

Civic Design Group

By Anthony Ault

Several of the projects which came to the Group's attention last year have been on-going and have continued to be agenda items throughout 2007.

We have made known our anxiety regarding further developments in the Docks. The completed block of flats next to the Barge Arm has continued to attract justified criticism from all quarters as an intrusion blocking off access to the Waterways Museum .

No firm proposals have been available for the reconstruction of Merchant's Quay. We have learned with dismay that it is intended to be another block of apartments with retail use on the ground floor only. We feel this will lead to the Docks becoming an estate of down market flats with little to attract visitors and tourists. However, it must be agreed that the new restaurant adjacent to the Biddle and Shipton Warehouse has a much better ambience inside than the drab exterior would indicate.

Having pressed for landscape proposals around the ugly builders' merchants "shed" on Metz Way, the Group is disappointed with the sparse planting which has now been carried out. The planting does nothing but to maximise the impact of the ugly shed on the surrounding area.

Another on-going concern is the condition of Sherborne House in Spa Road. Notwithstanding the comprehensive specification for repairs, no work has yet been commenced. It seems the owner is unable or unwilling to accept responsibility for the maintenance of this Grade 11" listed building.

Last year we reported that the Golden Cross development, including the so-called Robert Raikes house, envisaged a new shop front of good quality. The work is now nearing completion and we applaud the careful and sensitive repair of this historic building.

Also progressed during the year has been the welcome restoration of 66 Westgate Street. We wait to see the result when the scaffolding and hoarding are removed.

A tentative proposal by the City's Conservation Officer to create a new Conservation Area in the Denmark Road district has been warmly welcomed. It is understood that the proposal has now received official support as well as support by most of the residents!

The year has also seen the final completion of landscaping around St Oswald's Priory which has created an attractive setting for the ruin, particularly when seen from Archdeacon Street.

Finally the Group has given support to the Council's innovative scheme for floodlighting the Guildhall.

It is likely that in the future the Civic Design Group will not meet regularly each month as has been the custom in the past 20 years. This is because matters of major importance are generally now discussed by the Trust's Council of Management. Listed Buildings at risk are reviewed at the Gloucester Historic Buildings meeting which is a partnership between the Civic Trust and the City Council. Therefore the Civic Design Group will be convened as and when appropriate to express its opinion on controversial issues. Our Planning Appraisal Group, which comments on important planning applications, will continue to meet each month.