



**Urban Land
Institute**

Shaping the Future of Chester

ULI Advisory Services Panel Presentation
12th November 2010

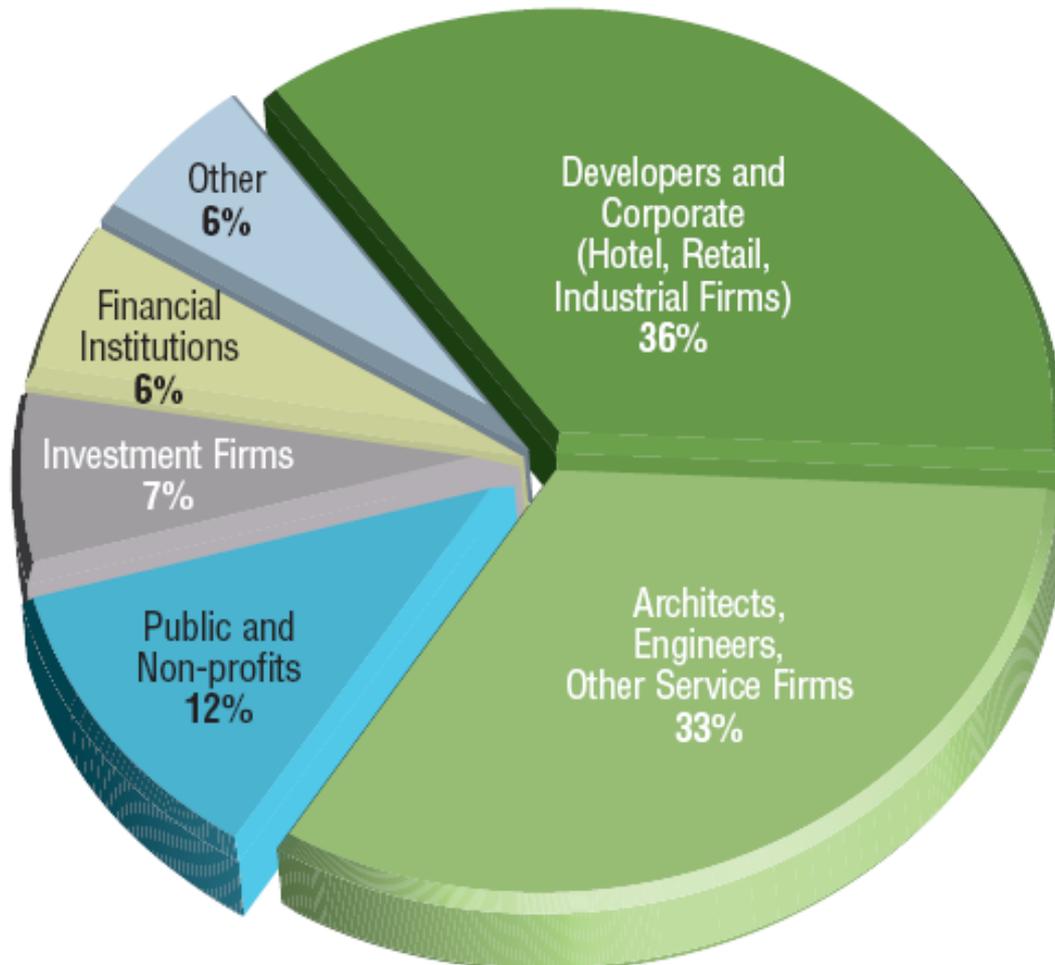
Alexandra Notay, ULI

Urban Land Institute

ULI's mission is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide.

- ❑ Not-for-profit founded 1936, USA
- ❑ Neutral and Non-Lobbying
- ❑ 30,000+ members
- ❑ 90 countries
- ❑ Washington DC, London, Frankfurt, Hong Kong, Tokyo

Entire property spectrum

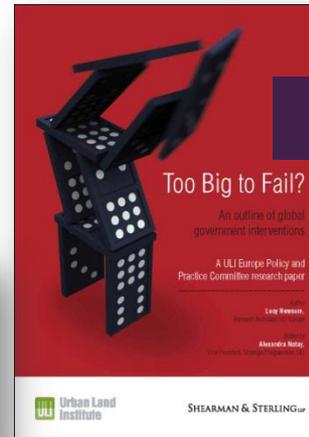


Diverse programme of work

Outreach



Knowledge



Research



Exchange



ULI Advisory Services Panel

- Over 600 run around the world since 1947.
- Private sector real estate/land use/ investment perspective.
- ULI handpicks a group of experts from its membership who act as an independent and objective review panel.
- Develop a focused assignment with the local sponsors.
- 5day site visit ends this public presentation
- Written report 3 months afterwards.

Panel for Chester



GROSVENOR ESTATE



CHESTER
RACECOURSE



University of
Chester



**Urban Land
Institute**

Shaping the Future of Chester

Introducing the panel team

Jim deFrancia, Panel Chair, Lowe Enterprises

Assignment Questions

1. What is Chester trying to be?
2. How can Chester be a distinct City and an active part of the sub region?
3. What can be done in the near future to improve the resident experience of Chester and retain and engaged community for the longer term?
4. What should Chester's city positioning/tourism strategy/goals be for visitor experience?
5. How can Chester position itself to attract and retain the business community and encourage inward investment?

Panel Process



Panel Process



Panel Process



Panel Process



Panel Process



Panel Process



Who We Spoke With



Who We Spoke With



Who We Spoke With



Who We Spoke With



Who We Spoke With



Who We Spoke With



Who We Spoke With



What We Heard

- “Chester is both physically and institutionally fragmented.”
- “Chester is like a theatre – we have all the props, scenery and actors but no script.”
- “Chester is a fantastic city but disjointed.”
- “There are bits and pieces everywhere but no comprehensive approach.”
- “Nothing is integrated.”
- “Chester is very fond of ‘pop-up’ initiatives but with little coherence.”
- “Lots of talk – little implementation.”

Q1:

WHAT IS CHESTER TRYING
TO BE?

Presented by Jim de Francia, Panel Chair

What is Chester trying to be?

- Chester is trying to be too many things to too many people.
- In so trying to be all things, it becomes no one thing.
- This circumstance begs the question, then, of what Chester *should* be, or should strive to be.
- The panel concludes that Chester should use its legacy as a city of history, heritage and a city of regional distinction to move forward.
- To that end, it should focus on what it *has*, and make those assets better and better used.

Q2:

HOW CAN CHESTER BE A
DISTINCT CITY AND AN
ACTIVE PART OF THE SUB-
REGION?

Assets:

- ▣ **Suffering from increased competition....**
- ▣ **But marvellous assets....**
- ▣ Heritage and history
- ▣ Growing businesses
- ▣ Corporate goodwill...
- ▣ Government, church, and law
- ▣ Grosvenor Estates
- ▣ Retail centre
- ▣ Higher education institutions

Unrealised Potential

- In this list there is much unrealised potential....
- And you have tied your hands together ...
 - ▣ too many organisations
 - ▣ planning blight around Northgate scheme
 - ▣ green belt absolutism
 - ▣ conservation politics
 - ▣ congestion

And as a result there is:

□ stress.....

□ anxiety.....



What to do? Economy

There is less of a problem of shortage of demand than a poor response to that demand....you should

- ▣ Be locally distinctive....
- ▣ Capture regional demand
- ▣ Support your entrepreneurs
- ▣ Maximise linkages

Marketing

- Chester's brand....it used to be aristocratic and based around the cathedral...
- You are competing lower down the market and are in danger of getting a new reputation for ...
- Get yourself back to the top....Be better than York!

Management of city

- **Leadership:** A voice for Chester probably centred on a public-private collaboration with resources provided by both sectors.
- **Performance metrics:** Chester must have clear, monitorable statistics that are reviewed regularly....how could a business work without proper figures?
- **International experience:** Look at Charleston, South Carolina USA, Aix-en-Provence, or larger cities like Munich or Barcelona.....

Take advantage of new localism

- The new government wants you to be locally responsible *and*
- Wants you to be responsible for generating your own resources and solving your own problems.
- You have the resources....the trend is in your favour.

In conclusion....

- **Be distinctive....exploit what you've got, get a leader, establish a brand, market, monitor your progress....**

Q3:

WHAT CAN BE DONE IN THE NEAR FUTURE TO IMPROVE THE RESIDENT EXPERIENCE OF CHESTER AND RETAIN AN ENGAGED COMMUNITY FOR THE LONGER TERM?

Presented by Ed McMahon & Gordon Brown

To improve the resident experience of Chester?

- **In The City Centre:** The city centre - the heart and soul of Chester - is key to the future of Chester's success. A city without a healthy city centre is not a healthy town. The city centre needs to be a good place to live, work and visit.
- **Citywide:** A good place to live can also be a good place to visit, but good places to visit are not always good places to live.
- **Economic Development:** The economies of most real cities develop from within.

In The City Centre:

- We were surprised that there appear to be no guidelines for building design. To ensure new buildings complement the city centre's heritage assets, building design guidelines, along with a review entity and review process are needed.
- The site by site reactions of the past indicates development alternatives are not understood. This requires a city centre strategic plan that considers housing, retail, offices, parking, public transport and boutique assets. It does not need piecemeal site by site reactions.

In The City Centre: (cont)

- Oversight focused on the city centre is lacking. There is an immediate need for a city centre asset/estate management function to:
 - ▣ Identify and remove barriers to vehicle flow into and through the city centre.
 - ▣ Create and manage a weekend marketplace in the centre (farmers market/arts and crafts/antiques etc)
 - ▣ Enhance access to and use of the River and Canal.
 - ▣ Enhance police presence at key places in the evenings to create a greater sense of social order.

Citywide:

- Improve management of public spaces throughout the city. This includes better signs and connections making it easier for visitors to get around Chester.
- Identify and create useable bicycle ways that make it safe to ride into the city centre.
- Restrict on-street parking in key locations to improve traffic flow.
- Create more park & ride facilities.
- Install more public toilets in key locations.

Economic Development:

- Create a formal institutional linkage between the city, higher education and the zoo.
- Provide internships for students and create a business incubator for local retail, rural property management, heritage restoration and other fields.

To retain an engaged community for the longer term – three basic measures

- Establish a city-wide civic forum for dialogue about the past and sustainable future of Chester.
- Develop an entrepreneurial and innovative environment in the city built on formal links between
 - ▣ heritage assets (those responsible for them),
 - ▣ The University and College,
 - ▣ The Zoo. – These three need connections to an expanded financial services sector that spins off ways of financing innovation in the Chester region.
- Encourage starting business improvement districts to enhance the public realm throughout Chester.

And how much will it cost?

- Finally, these recommendations about
 - ▣ the city centre,
 - ▣ the city as a whole and
 - ▣ economic development
- will take less than three years to accomplish requiring relatively few financial resources.
- With the resources you have now you can start on Monday!

Q4:

WHAT SHOULD CHESTER'S
CITY POSITIONING / TOURISM
STRATEGY / GOALS BE FOR
VISITOR EXPERIENCE?

Chester City Positioning

Chester should focus on “boutique” tourism striving to become “best in class”, while carefully supplementing its boutique tourist appeal with a focus on added corporate employment and expansion of its educational sector.

How:

- ❑ Focus on value added, as opposed to sheer number of tourists
- ❑ Lower impact, higher yield
- ❑ Quality vs. quantity
- ❑ “Less is more”
- ❑ Focus on more discerning and sophisticated visitors, with higher disposable income
- ❑ Provide integrated short-break experiences (hotel, dining, heritage, cultural activities, shopping, spa, golf, etc.)
- ❑ Provide high-end meeting facilities for senior corporate segment (executive retreats, special board meetings)

Assets:

- ▣ City walls
- ▣ Cathedral
- ▣ Rows
- ▣ Historic centre (not the same as intra-walls)
- ▣ River
- ▣ Canal and docks
- ▣ (Amphitheatre)
- ▣ ('Castle')
- ▣ (Apparently) good plans
(lots of them)



Liabilities:

- ❑ Visitors want to 'experience', not just to 'listen' or 'read'
- ❑ Some attractions disappoint (amphitheatre, 'castle')
- ❑ Some attractions could be better presented (city walls, rows)
- ❑ Few attractions, they can be seen in a few hours
- ❑ Too many development / tourist plans
- ❑ Lack of financial resources
- ❑ Lack of clear tourism strategy



Liabilities (cont.)

- ▣ Unclear leadership
- ▣ Insufficient public private partnership / coordination
- ▣ Disparate/incompatible opinions/views (Dee House, Northgate Arena)
- ▣ Lack of quality hotel accommodation
- ▣ Limited number of restaurants and cafes
- ▣ Lack of quality shops with unique and diverse offer
- ▣ Improvable marketing

TOURISM STRATEGY ACTIONS (1)

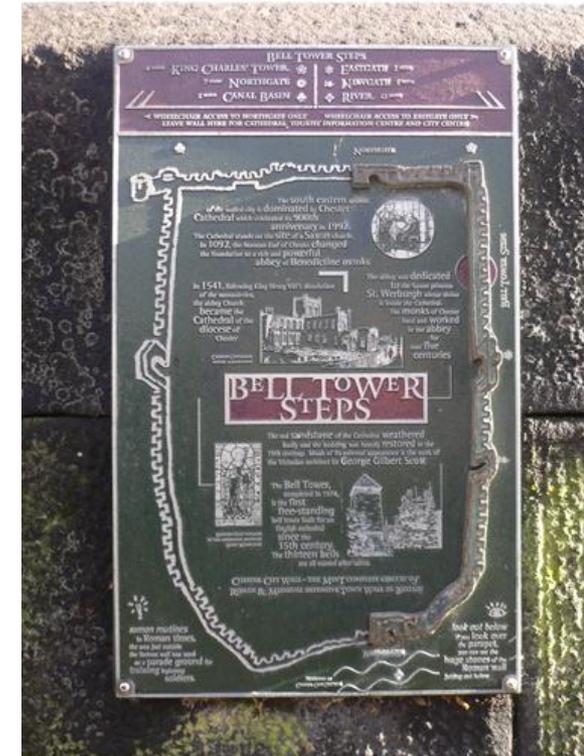
Shorter term – lower investment

- ▣ Improve arrival info at station (static + human).
- ▣ Improve public realm lighting and cleanliness; animate streets (banners, public art, entertainers, markets, fountains etc.)
- ▣ Improve wayfinding and signage (for orientation as well as for interpretation).
- ▣ Increase/strengthen pedestrianisation and improve/extend bicycle paths through the city centre (too many concessions to cars).
- ▣ Introduce on-street bicycle rental scheme.
- ▣ Manage Rows as an open-air shopping centre.

TOURISM STRATEGY ACTIONS (2)

Shorter term – lower investment

- Improve visitor itineraries / tourist trails (specific routes, signage, milestones, shopping trail, Roman trail, etc.) and historic guided tours – engaging, informative, entertaining – volunteers?



TOURISM STRATEGY ACTIONS (3)

Shorter term – lower investment

- Integrate university curriculum with city experience (heritage management, hospitality, museology, preservation, zoo management etc.) to create a 'centre of excellence', synergies, training for students and jobs for graduates, entrepreneurship/innovation incubator.
- Upgrade 'arrival experience', in particular pedestrian link from train station to city centre.
- Consider refurbishing old art-deco cinema, potentially focusing on specific non-block-buster, cinematographic programming.
- Consider introducing parking/pay by shops scheme.

TOURISM STRATEGY ACTIONS (4)

Short term – lower investment

- Reinforce/consolidate Chester festival(s), culture in unique spaces, use interesting, attractive venues (town hall, churches, etc.)
- Improve connection between Zoo and City Centre (transport, functional and 'psychological'). Create weekend package – 1day city, 1day zoo.



BIG IDEAS Longer term – higher investment

- ▣ Ideas to consider carefully
- ▣ Will strengthen Chester's desired positioning
- ▣ Will likely require significant investment
- ▣ Creative investment schemes may be possible – attract private investment
- ▣ Close public/private co-operation and co-ordination will be essential
- ▣ There will be financial, operational and planning challenges to surmount
- ▣ Professional , qualified, independent, frank advice is key
- ▣ Detailed planning and careful implementation will be required
- ▣ Sustainability (environmental, socio-cultural and economical) must be core principle
- ▣ Strong leadership and clear strategy are critical

BIG IDEAS Longer term – higher investment

1. Further improve public realm

- ▣ Opportunities:
 - To provide an enhanced 'sense of place' to the most attractive urban assets of the city, such as the Rows, the Cathedral Quarter, etc.
 - To create attractive urban spaces such as squares and terraces for various activities, such as open-air cafes, street performances, etc.
 - To focus investment on the key, most attractive urban spaces so the impact gradually irradiates into surrounding areas.

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BIG IDEAS Longer term – higher investment

2. Dee River

- ▣ Opportunities:
 - Create a focus of activity at the southern end of the City
 - Use the river bank(s) to refresh and reinvigorate the current leisure experience at the southeast side of the city, thus making better use of the available assets, especially the river.
 - Make Chester “the Henley of the North”.
 - Potential location of conference facility?



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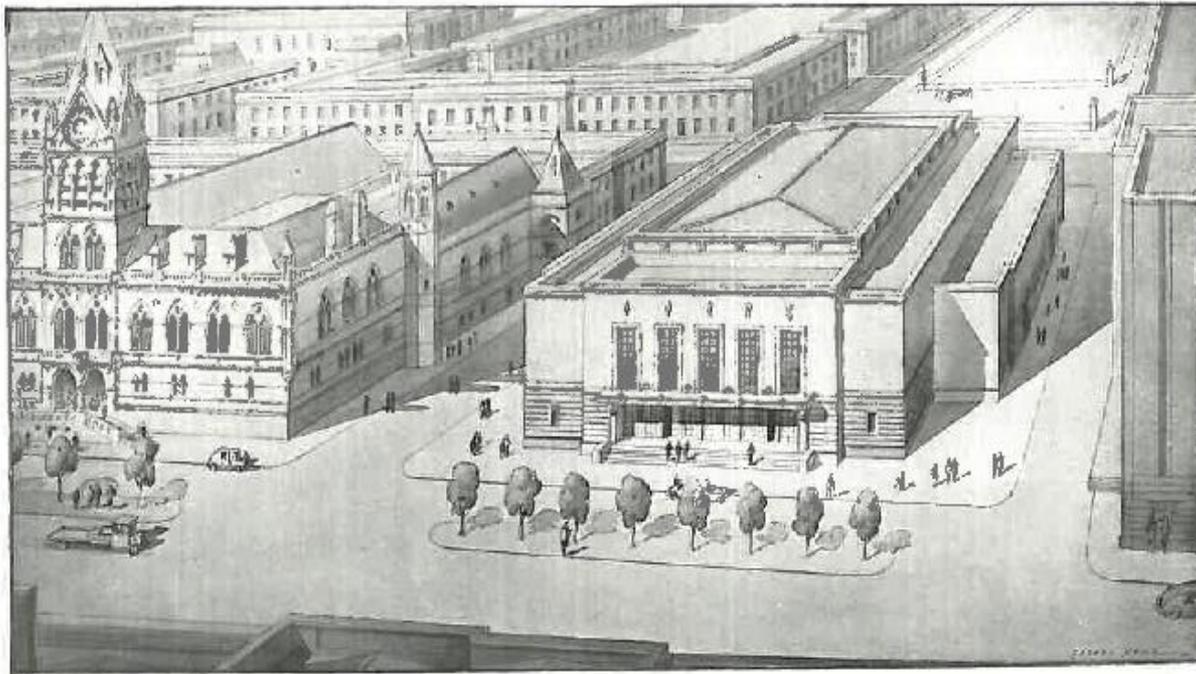
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- Opportunities:
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 - Potential redevelopment of derelict or unsightly buildings

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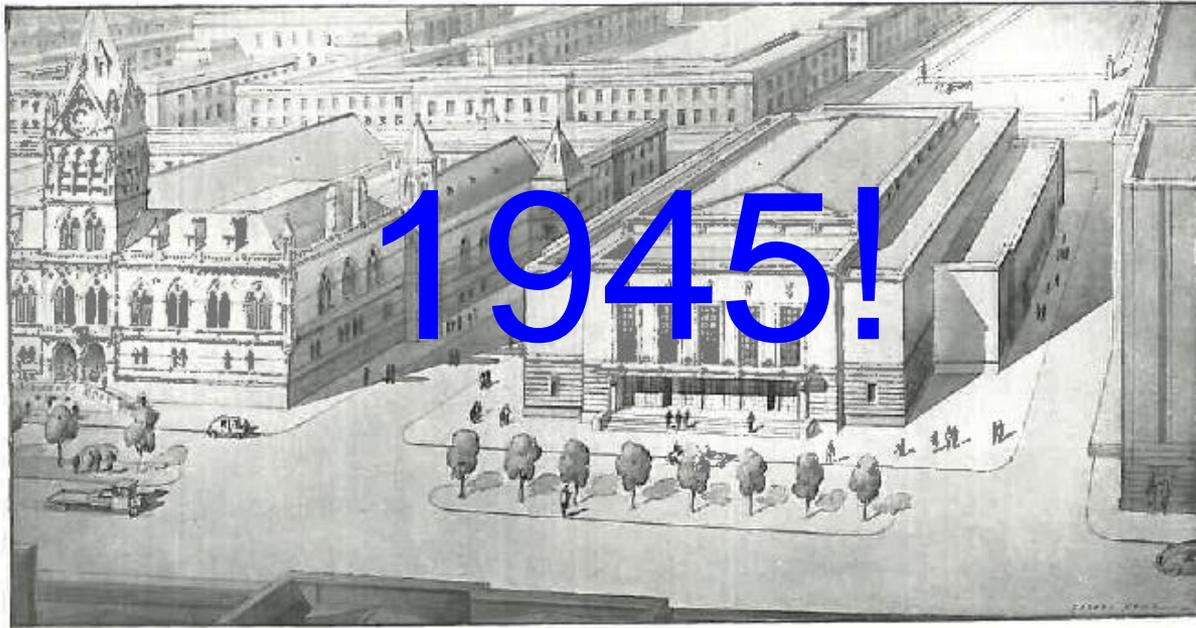


If Chester is to become a cultural centre it badly needs a large Concert Hall, to seat from 1,500 to 2,000 persons. This drawing shows how the site in the Town Hall Square, between Princes Street and

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If Chester is to become a cultural centre it badly needs a large Concert Hall, to seat from 1,500 to 2,000 persons. This drawing shows how the site in the Town Hall Square, between Princes Street and Hunter Street, could be developed for this purpose. This should be studied together with that on page 61, as this building would form part of the Civic Centre

BIG IDEAS Longer term – higher investment

4. Multi-purpose conference/performing art/exhibition facility

- ▣ Opportunities:
 - Use for business, entertainment, cultural activities, exhibitions and performances
 - Optimize investment and operating costs
 - Potential to attract private investment
 - Consider potential locations on city centre to energize urban environment

BIG IDEAS Longer term – higher investment

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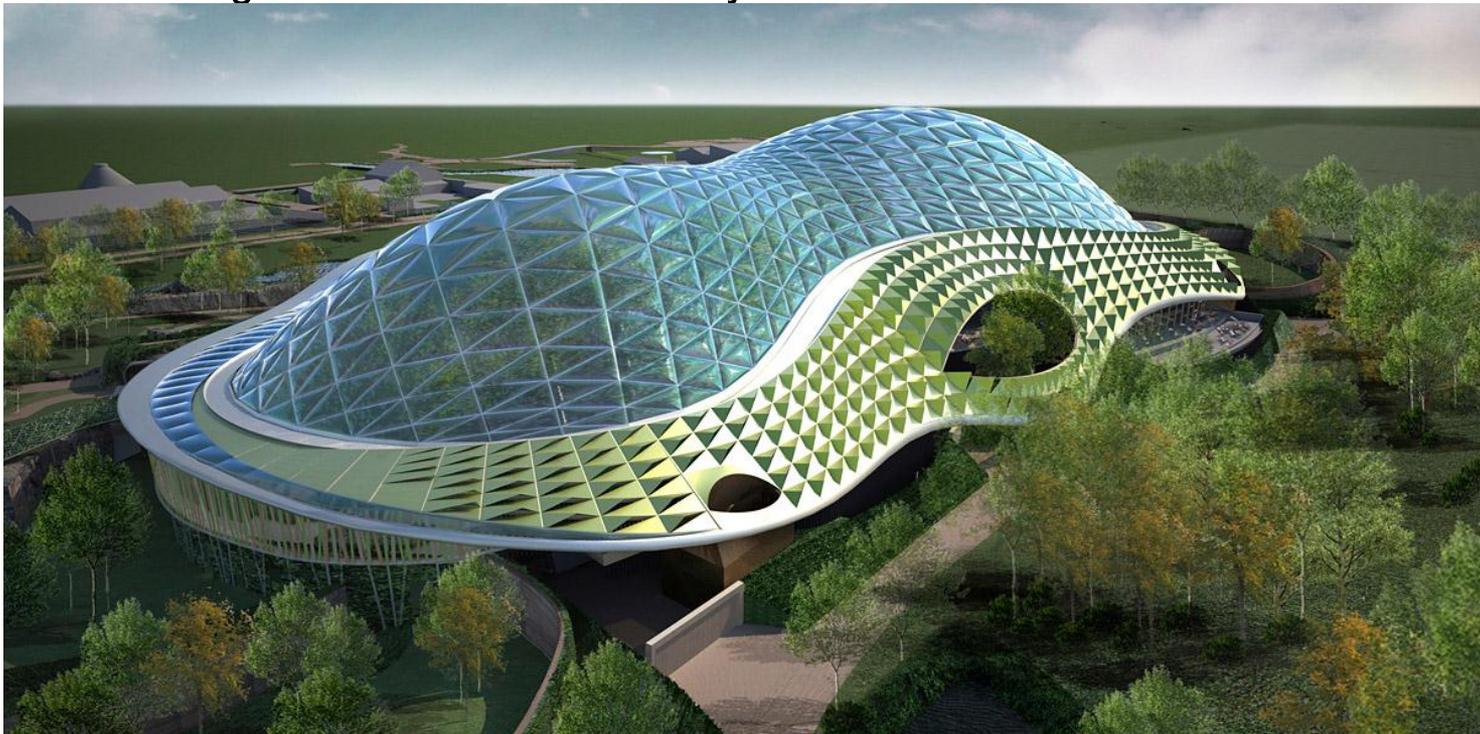
5. Biodome (Zoo extension)

- ▣ Opportunities:
 - Create a new attractor à la Eden Project.
 - Temporary exhibitions (attract repeat visitation)
 - Build innovation capability in relation to environmental sciences, zoo management etc. with university

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BIG IDEAS Longer term – higher investment

6. History experience centre

▣ Opportunities:

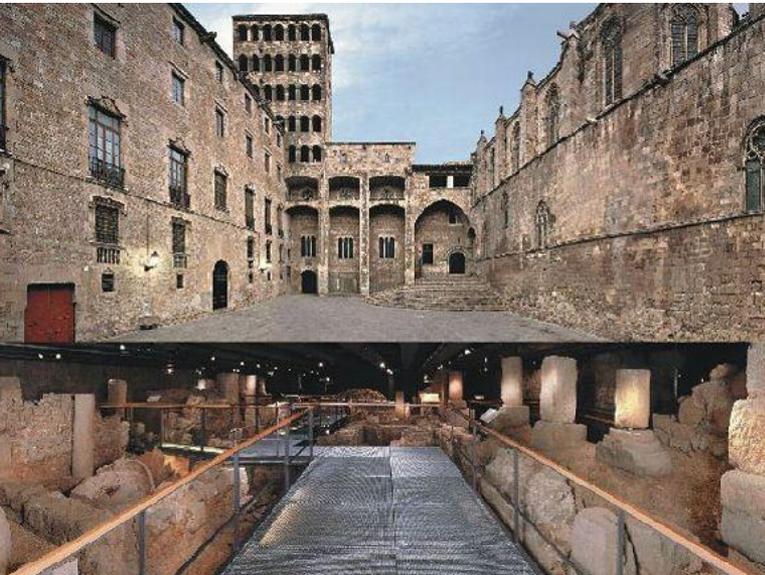
- Contents focused on a specific period of Chester's history, e.g., the Romans, OR the history of Chester since Prehistory to the 21st Century)
- A centre that generates activities in and around it, as well as business and employment opportunities.
- Use the Roman Amphitheatre AND Dee House as the 'container' for the new museum, combining outdoor and indoor spaces (dig under Dee House to expose Roman remains and use the resulting space as part of the museum to create a unique spatial experience).

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BIG IDEAS Longer term – higher investment

7. Chester Port

- ▣ Opportunities:
 - Use the canal and what is left of the Chester's old harbour infrastructure to create a new leisure experience at the northwest side of the city centre
 - Bringing into value assets currently neglected.
 - Generate activity between the canter and the port.

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BIG IDEAS Longer term – higher investment

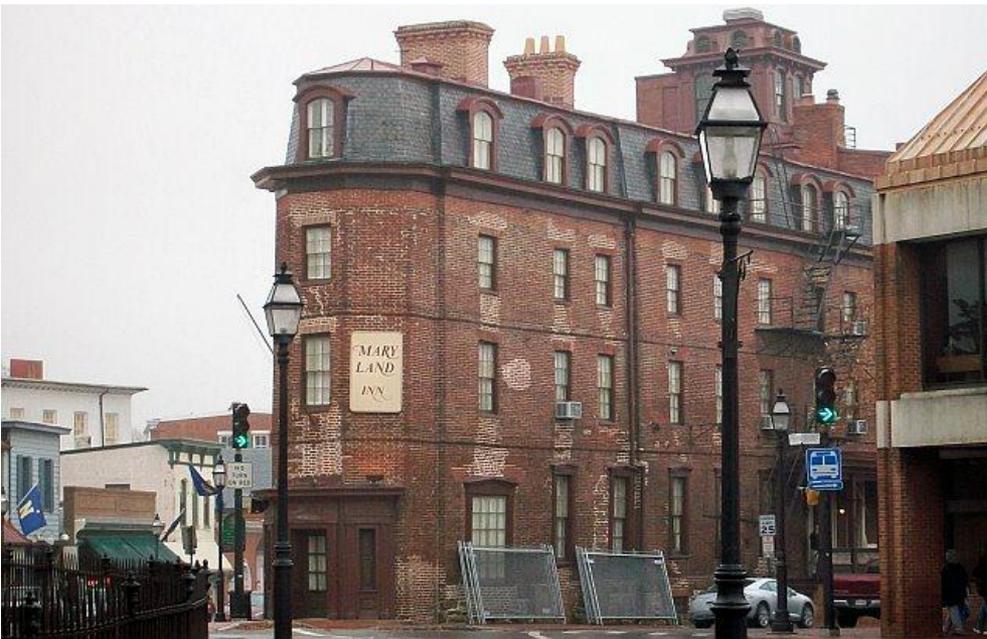
8. Hotel at The Rows

- ▣ Opportunities:
 - To use the currently underutilized upper floors of the rows for a high-end city centre hotel
 - Potential for further uses such as residential, office incubators, artist's studios, etc.
 - Revitalize Chester's city centre beyond 9:00 to 5:00

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Q5:

HOW CAN CHESTER POSITION
ITSELF TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN
THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY AND
ENCOURAGE INWARD
INVESTMENT?

Presented by Andrew Gould

Inward Investment

- Pretty strong legacy of success in attracting inward investment – mostly based out of town
- Clarity on inward investment strategy going forward:
 - Clarity and focus over who promotes
 - The “case” for Chester: what’s the offer
 - Targets & targeting
- ▣ Build on success – advocacy and ambassadorial role of those who have moved here
- ▣ Make Chester a stronger focus for the business community and business networks



Regional Business Centre

- Chester may have lost ground to Manchester and Liverpool
 - ▣ Regional HQs
 - ▣ Financial and business services
- Important to arrest that trend:
 - ▣ Engagement of the business community in strategy & key project delivery
 - ▣ Reinforce business networks
 - ▣ Review potential for business convention / conferencing centre of reasonable size

Business start-up and growth

- Business start-up, entrepreneurship & business skills development not generally part of the Chester “narrative” – mostly about “heritage”
- A few tremendous examples of local businesses growing to national/international significance: eg. Racecourse, Zoo, Money Supermarket,
 - ▣ business education / internship opportunities
 - ▣ grad retention from Chester Uni and local young people from WC College who wish to start up local businesses need more support
 - ▣ Innovation / business centre provision [business district]

Business and Innovation

- Build on innovation capacity in Chester:
 - ▣ Higher Education Institutions, corporate research facilities
- Innovation potential around the heritage, culture & arts
- Leverage local expertise & networks
- *Kings Place arts & culture business centre*



- **Chester has a great opportunity for a city turn-around strategy based on culture, arts and heritage – but business and opportunity led future**

Summary Recommendations:

- ❑ Formulate a clear, comprehensive strategy based on firm foundations of environmental sustainability
- ❑ Goal-focused
- ❑ Engages business community in public-private collaboration
- ❑ Monitoring / evaluating of progress on continuing basis
- ❑ Managed by clear accountable leadership
- ❑ Learn from examples from around the world
- ❑ Use ULI case studies
- ❑ 51 masterplans and studies dating back to 1945 and beyond!
- ❑ **Chester has immense unrealised potential...**

Conclusion:

GET ON WITH IT!