

## **Response to the Budget consultation: December 2009**

The Canterbury Society committee welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Budget Consultation. We recognise that the current situation requires either making cuts, or increasing revenue, in many areas. Having discussed the City Council's proposals, we should like to raise some issues for those who will have to make the final decision about the Budget.

The formal Consultation Questionnaire invites residents to make their views known and we shall be responding to that document as individuals. However, the Questionnaire did not make it easy for us to respond as a committee, to highlight some areas which we consider important, and to explain the reasons for our priorities.

### **Closure of museums**

We are very concerned about the proposal to close the museums, and particularly the Roman Museum. Our support for the Roman Museum is based on:

- Its popularity among school children and other visitors and its relevance, with the other museums in Canterbury, to university courses: despite very modest advertising, the museum still attracts over 20,000 visitors each year
- Its status as a Scheduled Ancient Monument, located in the 'buffer zone' of the World Heritage Site. Permission would be required from English Heritage for any change of use and failure to protect such an important site would reflect badly on the city
- Its potential for the future. For example, with better signing and marketing, additional funding from other sources, and support from the Friends of the Canterbury Museums, this museum could well increase its visitor numbers

### **Closure of the Westgate Hall**

Our concern about the closure of the Westgate Hall reflects several considerations;

- Its current use as a large and flexible city centre space, adjacent to parking facilities, and used for a range of community purposes from salsa dancing to City Council consultations and from weddings to craft fairs
- Its status as a non-denominational meeting hall, where people from a variety of different cultural traditions can feel comfortable

The proposal to close the Westgate Hall is not formally linked to the proposal to extend Tower House, but many local people see the two as connected and would regret the loss of the former in favour of the latter. Just some of the funding earmarked for Tower House, would pay for the refurbishment of the Westgate Hall.

### **Cuts affecting the quality of life in the city**

Appendix 6 of the Budget Consultation document makes it clear that many of the cuts will involve reductions in staffing in the City Council offices. We are concerned that these cuts will have a negative effect in some of the areas which most affect the quality of life in the city. For example,

- The closure of public toilets in areas of the city where night time drinking is prevalent will increase urination in the streets We are particularly concerned about the closure of the Wincheap toilet
- Cut backs in the staff in development control. We are concerned here about the conservation of historic buildings, the maintenance of quality in new developments and the enforcement of planning decisions
- Charging for additional re-cycling bags. Given the penalties charged for landfill waste, this must surely be short-sighted, especially since the process of charging itself involves costs.
- Cutbacks in the services for young people. Compared with other cities, the population of Canterbury includes an unusually large proportion of young people between 16 and 24 This group is already ill served, but there are many potential sources of funding outside the City Council budget. The Canterbury Society would be happy to work with the relevant council officers to tap into these funds,.