

## WHAT MAKES CHICHESTER SPECIAL?

*A Background Paper by the Chichester Society  
On the Visual Character of Chichester and its  
Landscape*

*We hope that those who are participating, or are interested, in the forthcoming examination-in-public of Chichester District Council's Local Plan may find this useful. A more extended version of this Paper can be found on the Society's website at <http://chichestersociety.org.uk/?p=328>*

*(Produced to accompany the September 2014 issue of the Society's Newsletter)*

For nearly seventy years, Chichester's councillors, consultants and citizens have fought to preserve the unique visual character of the city and its surrounding landscape. As the District Council notes in its draft local plan:

*"Chichester is a very special place ... the attractive qualities and features of our District are a magnet for people who wish to live, work and visit ... these features are an intrinsic element of our heritage and by protecting this legacy we are ensuring that it will be enjoyed by many generations to come"*

### **Policy since the 1947 Planning Act**

In 1949, Chichester City Council accepted the advice of its planning consultant Thomas Sharp that there should be no development west of the Chichester-Midhurst railway line, which is now Centurion Way. "So far as the preservation of the city's character goes," Sharp noted, "it is physical size more than the number of people which matters. A small ancient centre surrounded by a sea of suburbs is but a pale and pitiful travesty of an English Cathedral City."

During the 1960s, the Council zoned generous tracts of land on both sides of St Paul's Road as Public Open Space in order to protect the iconic view of the cathedral from the railway bridge; and to provide a green gateway from the city to the countryside beyond. In addition, the agricultural land to the west of Centurion Way was "to remain undisturbed".

The 1999 Chichester Local Plan confirmed Centurion Way as the city's western boundary. It also identified the open land south of Newlands Lane as a strategic gap to prevent the coalescence of Chichester and Fishbourne.

### **The Boundary of the South Downs National Park**

In 1999, the landscape consultants appointed by the Countryside Agency identified the wooded coastal plain between Chichester and West Ashling, including Whitehouse farm, as an area of high landscape quality. After the first public inquiry, the Inspector decided that although the area provided opportunities for recreation, it was not visually connected to the chalk downland. But after the public furore when the Inspector also rejected the no-chalk

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areas of the western Weald, the Countryside Agency relaxed its landscape criteria. In 2008, when the inquiry was reopened, the Inspector decided that although he had a higher regard than the Countryside Agency for the scenic quality of the landscape to the north and west of Chichester, it was too late in the designation process for the National Park to reopen the issue.

### **Landscape and Visual Amenity**

In 2005, Chichester District Council's Land Use Consultants concluded that several parcels of land within two proposed Strategic Development Locations were scenically important. Their conclusions impinge on the Council's Local Plan Policies 16 and 18, for Whitehouse Farm and NE Chichester / Old Place farm respectively. They concluded that:

- (a) The landscape character of the two fields to the south of Brandy Hole Copse, and the arable land to both the north and south of Newlands Lane, represented a moderate constraint to development. In addition, the priority views of the Cathedral from the Whitehouse Farm land north of Newlands Lane, and those from Centurion Way across the same stretch of open countryside, represented a severe constraint.
- (b) The landscape character of the Lavant Valley arable floor, east of Summersdale and Graylingwell, represented a severe restraint to development. The views from The Trundle and Seven Points car park, along with those of the Cathedral spire and Graylingwell Tower from Madgwick Lane, also represented a moderate constraint to development. The amenity to local viewers of the views across the Westhampnett arable farmland to the NW of Madgwick Lane also represented a moderate constraint.

### **Chichester and its Rural Setting**

Many writers and topographers have celebrated the scale of Chichester and its rural setting. "No English city has preserved both its original layout and its living entity over so many centuries" Arthur Oswald wrote in 1947, while a decade later, John Betjeman emphasised that Chichester was "still a country town and you can look down narrow streets to trees and grass".

In 1974, the broadcaster and local historian Bernard Price insisted that "Chichester must remain a complete environment in its landscape, not some nondescript fungus with odd spots of preserved historical buildings." While for Ian Nairn, "What Chichester has on any clear day --- is the gentle rising backcloth of the South Downs two or three miles away, so that God, man and nature always seem to be in equilibrium ... spire and countryside form an equation or symbol experienced by millions of people every year, which cannot be given a value purely in terms of landscape or architecture."

"Cross that bridge on Centurion Way", the distinguished naturalist Richard Williamson recently observed, "and you are in the woods and fields, the coppice chestnuts of Fairyhill, the type of quintessential England that inspired Elgar and produced his cello concerto for the world."