



A Conference organised by Residents for Residents



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CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

Tuesday 14th October 2025

8.30am until 4.30pm

The County Long Room, Chester Racecourse

Chester, CH1 2LY

What Makes Chester ‘Tick’

Introduction

Great cities like Chester and their neighbourhoods possess a particular kind of intensity – what we might call the ‘character’, ‘buzz’, or ‘atmosphere’ that develops over time and is often unique. One way to understand these qualities is to consider what’s changing, how we are embracing transition, new ideas, and services to improve social cohesion and economic life. Essentially, the question is ‘what makes Chester tick’ and how this fosters a sense of belonging and connection between the city, its features, and its people. Through each session, we will explore the most important insights for residents, the progress made, the options for shaping the future, and highlight interventions that could steer Chester towards a more beneficial, prosperous, and inclusive future. Today’s programme will address this key question, and I hope it will both inspire and inform you as delegates. Enjoy the conference, and please share your views and thoughts.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mike Hogg', with a large, stylized initial 'M'.

Mike Hogg
Chair CRAG 25

MORNING PROGRAMME

08.30 – 09.00 hrs **Arrival and Registration**
with refreshments

Conference Summons and Proclamation
The Chester Town Crier

09.00 - 09.15 hrs **Conference Introduction and Welcome**
Mike Hogg, conference and CRAG chair
Louise Stewart, Chief Executive, Chester Race Company Ltd

09.15 – 09.45 hrs **Keynote Address: What makes a City Tick.**
Jamie Christon DL, Chief Executive, Chester Zoo

09.45 – 09.50 hrs **Civic Address on behalf of the City of Chester**
The Worshipful the Lord Mayor of Chester, Cllr Sherin Akhtar

09.50 – 10.50 hrs **Session 1: Time for a Change – an interactive session
with updates on key OCP projects**

The One City Plan (OCP) is Chester's primary strategy for guiding the city's development and community wellbeing. First published in 2012 and revised in 2022, it now acts as a blueprint for civic engagement. The interactive session will brief attendees on progress across its five working groups: Being In, Connecting, Experiencing, Making, and Visiting.

Session Chair and Introduction

Cllr. Richard Beacham, CWaC deputy chair and the Leaders Champion for the OCP.
Working Group speakers include Andy Farrall, Rachel Foster, Jane Makin & Colin Potts.

10.50 – 11.15 hrs **Morning coffee and networking**

11.15 – 12.15 hrs **Session 2: Building our Future Today.**

This session provides an opportunity for young citizen speakers to share feedback and perspectives on the OCP and the conference theme. They will present observations about Chester, propose potential directions for future development, and discuss how collaboration may contribute to changes in the city.

Session Chair and Introduction

Sal Thirlway, Director of Education & Inclusion, Cheshire West and Chester Council
Summer Ainscough, Former Vice-President, University of Chester Students' Union

Participating Schools:

Blacon High School, Christleton High School, King's School, Queen's School, Queens Park High School, and Upton High School

Presenters include: Ryder Kaye-Drummond, Christleton School, Tayla Aspden, Queens Park High School, Anokhi Batra & Neha Sreeram, Queens School

12.15 – 12.30 hrs Session 3: Morning Roundup Discussion

Rob Hulme, chair Commonhall RA and CRAG member

12.30 – 13.45 hrs Lunch Break and Networking

Enjoy a hot buffet lunch (including vegetarian option) from Chester Race Company, followed by a Lunchtime Conference Prize Quiz hosted by Quizmasters Andrew Kendall and The Chester Town Crier.

AFTERNOON PROGRAMME

13.45 – 14.15 hrs Session 4: City Heartbeat.

This session will explore how social connection and well-being shape cities and tackle urban issues. Contributors will link OCP themes to real-world case studies and examples.

Session Chair and Introduction

Cllr Katrina Kerr, Cheshire West and Chester Council's Heritage Champion

Session Contributors:

Chester Aid to the Homeless, Robert Whittall, Chief Executive

Chester Women's Aid, Rachel Lewis, Chair of Trustees

Hospice of the Good Shepherd, Justin Caroe, Director of Income Generation

Kidsbank, Dee Denton, Chief Executive

14.45 hrs Afternoon Break: Refreshments and networking opportunity

15.10 – 15.15 hrs Quiz Award Ceremony The Chester Town Crier & Andrew Kendall
Quiz Prizes kindly donated by the Rooftop Social Club

15.15 – 16.15 hrs Session 5: Ask the Audience

Delegates can join group discussions on key Conference and OCP topics. Facilitators will present the group's findings to the conference. This session offers a chance to participate and share your views.

Session Chair and Moderator

Gemma Davies, Director of Economy, Housing, and Planning, CWaC

Roundtable Facilitators

Councillors representing wards in or adjacent to Chester

16.15 hrs Conference Closing Remarks and Farewell

Mike Hogg, conference and CRAG Chair

GUEST SPEAKERS & CONTRIBUTORS

The Lord Mayor of Chester – Cllr Sherin Akhtar



Cllr Sherin Akhtar is proud to be the first British Asian (Bangladeshi) person from the Islamic faith to take office as Lord Mayor of Chester. Her theme for the year is pride in place, which will provide great opportunities for groups and communities to highlight and showcase all the things they are proud of in their wards and communities. Cllr Akhtar was born in the Royal Oldham Hospital in the early 80s, and following GCSEs and A-Levels, she went on to study for a BA Honours in Social Science (majoring in Politics) at Manchester Metropolitan University. She furthered her studies a few years later after starting her family and achieved an MA in Social Work at the University of Chester. For her Mayoral year, Cllr Akhtar has chosen charities that are local to Chester; they are Chester Women's Aid and the Heath Youth Club. As Lord Mayor, she aims to bring communities and people together, and with her experiences, values, and community connections, she hopes that this can be achieved.

David Mitchell – Town Crier



David has served as Chester's Town Crier with his wife Julie since 1998. He is proud that Chester uniquely maintains daily midday proclamations (Tuesday to Saturday, June–August). David has handsomely appeared on TV, radio, and in the films 'Moll Flanders' and '24 Hour Party People'. He is a much sought-after and entertaining speaker and was the first to receive the Chester Chronicle's 'Pride of Cheshire' Award. He is also a writer and the distinguished author of the history of town criers and bellmen, 'The Word on the Street'.

Louise Stewart



Louise Stewart is Chief Executive of Chester Race Company. Since joining in March 2022, she has led a transformation programme to focus and modernise the business in a time of significant industry and economic challenge and improve guest experience. Chester is one of the country's best attended racecourses and is consistently voted one of the top ten racecourses by racehorse owners. Louise is responsible for the company's three racecourses, hotel, gaming operation,

the Horseradish Catering brand, Resourcing Agency, CommonHall Social pub, and several property interests in the city. Louise is now leading the strategic development of Chester Racecourse, laying strong foundations as the racecourse looks ahead to its 500th anniversary in 2039. Louise's leadership has been recognised with a number of accolades, including Woman of the Year at the 2024 Women in Business Awards (Downtown in Business). She has also joined the Northwest Business Leadership Team, strengthening Chester's voice and influence within the region. Before joining Chester, Louise was Chief Executive of London's Alexandra Palace, overseeing a £30m restoration programme and significantly improving financial performance. Previously, she was Deputy Chief Executive of VisitEngland and held senior roles at One North East and Yorkshire Forward Regional Development Agencies.

Jamie Christon DL



Jamie is the Chief Executive Officer of Chester Zoo with a strong operational and strategic background at board level. After graduating with a degree in politics, he spent the first part of his career in high street food and retail department store management moving on to become on-board operations director for Stena Line Europe before his joining the zoo in 2013. He is actively engaged in local affairs and in 2023 was commissioned as a Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Cheshire. Amongst his other public appointments Jamie is chair of the British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums (BIAZA), chair of Marketing Chester, and a governor of the King's School.

Cllr Richard Beacham



Councillor Richard Beacham is Deputy Chairman of CW&C, Chairman of the Town Hall Board, and Leaders Champion for the Chester One City Plan. He is one of three Councillors representing the Newton and Hoole ward. Richard has held a portfolio of cabinet positions and is renowned as a passionate advocate of all things Chester. Richard is also currently a member of the council Appeals Committee and a Charter Trustee for the City of Chester, focusing on the preservation and protection of the City's historic rights and traditions.

Andy Farrall



Andy runs his own consultancy firm, Andy Farrall Limited, specialising in providing advice on development, regeneration, urban design and planning to investors, developers, government, and communities. He is a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute. He was also former chair of the English Historic Town Forum and Hon Sec of the Urban Design Group. He was formerly Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director at Warrington Borough Council and Executive Director at Chester City Council.

He also was Deputy CEO of the Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership and MD of Marketing Cheshire. Currently, Andy is working closely with the Council and partners as chair of the Chester One City Plan 'Making' Working Group. Andy is a Trustee of Chester Bluecoats Charity.

Rachel Foster



Rachel Foster is Head of Communities, Culture and Libraries at Cheshire West and Chester Council. An experienced local government leader and Chartered member of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), Rachel has led transformation in Cheshire West and Chester, both through physical developments and through inspiring cultural change and collaboration. Rachel's work includes advocating for the role that culture, museums, arts, archives,

and libraries play in connecting and inspiring communities, shaping and making places, enhancing the economy, and inspiring and empowering individuals. Award-winning Storyhouse and Theatre Porto are a true reflection of this ambition and the power of working through partnership and real collaboration to deliver transformation.

Colin Potts



Colin is the Visiting group lead on Chester's One City Plan. He delivered local authority tourism services in Wirral, Gloucestershire and Chester before joining academia. He now leads the tourism courses at the University of Chester. He has been President of Britain's Tourism Management Institute and Chair of Britain's Heritage Cities. He is Vice Chair of Chester Mystery Plays, Chair of Destination Chester and a board member of Marketing Cheshire.

Jane Makin



Jane is the CW&C Senior Manager Communities and Engagement and is responsible for Chester. Jane studied at the Chester University and has worked in local government since 2003 beginning in a Pathfinder programme. She lives with her family in Chester and feels privileged to have a role that plays a fundamental part in the delivery of the One City Plan. Jane focuses her effort and support on our communities to enable them to play their part in making Chester a great place to live and work.

Sal Thirlway



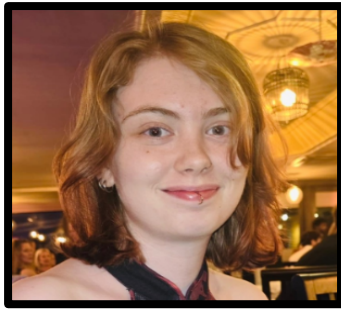
Sal joined CWaC as Director of Education and Inclusion in June 2025. Sal has over 25 years of experience working in local government children's services, where he held a number of senior leadership roles across Social Care and Education. He also brings considerable experience of the voluntary sector through his roles with Barnardo's and as a trustee of ONE YMCA, and as chair of the Trustee Board of the Early Childhood Partnership. Sal undertook his Youth & Community Worker training at the University of Sunderland, and has also been awarded a Postgraduate degree in Social Work by Oxford Brooks University

Summer Ainscough



Summer is an undergraduate at the University of Chester studying Marketing and Tourism. She has just completed a very rewarding year serving as Vice President of Student Life 2024/25, representing the university students. During her term, Summer became involved in wider community projects, including representing student interests at CRAG meetings, Purple Flag, Street Angels, councillor catch-ups, and working with student sustainability outreach representatives. Summer was a speaker at the Chester Festival of Ideas in July and has been a key member of the CRAG 25 conference organising team.

Tayla Aspden



Tayla, aged 17, is a Year 13 student at Queens Park High School who was the winner of the prestigious Chester Business Club ‘Young Vision’ Award 2025. She won the award for her standout idea of creating a new cafe for students in the city, inspired by the increasingly popular learning space within Chester’s Storyhouse building. Judges praised Tayla for her comprehensive business plan, which identified a gap in the market, and for finding a vacant building to operate the cafe from. Tayla lives in the heart of the city and is actively engaged in city life.

Ryder Kaye-Drummond



Ryder attends Christleton High and is currently Head Boy. He is studying A-Level Politics, History and English Literature. Ryder has been living in Chester since August 2024, having previously lived in Sutton Coldfield and Nassau, Bahamas. Outside of school, Ryder loves to travel and has an ambition to visit most if not all, countries in his lifetime, but remains especially passionate about Chester. Ryder is looking forward to seeking a solution to transform Chester into its best state, to make it better and brighter for everyone alike.

Rob Hulme



Rob Hulme has lived in the City centre for 20 years. He is a member of CRAG and the Chair of the Common Hall Street Area Residents' Association. Within this role, he has worked closely with councillors, officers, and community leaders on a range of local issues. Rob worked as a Professor of Education at the University of Chester and Metropolitan University, and the University of Central Lancashire for over 30 years. His work focused on education and social policy, both in theory and in practice. Currently, teaches literacy and oracy in a local primary school and works as an adviser to the local authorities in Cheshire on employability.

Cllr Katrina Kerr



Katrina is one of three ward councillors for Chester City Centre and Garden Quarter. Prior to that, she was Chair of Chester Bid and CEO of Marketing Cheshire.

For over thirty years she worked in large multinational communications agencies – Ogilvy, J Walter Thompson, Publicis – on clients such as Unilever, Reckitt Benckiser, Kimberly Clark, Renault, Magnet Kitchens, Times Newspapers, HSBC and local accounts such as Vimto and

Salford University. She has also consulted on tourism strategy for councils in Herefordshire, Shropshire, and Staffordshire. Katrina was educated at the University of Bristol (Modern Languages) and has an MBA from INSEAD. She is married with two grown-up sons and lives in Queen's Park.

Robert Whittall



Robert is Chief Executive of Chester Aid to the Homeless (CATH), a central city charity supporting homeless people through crisis intervention and long-term accommodation. CATH operates multiple locations in Chester, helping individuals gain skills for independent living. Before joining CATH, Robert worked in banking and holds a Law & Psychology degree from Oxford Brookes University.

Rachel Lewis



In her day job, Rachel is Head of Event Marketing at Agriconnect, which, through its numerous communication platforms, is at the centre of the British farming community. As a volunteer, she has been a long-time associate with Chester Women's Aid and is currently its chair of Trustees. The organisation is an active community of volunteers working together to help those women and children experiencing domestic abuse across Cheshire. The trustees are raising awareness of issues surrounding domestic violence and monitoring the provision of services for women who have experienced domestic abuse. Rachel was educated at Christleton High School and is a graduate of the University of Hull

Justin Caroe



Justin Caroe has been serving as Interim Director of Income Generation at the Hospice of the Good Shepherd since May 2025. He has developed his career at the hospice over more than a decade, previously holding the roles of Head of Fundraising and Community & Events Fundraising Manager. Justin's professional background is rooted in fundraising and income generation for the charitable sector. He began his journey with the hospice as a Fundraiser back in 2012, and over the years has played a key role in developing successful fundraising initiatives, building community partnerships, and supporting the long-term sustainability of the organisation.

Dee Denton



Dee serves as the Chief Executive Officer at KidsBank, overseeing the strategic direction and efficient management of the charity, while leading its ongoing development. She initially joined KidsBank in May 2023 as Operations Manager and was promoted to CEO in April 2024. Prior to this, Dee held the position of Charity Manager at The Chester Bluecoat Charity, focussing on implementing procedures to enable a strong governance culture. Dee is passionate about ensuring greater opportunities for children and sits on the Advisory Board of the Baby Bank Alliance and the School Uniform Working Group with Cheshire West & Chester Local Authority. With more than a decade of operational experience, including her tenure as Store Operations Director at Aldi Stores Limited, Dee offers substantial legal, financial, and operational expertise to the KidsBank team. In her spare time, Dee regularly participates in running events, supporting charitable initiatives across the UK.

Gemma Davies



Gemma is Director of Economy, Housing, and Planning at Cheshire West and Chester Council. Gemma has worked in Local Government for 21 years, after graduating with an Economics degree from Lancaster University. She has worked in various roles for Chester, Shropshire and Cheshire West and Chester Councils. She has responsibility for Housing, Planning, Economic Growth, the Council's markets and the development and construction team. Gemma is also playing a lead role in Cheshire and Warrington's devolution programme, is a Governor for Cheshire College South and West and is a member of the Institute of Economic Development.

CRAG 25 ORGANISING AND DELIVERY TEAM

Mike Hogg



Mike is chair of CRAG and worked in the energy industry full-time for 42 years – mainly with Shell and Danish company Orsted. This embraced the marketing, sales and distribution of most renewables and carbon-based energy products, spanning strategic planning to front-line roles. Mike is now engaged upon a portfolio of consultancy and voluntary work across health, education, and energy – including NED and stakeholder advisory panel roles in the UK energy and education sectors. Mike is also a Freeman of the City of London.

Pauline Brown



Pauline is a Chartered Fellow of CIPD (FCIPD) with over 25 years Employment Law and Generalist Human Resource experience in industry. She is a Director of Eclipse Executive Limited who is based in Chester. The Company offer employment law advice and support across a range of organisations nationally and internationally. Pauline is a member of Westminster Park Residents Association and has close links with the business in Chester. Passionate about the City and its community, Pauline is CRAG 25 co-organiser.

Simon Burtonshaw-Gunn



Professor Simon Burtonshaw-Gunn is an international academic, author, and management consultant with experience in both the public and private sectors. He has held professorial appointments at several universities and completed multiple international assignments. Simon serves as a Magistrate in the criminal court and is a member of The Lord Chancellor's Advisory Panel on Justices of the Peace. His volunteering roles include serving as an executive member of CRAG, chair of the Cestria Building Tenants Association, a past president of Chester Rotary club and is currently both a trustee of Chester Women's Aid and a mentor for the Longford Trust supporting serving and recently released offenders.

Scarlett Farnell



Scarlett is a third-year Digital Marketing student at the University of Chester with a strong passion for social media marketing and visual storytelling through photography. Originally from the Black Country, she recently relocated to rural Herefordshire, where she has continued to develop her creative skills alongside her academic studies. Her recent placement with the central marketing team at Chester Races allowed her to gain hands-on experience in event marketing and race day photography. Outside of her academic and professional pursuits, Scarlett is an active member of the University of Chester's women's rugby team, proudly playing in the second row.

Andrew Kendall



Andrew has extensive leadership experience in health, local government, justice, and the charity sectors. He is currently Chief Commercial Officer at Alternative Futures Group, guiding strategic change, growth and IT. He is also a recent trustee at Petty Pool College. Andrew authors the 'Chester Intersections' blog and has chaired the Curzon Park Residents Association while participating in CRAG. He has a Ph.D. in Theoretical Physics from the University of Manchester in 1993.

John Walker



John is a Cestrian and has been active in city affairs for the past four decades. He studied at the University of Liverpool and is a retired chartered engineer and management consultant, with a lifetime of business experience in the energy and technology sectors. John has worked extensively in both the UK and overseas, where he held senior board and academic positions and was a government advisor on energy market reform. His local community and public service record includes chairing 1761 Building RTM Co Ltd, serving as vice-chair of CRAG, being a past chair of governors at West Cheshire College, acting as an independent member of the CWaC Ethics and Standards committee, and serving as a director of Sustainable Blacon Ltd.

Roger Wynne



An Ellesmere Port Grammar School boy, Roger was brought up in Little Sutton. He spent his early years visiting Chester, enjoying its vibrancy. Following business studies at college he joined Marks and Spencer on its graduate management training scheme, moving all around the UK until the 1990s, when he set up his own successful businesses, which he built, developed and sold. Roger still has an interest as a non-exec director of a leading North Wales holiday park. In 2001, he and his wife Pat, were instrumental in the formation of FOGG (Friends of Grosvenor Park and The Groves) becoming the inaugural chair. Roger loves Chester, and his ambition is to work to make it better, in harmony with others.

NOTES

CONFERENCE DETAILS

Parking:

Free parking is available for delegates at the racecourse, courtesy of Chester Race Company (entrance via Crane St). Paid parking options include Linenhall Car Park (St Martins Way) and New Market Car Park.

Booking

Admission to the Conference is complimentary, with morning coffee and afternoon tea generously provided by the Chester Race Company. A hot buffet lunch is available at a cost of £18.50 per person, payable upon registration.

Registration

Register for the Conference through the Ticket Tailor booking site on the CRAG website (www.crag.uk).

Photography

Please be aware that we will be taking photographs at this event. If you do not wish to be photographed, please inform a member of the CRAG organising team.

Acknowledgements

CRAG gratefully acknowledges the assistance provided by its members and partners, including Marketing PRojects, Printworks, and The Web Hound, for their support and contributions in the planning and delivery of the conference.



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 Chester Residents' Associations Group
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