

Initial Meeting of Historic Cathedral Cities Alliance

The meeting was held under the auspices of Civic Voice at the CPRE headquarters in London on May 22nd. In addition to Chester, there were representatives from civic societies from (in no particular order) Canterbury, Chichester, Lichfield, York, Rochester, Norwich, Worcester, Winchester, Wells and Peterborough.

Also present were Richard Bate from the consultancy Green Balance, who produced the recent English Heritage report on the effects of the NPPF on a number of historic cities, including Chester, and Terence O'Rourke of the "Kenwood House Group" who was the main speaker at the meeting. John Walker from Civic Voice took the chair.

Terence O'Rourke explained the role of the "Kenwood House Group" and what it had achieved so far. The group was a gathering of influential people in the field, who had concerns about the impact of the NPPF in general and housing targets in particular, on historic towns and cities. They met at Kenwood House, the EH property on Hampstead Heath. The group was initiated by Lord March (of Goodwood House) and included *inter alia* Simon Thurley, Norman Foster and Richard Rogers. At present they were operating in a "below the radar" fashion, trying to influence decision makers privately rather than through public campaigning. Norman Foster Associates had carried out a *pro bono* comparative study of a number of historic European cities with King's Lynn – published as *Cathedral Cities in Peril* and in March, the group produced a set of key recommendations.

The meeting then opened up to a general discussion in which the various participants mostly outlined the issues that they felt their cities were facing. There was a common thread of concern that, whilst accepting the need for increased housing numbers, the developer-led projects that were coming forward were too often focused on large tracts of relatively low-density housing on urban fringes (like Wrexham Road?!) which had most profit-making potential.

I was agreed that a group representing the special concerns of historic cities would be helpful in complementing the efforts of the Kenwood House Group. It was felt that this should be a relatively informal grouping within the structure of Civic Voice and should aim to avoid a significant addition to the number of meetings we all tried to attend! There was some discussion about the importance of "Cathedrals" for the group, particularly since there was no proposal to involve the cathedrals themselves in the group. I pointed out that many towns / cities without cathedrals (such as King's Lynn and Cambridge) shared the same issues as the rest of us whereas many cities with cathedrals (Manchester, Liverpool, Coventry) probably didn't. The general view was that the group would welcome any towns that wanted to join in.

It is intended to hold a more formal inaugural meeting for the group at the Civic Voice Convention in Bristol on 23-24th October.