



Historic Towns Forum

Introduction to Heritage Planning

Study toolkit

Heritage Led Regeneration

It is unfortunately the case that, still, many agencies connected with regeneration of our towns and cities fail to see any role for investing in the historic environment. Their starting point is to look forward to what can be created on an open site but they fail to look at what can be kept and re-used from the past and the benefits that might arise from adopting such an approach. After all, it is the existing built environment that lends a sense of quality to a place and gives it its distinctiveness on account of the myriad factors that have gone before to arrive at where things are today.

There are numerous examples of successful regeneration programmes where conserving the historic environment has been at their core - Lincoln, Hebden Bridge, Newcastle (Grainger Town) and Buxton are just some. A full account of the work undertaken at Buxton is set out in the *Investment in Heritage – financing small town regeneration* published by the Historic Towns Forum (details below). The following general points summarise some of the lessons learnt:

1. Establish a clear vision

This is vital but the vision should be expressed by the local community not drafted by the local authority with an anticipation that the community may sign up to it.

A good way of finding this out is to undertake a visioning exercise using the well established (although still little used) 'enquiry by design' approach whereby professional facilitators (urban designers in this case) can lead workshops with invited

representatives of the local community and other stakeholders. All parties will be expected to sign up to an agreed design vision and framework so that this can carry the full weight of the community's support in guiding future development proposals that come forward. The design vision can and should capture the values that the local community attach to a particular place – this will nearly always include the place's history and the heritage assets that survive from that.

2. Adopt a strategic framework

Once the vision has been agreed, it is vital to adopt this as part of the local development plan so that it has statutory weight. Assessing future development proposals against the vision for the town is critical. Developers like clarity and will be given a clear steer on the local community's vision and on the standards of development that they are expecting.

3. Accept the long haul

Successful place making and regeneration takes a long time which can sometimes be measured in decades rather than years - anything less than that will probably be a poorer project for it. It is often the case that a locality is not ready in the early years, economically or socially, for the vision. However, there are small steps that can be taken in the early stages and these will not be wasted if they are carried out with the longer term vision in mind.

4. Strong political leadership

Following on from the last point, all party support for the programme is essential given that the programme is almost certain to extend over more than one term of office – often the most obvious results from the programme arrive at its end rather than in the early stages.

5. Always consult

Regeneration programmes and place making projects will only work if the public get behind them. Successful consultation will extend ownership of the projects to the wider community and will keep opposition to a minimum (although it will never remove it altogether).

6. Work in partnership

It is unlikely that any one agency can achieve the vision on its own. This is why all of the agencies and potential stakeholders should be invited to the visioning exercise so that they all sign up to it.

7. Feasibility studies

A feasibility study will almost certainly be a basic requirement of any subsequent funding bid and so is worth investing in at the earliest opportunity. Once completed, it also enables a bid to be put together quickly should funding become available at short notice. If properly prepared, it should allow the sponsoring authority and the external funders to pick out the most essential parts of any scheme and so tailor the scheme to the resources available.

Buxton - a case study

Set against the backdrop of dramatic Peak District scenery, Buxton has a legacy of fine Georgian and Victorian architecture largely built under the patronage of the Dukes of Devonshire. Unfortunately, the town's popularity declined throughout the 20th century, so much so that the local economy was failing to sustain its architectural heritage.

A programme of heritage-led regeneration started about 20 years ago; after the completion of all of the currently planned schemes it will have involved a combined public and private investment of approximately £70 million – this in a small town of just under 23,000 people. The programme has included the restoration of the key historic buildings and gardens including the Buxton Opera House, the Pavilion Gardens, the conversion of the former Devonshire Royal Hospital into a new campus for the University of Derby and long-standing area grant schemes. Its latest and most ambitious project involves the creation of a 5* hotel linked to a new thermal mineral water spa and visitor

attraction in the Georgian Crescent. Benefiting from funding programmes involving local authorities, English Heritage, the Heritage Lottery Fund and the former East Midlands Development Agency, it is now paying huge dividends in sustaining the town's future prosperity through enhanced private-sector interest.

High Peak Borough Council is a small authority and, of the £70 million, it has invested just over £4 million of its own resources demonstrating the importance of funding partnerships. A successful set of enquiry by design workshops led to the adoption of the Buxton Design & Place Making Strategy which has been adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document. The strategy formalises the local community's vision for Buxton to become England's leading spa town.

For further details of the Buxton case study, see *Investment in Heritage – financing small town regeneration* published by the Historic Towns Forum, 2004