

ST. ANDREW'S TRUST. BISHOPTHORPE

OUR VIEWS ON FLOOD ALLEVIATION IN CHANTRY LANE, BISHOPTHORPE, YORK



BEAUTY, noun: *“the aggregate of qualities that give pleasure to the senses”*.

People come to Chantry Lane for its spirit lifting mix of noble trees and handsome Georgian buildings and for its attractive riverscape, but not everyone appreciates their picturesque



charms. We include the Environment Agency and its agent, Aecom, (part of the Capita Group of affiliated private sector companies), and the City of York Council. How else are we to understand and explain the provisional planning consent granted by this council for Aecom’s crude redevelopment scheme to add flood defences at this exceptional location?

So we have devised a better scheme of our own to integrate with the natural landscape of this outstanding conservation area.

We have done this successfully here before with our artificial riverbanks. They conceal large-scale civil engineering works to resist erosion but few who use our riverside path realise that this attractive riverside has not always existed. We built it from scratch only 20 years ago.

AGGREGATE OF QUALITIES

Before we describe our alternative approach, we first need to identify the visual components of this "*cherished local scene*" (in the apt words of the Civic Trust) and why they will be devalued by the Environment Agency.

1. Elevating architecture

Chantry Lane (historically a part Bishopthorpe Palace) consists almost entirely of neo-classical buildings dignified by their characteristic elegance of proportion and upstanding design. Take for example the balanced rhythm of vertical components of the humblest



listed building in Chantry Lane.

It was built two hundred years ago just to stable carriage-horses, but Georgian architects knew how to create uplifting architecture of every sort, especially for wealthy clients like Archbishops.



One of the ablest, Thomas Aitkinson, added this iconic focus of the long view in the 1760s, the Gothic–styled but classically proportioned West Front of St. Andrew’s Old Church. Its exquisite perpendicular composition all points skywards (or towards Heaven if you prefer) and in its verdant setting of the Archbishop of York’s old burial ground it is the quintessential Romantic Ruin of English culture, art and literature, but all this will change. Like an old master painting remounted in a plain modern frame this beautiful composition will be fitted with a foreground more suited to an industrial estate.



2. Trees

And none of these trees will survive either.

This will be the depressing new face of Chantry Lane with a squat 180-metre-long flood wall dominating its horizontality and around in front of Priory Corner.

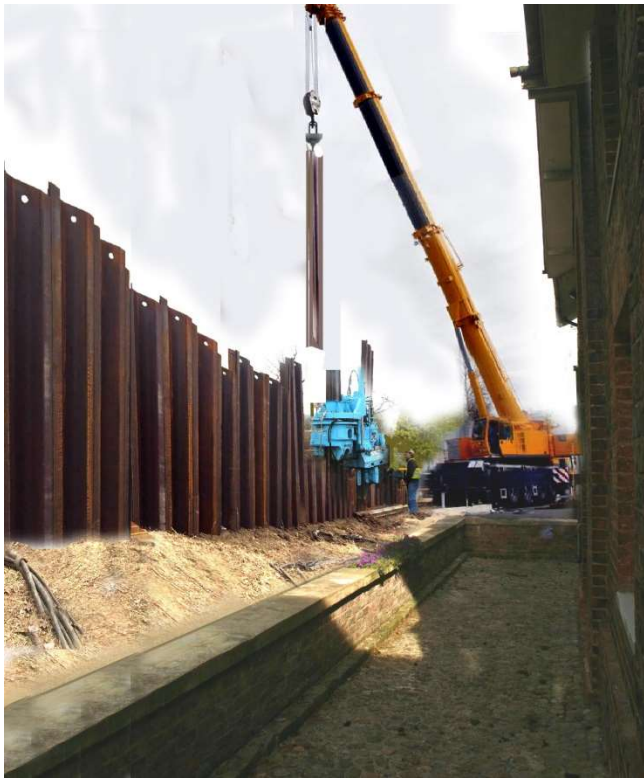
These trees, beautiful at any season, will have to go because the flood wall is only the visible part of a barrier extending six metres below ground in a skirt of corrugated sheet steel piling driven in with immense mechanical force. It will slice through their dense matrix of roots

destabilising and killing them. So they have to be removed first, a massive undertaking in itself.

Nor will they ever return. The agency has made vague promises to replace them with more trees than it destroys, but how, when, and where does not form part of its conditional approved application and, besides, trees and piling do not mix.



A below-ground steel wall will restrict root growth so that this size of tree will never grow along Chantry Lane again.



And the future prospect is no better in the other direction especially for the residents of Chantry Lane. They will have to endure intolerable living conditions while this attractive historic environment is turned into a noisy construction site for ten hours a day for eight

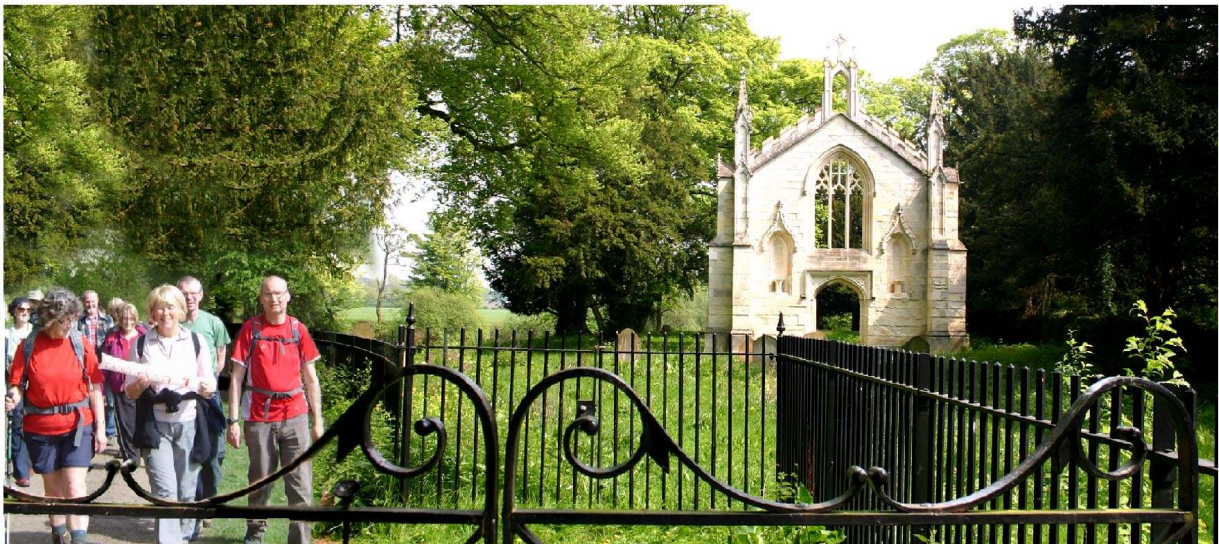


months according to Aecom Capita's current estimate.

During those months, Chantry Lane will be too dangerous for anyone to stroll along enjoying the sights. Large steel sheets will be swinging around in mid-air and a constant stream of lorries delivering them to the piling machinery, shaking the ground and these fragile listed buildings and the people inside.

Yet the city council has granted planning consent on condition and supposition that this developer is capable of coming up with a management plan (called a Construction Environmental Management Plan) to enable pedestrians to use Chantry Lane while construction work is in progress. We believe this to be impossible. Also impossible will be public access to our land and riverside path in future.

The reasons for this are more complex.



People can use our land only because we pay public liability insurance to cover them while traversing it. They have no automatic right of entry. The amount of annual insurance premium we pay to keep it open for them depends on our insurer's perception of the risks they run.

To maintain it in a safe condition we need vehicular access to all parts and ability to respond quickly to any emergency. Here is an example of one that could easily have been fatal.



Last year this old tree in the Palace Grounds suddenly sheared off without warning, the top half crashing down on our concessionary footpath fortunately in a gap between two parties of walkers.

So, paramedics on that occasion did not have to drive ambulances on to our land and the fire brigade did not have to bring in their winches to lift tree trunks off crushed bodies.

But it could easily have been otherwise.

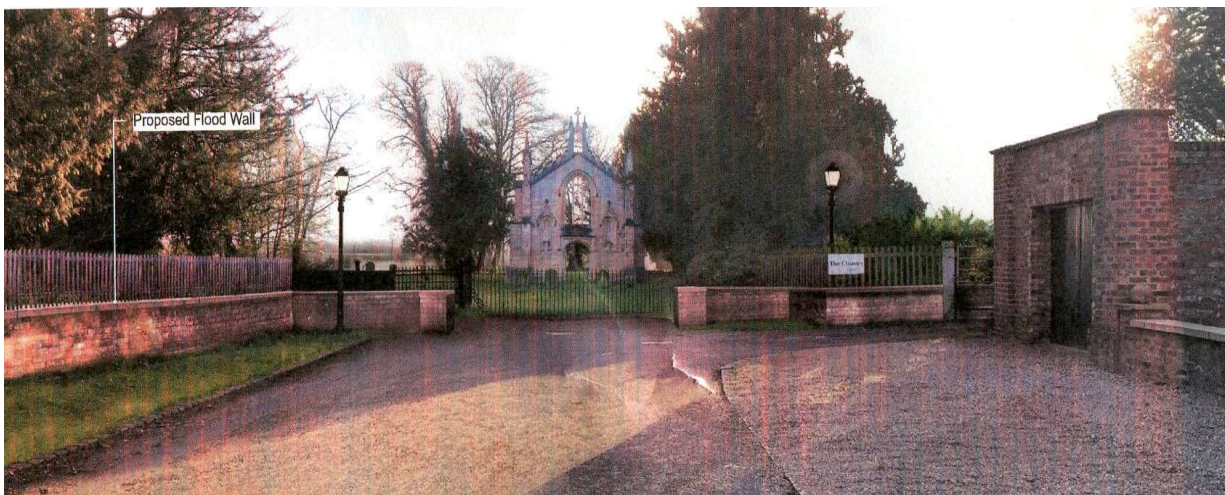
Those that did need to bring in heavy equipment to clear away debris and reopen our path were arborists.





This gap in the floodwall is too narrow, in the wrong place, and too close to our railings to allow any sort of vehicular access for fire engines or ambulances or the occasional hearse (it is still burial ground) or any other large vehicle bringing in bulk building materials and construction equipment to conserve our assets, repair our riverbanks, and maintain our land in a safe condition for public use. This barrier renders our land uninsurable.

The puzzle for us is that the Environment Agency, and its agent Aecom, knew this when formulating their redevelopment proposals, as did the City of York Council when granting planning consent for them.



However, this computer-generated image offers an explanation.

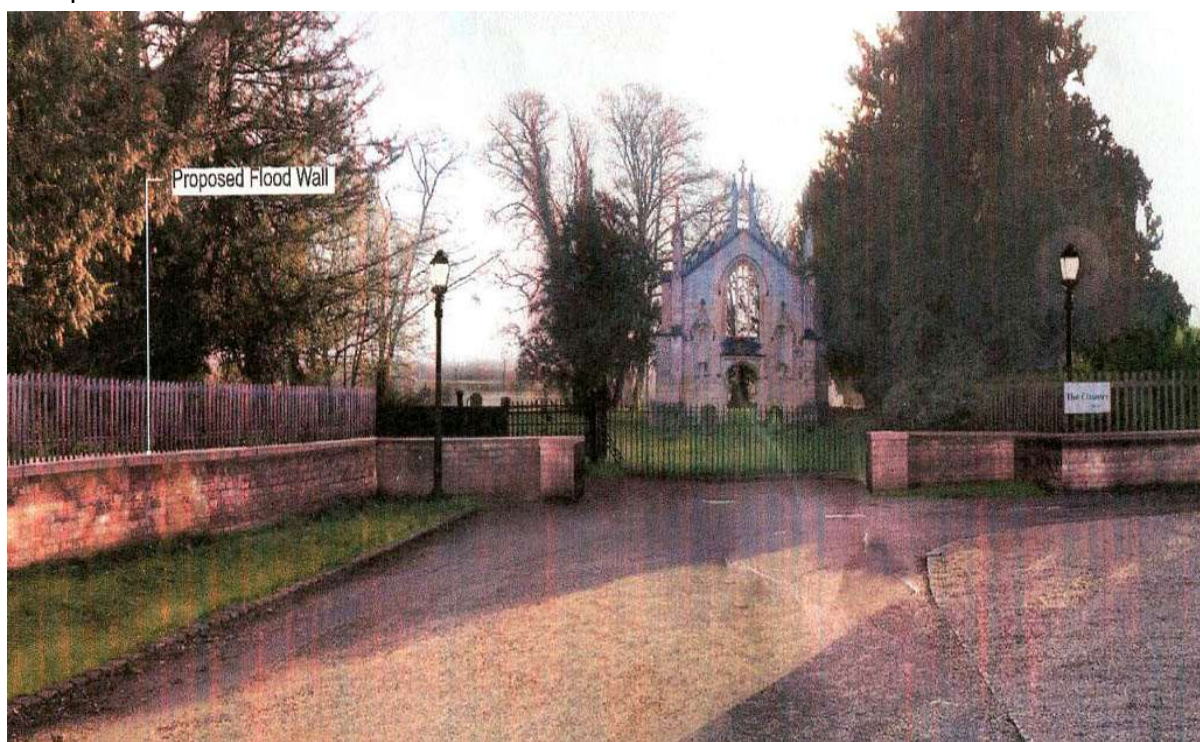
It was displayed prominently at a marketing event organised by the Environment Agency in Bishopthorpe in October 2019 and included in its planning application in January 2019.

This is what our community thinks the Environment Agency is going to build.

But compare it with our own more accurate CIG. The width of this cul-de-sac has been stretched digitally sideways by Aecom Capita to seem more spacious than it really is.

The verge on the left is twice its actual width and the area of gravel on the right has been enlarged substantially. The one metre high floodwalls of the planning application are shown at knee height across the frontage of our land and the 5-metre-wide opening has been doubled in size.

This opening has also been centralised on the old church rather than being lopsided and moved further back to give the impression that enough room exists between the flood gate opening and our boundary to drive vehicles on to our land. And trees in the Palace Grounds are shown thinned but not felled. In short, this planning consent has been obtained by deception.



Deception continues in the Environment Agency's latest information pack announcing its conditional planning consent.

Its agent has returned to Photoshop to make retrospective changes to its approved application documents. The right side of its misleading CGI has now been cropped off and the rest shrunk digitally sideways to reduce the width of the flood gate opening.

The grass verge on the left is still wider than reality, trees still survive in the Palace Grounds, something strange has happened to the proportions of our architectural centrepiece and it is still centred on the floodgate opening. This is no more a realistic depiction than before, and we still cannot get vehicles on to our land.

THINKING BEHIND OUR SCHEME

Devising an effective flood alleviation scheme depends on the level of floodwater it is designed to resist. This is called the design threshold which is normally expressed as a datum or contour relative to a mean or average sea level nominally set at 0.

In Bishopthorpe that design threshold has been set by Aecom and us at 9.8 AOD i.e 9.8 metres above a notional mean North Sea level.

So, what would happen if flooding reached that design threshold here in future?

Our CGI here visualises that future event.



The whole of the old church façade would remain visible because it is sitting on land at around 10.0 AOD. If we then transpose that design threshold of 9.8 as a blue line on Aecom Capita's flood walls this is what happens.



The walls are higher than they need to be and there is no necessity to leave a gap to see the church façade. It would still be visible in its entirety even with a solid wall and no opening. So, a flood barrier with the same design threshold of 9.8 AOD but concealed inside a landscaped flood bank across the front of our land would do the same job. The uplifting verticality of the aggregate of qualities that make Chantry Lane beautiful would be unimpaired and considerable savings made in public expenditure building a superfluous floodwall.



A shallow cobbled ramp across the raised ground would allow public access to continue and, most importantly, vehicular access to our land.



Moreover the destruction of the south side of the Palace arboretum to facilitate piling along the red line will create its own cleared construction site. This is the logical place for it rather than the residential area of Chantry Lane.

At the widest part of Main Street access for a one-way delivery system could be arranged for the contractor's empty transporters to exit Chantry Lane slowly to reduce the risk of vibration damage to these vulnerable private properties.



In short we see no reason why the same landscaped flood bank at the entrance to our land should not be extended round to include the whole of the devastated arboretum of the Palace Grounds and so begin its restoration back to a worthy setting for one of the only two archiepiscopal residences in this country.



Nor will it be necessary to destroy this listed curtilage of Bishopthorpe Palace or the verge along the north side of Chantry Lane including its historic stone kerbs, cobble lamp bases, and 200 year-old cast iron street lighting. Brittle cast iron cannot be rejoined if broken in extraction but there is no need to move these elegant components of the conservation area at all simply by adopting the green piling line above.

We have firm opinions about how landscape restoration work should be designed for the devastated arboretum of the Palace Grounds but these are our views on flood alleviation in Bishopthorpe for the time being.

We hope for all our sakes that you agree that they make more sense than the Environment Agency's ill conceived scheme.

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