been installed when the original £34m project stalled two years ago. Plans are now under discussion to restart work. There is a proposal for a large block on Delamere Street that will house doctors' surgeries and related medical facilities. This will be a 'super clinic' that would replace four existing GP surgeries. Various CWAC social services will occupy a block opposite Gorse Stacks car park and there will be a student hall of residence on George Street.

This will be a new planning application with major changes of use from the previously approved scheme. The planning authority therefore needs to judge it from first principles. Members of the New Works Committee have seen the current proposals and were disappointed with the initial designs for the site. Our views have been sent to CWAC and the developers.

The Manifesto for Contemporary Design produced as part of the Chester One City Plan states that:- 'In recent years there have been a number of developments, which, by general consent, have fallen short of the level of excellence of design to which the city aspires and which it deserves. It concludes that in order to be considered a first rate city for residents, employees, businesses and visitors alike, Chester must continue to conserve and celebrate its heritage Ensure that additions to and developments within its urban fabric are designed and implemented to the highest possible contemporary standard.'

The development of this site is an immediate test case of this principle. The current proposals fall significantly short of the Manifesto's aims. They demonstrably overdevelop the site. Five- and six-storey blocks are planned on all three street frontages and the scheme will be visually massive. It will be



The Delamere Street hole awaits planning permission

obtrusive and out of scale with the immediate surroundings, particularly Northgate Street and the City Walls. The sheer height of the proposed buildings and their location towards the centre of the site will produce a gloomy canyon of an inner courtyard. The north-facing rooms in the student block will be dark and have cramped, unpleasant, outlook.

The scheme makes little attempt to reference Chester's local distinctiveness and character. There is not much variety in its appearance. In particular, there are monopitched roofs, which are alien to Chester. The proposed student accommodation could be designed to a different, more locally distinctive, residential style in contrast with the other parts of the scheme. Overall Civic Trust think there is some way to go to produce a satisfactory scheme on this important site. It is a test of the ability of both the developers and CWAC to produce a successful outcome that reflects the aspirations of the One City Plan.

John Herson

UPDATE ON THE CATHEDRAL PUBLIC REALM

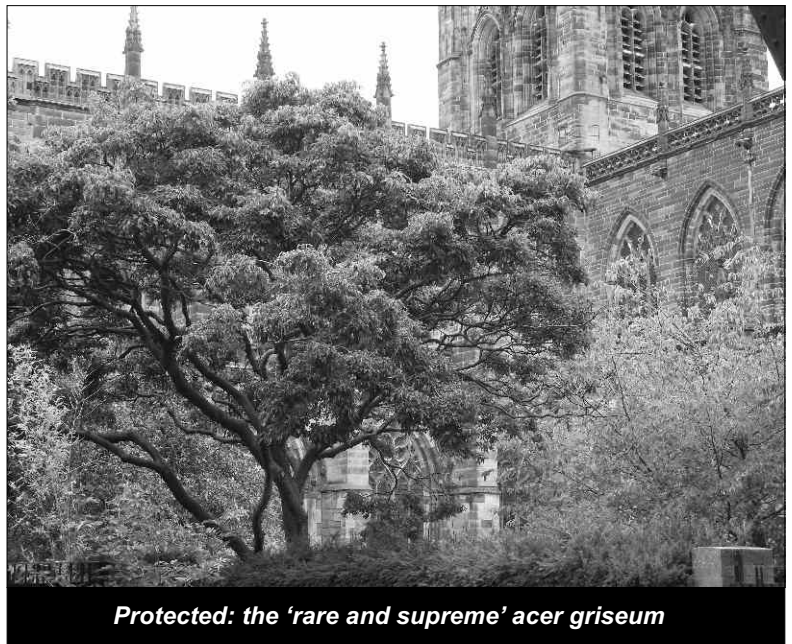
The last edition of the CCT Newsletter contained some critical comments on the proposed Cathedral Quarter. The original planning application has now been withdrawn and in June Civic Trust learned of the proposed changes. While improved, the scheme remains fatally undermined by having to accept the current traffic and parking arrangements in St Werburgh Street. The locality's traffic and parking, including disabled parking, needs to be resolved by the wider transport plan before a satisfactory solution can be reached.

Issues concerning the West Front of the Cathedral have not been resolved. The space between the Town Hall Square and the West Front should be seen as a square in its own right, not as a road through to the main square round the corner. The new plans rather illogically introduce a clear road line in the paving materials even though everyone wants the area ultimately to be traffic-free apart from local servicing. The pavement on the colonnaded side of St Werburgh Street will be widened. This will force the traffic line across the road to almost graze the Cathedral structure.

The issue of the War Memorial is also unresolved. We still think it may be vulnerable to disrespectful behaviour and might ultimately have to be protected. The Memorial could look stranded in a rather sterile paved space. The new plan proposes an out of character 'post fence' along the path towards the Kaleyards wall area. A cheaper, more aesthetic and more straightforward solution would be to use the existing railings when they are removed from St Werburgh Street.

We do welcome the proposal to make the Bell Tower a focal point with Visitor Management facilities and al fresco refreshments. However, the natural pedestrian

route through this area from the Eastgate via the City Walls will be blocked off, which will reduce footfall. It will also produce a potential anti-social backwater at quieter times of the day. The existing route to the south of the bell-tower should be retained to complement the new path to the Kaleyards. The proposals for the War Memorial Garden are generally reasonable and we are pleased that headstones will be retained at least in part. However, we still remain to be convinced that 'bound gravel' is a good solution for the other parts of this area.



Protected: the 'rare and supreme' acer griseum

The plans will be considered by the Cathedrals Fabric Commission in late July. Civic Trust has sent its observations to that body. The planning application is expected in August.

John Herson

CIVIC TRUST VISIT TO STOKE-ON-TRENT

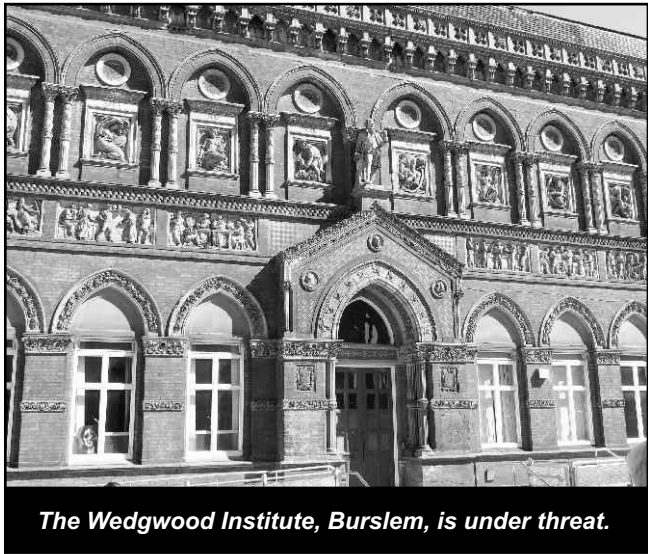
This was a fascinating, varied and mostly sunny trip, organised by Martin Meredith on 4th June, 2011. Together with Newcastle-under-Lyme, Stoke-on-Trent forms the Potteries Urban Area of Staffordshire. The city of Stoke now includes the five towns of Hanley, Burslem, Tunstall, Longton and Fenton. It was also a coal-mining and steel-manufacturing area.

The rich industrial past has left a legacy of some fine buildings, including grand town halls and industrial buildings including a few remaining bottle kilns. It has also left many problems of urban decay, dereliction and under-used buildings as the area has struggled to develop a new identity for the 21st century. This made for a very interesting visit, which took in an Arts

School, town halls, housing and commercial redevelopment, canalside dereliction and cultural renaissance, with two remarkable theatres.

Dave Chetwyn of DCJ1 Planning and Andy Perkin of the Potteries Heritage Society greeted us at the Burslem School of Art. This attractive Grade II building built in 1905 was once 'the powerhouse in developing world-renowned artistic talent within the ceramics industry' and boasts Clarice Cliff and Susie Cooper among its graduates. It is now occupied by a recording studio, film-making studio, youth project, a costume-maker, art space and café. Opposite this is the magnificent Venetian-style Wedgwood Institute, designed by Rudyard Kipling's father in 1869. It was

funded by public subscription and became the second of the great Victorian Free Libraries. It is now empty and on the Victorian Society's top ten list of the most threatened buildings in England and Wales.



The Wedgwood Institute, Burslem, is under threat.

Dave's experience includes two decades in urban design and conservation and he was the Head of Planning Aid in England for the three years. He gave a powerful presentation on the importance of architectural heritage, saying that it was partly due to scarcity value, partly to the wish to preserve examples of leading architects and partly to the intrinsic value of particular buildings. Heritage can help maintain a healthy diversity and sense of place and can also help to attract other investment, due to the high quality of environment that is produced. Stoke on Trent has big potential with its architectural heritage, but has, according to Dave, largely 'missed the boat' in the last decade of investment. He spoke very enthusiastically about recent developments in Liverpool. Many CCT members will remember our tour of Liverpool in the rain, where we were introduced to the Ropewalks area, with the Urban Splash designed Concert Square.

Key challenges in the future are the 32% cut in funding of English Heritage, the abolition of Regional Development Agencies, the loss of specialist heritage and conservation staff in local authorities and the fact that CABE has been absorbed into the Design Council.

Following a very pleasant buffet lunch at the arts centre, the tour highlights (apart from a motor-scooter rally!) were undoubtedly the fine town halls and the two theatres. The Grade II listed Victoria Hall at Hanley with its award-winning modern extension completed in the late 1990's, is a leading concert venue. The Regent Theatre was built in 1929 as a super cinema. It reopened in 1999, having been beautifully refurbished to become a 1600 seater theatre in original Art Deco style. A fly tower has been added and it can take major productions, including Glyndebourne Touring Opera. Both are architectural gems and made us Chester residents very envious! There are many challenges ahead for Stoke on Trent, the current economic and funding climate being just one. However, the current focus on retaining its heritage and developing its cultural facilities should stand it in good stead to help tackle these challenges.

Ian Lawrence



CIVIC VOICE MEMBERSHIP

The Chester Civic Trust is a member of Civic Voice. Membership links Chester Civic Trust to the national civic movement and also brings with it some benefits to individual members. Members are entitled to day passes giving free access to any National Trust or English Heritage property, subject to a small number of restrictions. Members with Internet access may apply online; otherwise contact the Civic Trust Office on 01244 318415 to arrange an application.

The free National Trust pass is available to download by members using the following link

www.civicvoice.org.uk/nationaltrustcivicvoiceoffer

This pass is transferable and can be given to friends or family if you are already a member of the National Trust. It is valid until 30 April 2012 and may be used once only. The free English Heritage pass can be used between 1 September 2011 and 31 January 2012 and is available to download by members using the following link

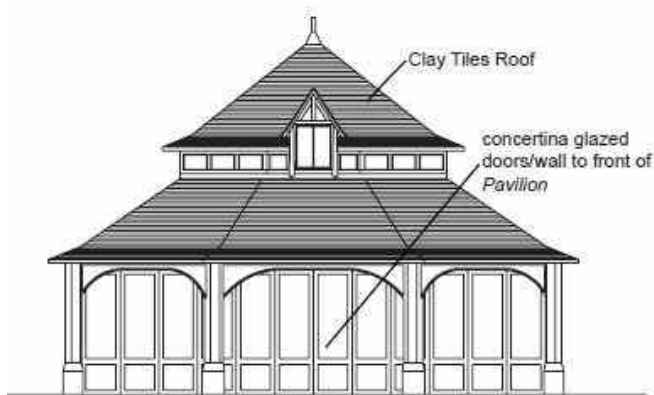
<http://www.civicvoice.org.uk/englishheritagepassoffer>

This pass is not transferable.

NEWS IN BRIEF

GROSVENOR PARK

Cheshire West & Chester Council has been successful through the first round of bidding for the Heritage Lottery Fund's 'Parks for People' programme for an ambitious £3.5 million project to restore Grosvenor Park. Proposals include new investment in the park infrastructure, landscape and buildings as well as events and activities to appeal to all sections of the community. Detailed plans will be submitted to the local planning authority and the Heritage Lottery Fund in August 2011. If successful, work will begin in January 2012 to start the design. The physical improvements will be carried out over a two-year period.



Proposed new pavilion

STUDENT VILLAGES

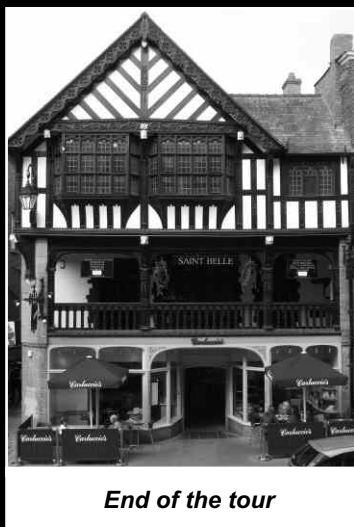
At the moment there are several proposals to provide student accommodation in Chester.

- The University of Chester submitted plans to build accommodation to house 203 students on the main campus. CWAC Planning Committee rejected the scheme in July; the Civic Trust commented on 'the low standard of design'. An earlier proposal by the University to build a 200 unit, 1000 bed mini campus, alongside Parkgate Road north of the present campus, is in abeyance.
- Morris Homes has produced plans for a canalside development of 200 flats on the site of the old Bluebird garage on Upper Cambrian Road. The present designs include the listed boathouse.
- Bell Developments are holding consultation meetings for their proposed 2000 pod, 3000 bed student village on land between Parkgate Road and Blacon.

Other proposals include 85 student apartments in the former Careers Office in George Street and the incorporation of 150 flats into the proposed Watkins Jones development in Delamere Street.

Chester Civic Trust will respond to the proposals as they reach the planning application stage.

LOCAL ACTIVITIES



End of the tour

As part of the John Douglas centenary celebrations, Graham Fisher led a party of 33 people on an evening walk round Chester on 23rd May. The tour ended at the Grade II listed Douglas building of 38 Bridge Street, now in its new incarnation as Carluccio's.

Thirty members of the Frodsham Historical Society visited Chester on 6th June. They were made welcome at BLP with refreshments provided by the Events

Committee, and later enjoyed an evening tour of the Rows conducted by Peggy Grimshaw.

Civic Voice proclaimed 25th June as the first nationwide Civic Day, described as a national celebration of what makes the place we live attractive, enjoyable and distinctive. Chester Civic Trust erected a gazebo on Town Hall Square, offering information and copies of the new Membership Leaflet.

A party of 52 members from Leeds Civic Trust visited on 6th July. They were welcomed by Martin Meredith in Bishop Lloyd's Palace, where refreshments were provided by Cynthia Paley and Ruth Davidson, with Keith Truman also helping. David Evans then gave a talk on Chester and its problems set within its historic context. The party then left on a tour of the historic core of the City with Graham Fisher and Peter Bingham as guides.

Rhetoric or Reality?



How the Localism Bill might affect us in Chester

The 'big society' and 'localism' are broad themes overarching the Coalition Government's programme. Whilst the terms are open to interpretation, key elements include encouraging volunteering, community participation and the shift of decision making from national and regional levels to local and neighbourhood levels. The Localism Bill is designed to help deliver this agenda, especially in its neighbourhood planning proposals. However, Dave Chetwyn, a member of the Historic Towns Forum executive who spoke to us during the CCT visit to Stoke, has raised some questions: is the proposed bill really about empowering local communities and is it deliverable in practice, especially in the context of public sector spending cuts?

In anticipation of the Localism Bill, which is expected to complete its passage through Parliament in November, the Historic Towns Forum is running a series of seminars to explain the likely implications for local authorities and community groups. One such was held here in Chester on 17th June and was attended by four of us from the Civic Trust Council.

The draft Bill contains several measures that, if adequately funded, should help to empower local people. Perhaps the most significant for us is the proposed introduction of Neighbourhood Development Plans. The idea is that everyone with

an interest in a particular neighbourhood – residents, workers and local businesses – will have the opportunity to define both the scale and nature of future development in their own area. It's a very laudable aim and potentially a great opportunity for residents' associations and civic societies. Instead of being reactive, local people can begin to set their own agenda.

It all sounds fine in principle: indeed it could be a welcome boost for Parish (and Town) Councils because they will be responsible for preparing the Plans for their own existing administrative areas. The problem is that only 34 per cent of the population of England live in places where there is a Parish (or Town) Council. What will happen everywhere else, including Chester? Who is going to define the 'neighbourhoods'? Who will decide who should prepare the Development Plans? Who can provide the necessary resources, and how democratic will the process be?

Not everyone will want a Neighbourhood Development Plan – and there is no obligation to have them – but if they are going to happen Chester Civic Trust must engage in the debate from the outset and not wait on the sidelines. It's not just a case of 'being in the thick of things' but a rare opportunity to re-introduce policies that will maintain Chester's distinctiveness amidst the bland strategic ambitions for our new and very diverse Borough.

Stephen Langtree

50

Chester Civic Trust
1960 - 2010

Our 'Jubilee Book'

To help illustrate our forthcoming book we are keen to borrow any photos of founder members - especially James Chandler and Gertrude Jones. If anyone can help, please contact the Civic Trust Office.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Thursday 25th August 2011

CIVIC TRUST LECTURE

'John Douglas Centenary',
free talk by Graham Fisher
Grosvenor Museum, 7.30 pm

8th -11th September 2011

HERITAGE OPEN DAYS

Details enclosed

Thursday 6th October 2011

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

St Mary's Centre, 7.30 pm
Details enclosed

16th to 19th October 2011

CIVIC TRUST TRIP TO CAMBRIDGE

Details enclosed

Friday 21st October 2011

CIVIC TRUST LECTURE

'Conservation in Moscow', by Edmund Harris
Grosvenor Museum, 7.30 pm

Wednesday 23rd November 2011

CIVIC TRUST LECTURE

'A Shell Eye on England',
by David Heathcote
Grosvenor Museum, 7.30 pm

CORPORATE MEMBERS

ALLINGTON HUGHES, Solicitors, Newgate Walk, The Precinct, Chester
BARCLAYS CORPORATE, 30 St Werburgh Street, Chester
DESIGN GROUP CHESTER, Chartered Architects, 9 Abbey Square, Chester
DONALD INSALL ASSOCIATES, Historic Building Architects, 5 Bridge Place, Chester
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSOCIATES, Landscape Architects & Designers, 8 Abbey Square, Chester
GIFFORD & PARTNERS, Consulting Engineers, 20 Nicholas Street, Chester
HUNTER STREET Ltd, Property and Leisure, Brook House, Dodworth Road, Barnsley
LOVELOCK MITCHELL ARCHITECTS, 3 Stanley Street, Chester
NATWEST, 33 Eastgate Street, Chester
PETER V MOORE DUTTON Ltd (Plant Hire), Tushingham Hall, Malpas
THE KING'S SCHOOL (Headmaster Mr C D Ramsey), Wrexham Road, Chester
THE QUEEN'S SCHOOL (Headmistress Mrs E S Clark), City Walls Road, Chester
THOMPSON COX PARTNERSHIP, Property Developers, 1 City Walls Road, Chester
THORNTON-FIRKIN, Chartered Quantity Surveyors, Meyer House, 42 City Road, Chester
TWEED NUTTALL WARBURTON, Chartered Architects, Chapel House, City Road, Chester

The Civic Trust is grateful for the support of its Corporate Members.

Corporate Membership is available to professional practices, institutions, colleges, schools and businesses of all types in the Chester area.

Visit our website or contact our Membership Secretary for further details.

If you would like to join The Chester Civic Trust, please call in at our office at Bishop Lloyd's Palace between 1200 and 1400, Monday to Thursday, write to the Membership Secretary or email us at admin@chestercivictrust.org.uk



Published by

The Chester Civic Trust

Registered Charity number 504634

BISHOP LLOYD'S PALACE

51-53 Watergate Row, Chester, CH1 2LE
Telephone (01244) 318415

Founder member of



North West Association of Civic
Trusts and Societies

For more information, visit our website at
www.chestercivictrust.org.uk