

## OFFER BY CIVIC SOCIETIES IN MANCHESTER TO PROVIDE EVIDENCE

This response to your call for evidence is unfortunately made in haste, as it was only late this afternoon that I discovered that an APPG had been set up on this subject.

Unfortunately, I need to start with an apology for what must be a sketchy response, but hope that you will bear our evidence from the North of England in mind when seeking greater detail of our experiences of failures to regenerate and conserve our historic environment.

I represent Manchester Civic Society (as Vice Chairman) and Rusholme and Fallowfield Civic Society (as Chairman) and am Secretary of the regional body North West Association of Civic Trusts and Societies (NWACTS). We are representatives on the Civic Voice's Regional Forum.

Clearly there is something very wrong with how we protect our national historic heritage when the many bodies established to protect them have annual Top Ten lists of Buildings at Risk and publications documenting these.

Both the societies above, MCS and R&FCS can provide examples of the issues you identify, that is:

- Commercially and socially successful redevelopment
- Unequal tax treatment between refurbishment and new construction projects
- Challenges of finding fresh uses for old buildings

To these I can add

- Commercial advantage to be gained from 'constructive destruction'.

By this I mean the wilful neglect of a building so that, ultimately, its only hope of survival is to offer to repurpose it at the price of destroying its setting by filling it with 'enabling' development. The need to enable would never have existed had the building not been disabled by neglect.

It is heartbreaking to watch this process. It is also frustrating, because there is a means of avoiding it should the building be listed and/or in a conservation area.

In theory, the local authority can inspect, do the work themselves and charge the cost to the owner. In practice, the local authority would need to pay for the work upfront, with a long and uncertain time before repayment. The remedy is almost never applied.

I am highlighting this problem because within Manchester, in the Victoria Park Conservation Area, there are multiple examples of this destructive practice. The once-proud conservation area is, despite its provenance, holding onto its magnificence by a thread.

Victoria Park was once the premier suburb of Manchester, close to the University and home to a galaxy of notable residents, for instance the Pankhursts and Charles Halle. Nearby Fallowfield housed similarly illustrious residents, Scott of the Manchester Guardian, Waterhouse, architect of the Natural History Museum and Manchester Town Hall and Joseph Whitworth, engineer, inventor and philanthropist.

We are fortunate in our R&FCS Committee to have the collator of an archive of the area <https://rusholmearchive.org>

We also have a local businessman who is willing to buy some of the properties, now rotting, and restore them for residential use, but the owner will not sell.

Several of the mansions have been repurposed for educational uses. A school owns and maintains three of them, the Chinese consulate has another, several have been repurposed as University halls of residence. One of these has suddenly been closed (a year pre-pandemic). Another suffers from

repeated attempts to build an extra residential block in the grounds. So far, two separate attempts have been taken to appeal at the Planning Inspectorate, and dismissed, but we expect more tries.

But the land is valuable, more so if building high were to be permitted. Of course that would destroy the ambience of the conservation area.

Land swaps are now being entertained, with a proposal that affordable housing required by Policy for proposed inner city development, should be relocated in the conservation area in blocks which will loom over the rest of the CA.

There is much more to be explained about the R&FCS area, which may be of interest to your APPG, but I hope that in the short time I have here I have managed to persuade you that our situation would provide a rich seam of examples of relevance for you.

Both of the committees (MCS and R&FCS) would be pleased to support you should you wish to explore these issue in a very remarkable, but challenged environment. I am sure that some very knowledgeable members of our local Victorian Society would also be willing to help.

Yours sincerely,

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